

THE VIKINGS & IRELAND

The purpose of this section is limited to providing a sketch of the two main aspects of Irish culture encountered by incoming Vikings, the political structures and the ecclesiastical establishment, and to tracing in broad outline the politico-military and cultural contexts in which Viking-Irish contact evolved over a period of almost four centuries.

1. IRELAND ON THE EVE OF THE VIKING WARS: INSTITUTIONS

In the eighth and ninth centuries, according to the law tracts, there was a hierarchy of kings in Ireland: *rí túaithe*, the king of the local *túath* or petty kingdom; *ruiri*, the king of his own *túath* and the overlord of some other petty kings; and *rí ruirech* or 'king of overkings', the king of a province. The king of Tara, also later called *ardrí* 'high king', who claimed precedence over all other kings, is the highest grade of king according to the law tracts (Breatnach 1986). In practice, the structure of subordination was more complex and much more subject to change than the neat ascending scale of lordship indicated in the law tracts.

The *rí* was responsible for the good government and defence of his people and his was the final court of appeal. He was a great landowner, but not the allodial owner of the lands of the kingdom, for these were owned by the aristocratic and free commoner families (*cenél, fine*). He was pre-eminent in dealings with other kings. He made peace and war, conducted negotiations and made treaties, and entered into relationships of superiority or subordination with other kings. In the eighth century and earlier the independent legal position of the *túath* or petty tribal kingdom was being steadily eroded by the greater overlords and by the increasing power of the dominant dynasties. Overkings were conquering other *túatha*, expelling their rulers and carving out new lordships for themselves or their expanding kindred (Ó Corráin 1972, 28-32). These developments have been attributed to the upheavals that came in the wake of the Viking wars (Binchy 1962), but long before the Vikings set foot on Ireland, the dominant dynasties were conquering their weaker neighbours. For example, in 744 the Déis or Dál Cais annihilated the Corcu Modruad in battle, and from this point dates the occupation by the Dál Cais of former Corcu Modruad lands in Clare—the strategic position from which they were to control the Shannon, and later the Viking city of Limerick. In many of these cases the conquerors took over the lands of the defeated, their name, and their patrons saints and churches. Ireland, then, was a land of dynastic overlordship where the kings of the great dynasties extended their rule and their kindred wherever they could. The great meddled in the affairs of their sub-kings, most often when there were succession struggles and even great provincial kingdoms were not free from interference of this kind.

Inherited and exotic, native and christian elements were mingled in the Irish idea of

kingship—clear enough to historians, transparent to contemporaries. The inherited metaphor of the sacred marriage of king and goddess and the related idea of the righteousness of the king by which men and animals were fertile, the fields fruitful, the herds full of milk, and the seas and rivers full of fish, were elaborately articulated in the saga literature of early christian Ireland and skilfully integrated with christian concepts of kingship derived very largely from the potent images of Old Testament kingship. At an early period the churchmen sought to christianise kingship, they were the advisers and confidants of kings, urging them to rule as well as reign, and they introduced the ceremony of royal ordination, basing themselves on Samuel’s anointing of Saul in 1 Samuel 10: ‘Then Samuel took a vial of oil and poured it on his head and kissed him and said: ‘Has not the Lord anointed you to be prince over his people Israel? And you shall reign over the people of the Lord and you will save them from the hand of their enemies round about.’” There is an annalistic example of royal ordination on the eve of the Viking wars: Artrí mac Cathail was ordained king of Munster by the abbot of Emly in 793.

The Uí Néill were the foremost dynasty in Ireland. They paraded illustrious ancestors and their claim to precedence was expressed in an elaborate mythography that passed for history. The paragon of Irish kingship, to be compared to David and Solomon, was their alleged ancestor Cormac mac Airt (Ó Cathasaigh 1977). There were two great branches of the dynasty, the Southern Uí Néill in the midlands, the Northern Uí Néill in Ulster. Aed Sláine (†604) and his immediate successors in Brega (centred on co Meath on the east coast) made Uí Néill power in the midlands. Eight of them were kings of Tara, overkings of the whole Uí Néill dynasty. To the west in co Westmeath and in the adjoining counties, were their kinsmen and rivals, Clann Cholmáin, descendants of Aed Sláine’s brother, Colmán Már, according to the genealogists. These took the kingship of Tara only in 743, but after that they completely excluded Brega from that office, with one exception, that of Congalach Cnogba (944-56). By the mid eighth century, the Brega dynasty itself had split into two hostile branches, Knowth and Lagore (Byrne 1968, Byrne 1973). These territorial and dynastic splits among the Southern Uí Néill are the essential backdrop to the Viking attacks on the midlands and the growth of Dublin on the Uí Néill-Leinster border.

The Northern Uí Néill divided, at an early date, into two leading eponymous branches, Cenél Conaill and Cenél Eogain (also known as the kingdom of Ailech). Cenél Conaill was the more powerful down to the middle of the seventh century and perhaps later. The last of their rulers to hold the kingship of Tara abdicated in 734. Cenél Eogain became dominant in 789, after a long struggle. They expanded southwards and eastwards across the mid-Ulster plains in the eighth and ninth centuries. This brought the large sub-kingdom of Airgialla and the great monastic town of Armagh under their control. It was now usually ruled by Airgialla dependants of the Uí Néill and from now on the abbots of Armagh played an important role in Uí Néill politics. Abbot Condmach, for example, summoned a synod of the senior Uí Néill clergy to pacify the warring branches of the dynasty in

805 and, most likely on that occasion, anointed Aed Oirníde ('the ordained') as king of Tara.

The kingdom of the Ulaid, now reduced to the lands east of the Bann with some small outliers, held out against Cenél Eogain. It maintained a precarious independence and did not recognise the overlordship of the kings of Tara before the middle of the ninth century.

By the 740s the classic Uí Néill political arrangement had come about: the overkingship of the dynasty as a whole alternated regularly between Cenél Eogain of the Northern Uí Néill and Clann Cholmáin of the Southern Uí Néill. The holder of the overkingship was called king of Tara, and he was usually but not always the most powerful king in Ireland. Clerical propagandists claimed that he was king of Ireland (*rex Hiberniae*), a claim not that he was a precocious national monarch but that he was the most powerful king in Ireland and took precedence over all the rest. That claim was disputed in the ninth, tenth and eleventh centuries, and all the more keenly because a real kingship of Ireland was then in the making (Byrne 1973; Byrne 1969).

Eighth-century Leinster was dominated by the Uí Dúnlainge, settled in the vale of the Liffey and on the plains of Kildare, and so closely associated with the great monastery of Kildare that it was really the dynastic capital. Their rivals, the Uí Chennselaig, seemed once about to seize the plain of the Liffey but they eventually carved out a kingdom for themselves in south Leinster in close association with Ferns and other monasteries. They could rarely lay claim to the kingship of Leinster before the eleventh century, and then they took it over.

The Eoganachta were the dominant dynasties of Munster on the eve of the Viking wars. Their royal site of Cashel (they said) was revealed to their ancestor by the angels of God and they looked back with pride to a founder who was baptised by St Patrick himself. The Eoganachta were divided into two main groups: the western Eoganacht settled in west and south Munster and the eastern Eoganacht, at Cashel, Glanworth, Knockainy and elsewhere in east Munster. With few exceptions, the eastern Eoganacht monopolised the kingship of Munster in the seventh and eighth centuries and by the second decade of the ninth century, it was held mostly by the Eoganacht of Cashel. Yet they did not develop a settled power-base.

The Eoganacht kings put themselves forward as the most christian kings in Ireland. A ninth-century text contrasts the gentle rule of the Eoganacht, who received their name and kingship because of the blessing of the men of Ireland, with the violence of the Uí Néill, who seized sovereignty by force and won land by the sword, 'and it will be always so'. Several of their kings were clerics, the most famous being Fedelmí mac Crimthainn, who seized power in 820 and ruled until his death in 847. A *céle Dé*, nominally a monk of strict observance, described in his obituary as 'the best of the Irish', a scribe and anchorite, he was an imperialist in church and

state. He ruthlessly seized the abbacy of Cork in 836, sat on the abbot's chair in Clonfert, carried on a long struggle with Clonmacnoise, and plundered the monasteries of Kildare, Durrow, Fore and Gallen. In 823 and 836, he meddled in Armagh politics, each time supporting his candidate in disputed successions. Nobody saw more clearly the real political and socio-economic power of the monastic towns and the Vikings had nothing to teach him about plundering them. The association of the kingship of Munster with the church predates the Viking wars and the suggestion that clerics were specifically chosen in the hope of protecting the church against Viking raiders seems unlikely.

Uí Néill attacks, Viking raids, and dynastic disarray finally brought down the Eoganacht. Dál Cais, their supplanters, made most effective use of the church to help them to secular power. They expanded north of the Shannon into the power-vacuum left by the decline of the Connacht overkingdom of Uí Fiachrach and settled in the good lands of southern and eastern Clare. With the coming of the Vikings and the development of river and sea-going craft in warfare, they found themselves strategically placed in control of the Shannon and its lakes. They do not appear as 'Dál Cais' in the annals until 934 and after that their rise to power was spectacular, not least because they captured Viking Limerick and became the first urban Irish dynasty (Kelleher 1967)

The Uí Briúin kings who made Connacht a force to reckon with in national politics, emerged in the seventh century and expanded rapidly in the eighth. By 725 Uí Briúin was the dominant dynasty in Connacht and had begun to throw out branches that were eventually to provide Connacht with a new aristocracy and extend their influence into the north-east, where a new subkingdom of Bréifne arose in the eighth century on the frontiers of Uí Néill. The new dynasty courted the blessing of Armagh and allied itself with Clonmacnoise and other churches. The Uí Briúin limited the kingship to the immediate royal family. This is evident from the middle of the eighth century, and for the greater part of the tenth and eleventh centuries they had a very stable lineal succession (Byrne 1973, 106-53). In the twelfth century they were kings of Ireland.

In the eighth and ninth centuries and later, political power was held by an aggressive and confident upper class with a well-developed ideology of kingship and a keen historical awareness. It was distributed territorially between provincial kings, regional sub-kings and local lords, but articulated also in terms of a hierarchy of kings, culminating ideally in the kingship of Tara. There was no central administration that a conqueror could seize and make effective. Much as in Merovingian Francia, kingship was the property of the royal dynasty, not an impersonal office that could legitimately be held by an outsider. The island was united culturally and linguistically, and a sophisticated historical myth derived its dynasties and peoples from a single source (Ó Corráin 1985). This myth was so powerful that the Vikings were given a place within its structures only towards the end of the middle ages (Bugge 1905). Self-consciously, the Irish literati saw the Irish as a people or *natio*, to be compared with the Germans, the Franks, or the

peoples of classical antiquity. The Vikings were outsiders, and were called *Gaill* 'Foreigners' to the end. Irish reaction to the Vikings is to be understood in terms of these cultural traits. Clearly, the Vikings never had the means to conquer Ireland. Neither had the Anglo-Normans, if one considers the vast resources that were needed for the conquest of Ireland in the early modern period. The difference between the Viking and Norman experience in Ireland and England is striking and it will suggest some interesting questions: there are few convincing answers.

Ireland had christianity in the fifth century: for the people of the eighth century its christian history began in the mists of time. St Patrick and the great monastic founders belonged to an 'age of the saints', remote and legendary in one sense, present and immediate as guardians of their churches and heavenly patrons of their communities in another. Their foundations, the churches of the eighth and ninth centuries, were rich and powerful, linked closely, perhaps too closely, to the great. In the very early years of the Viking raids, the prologue to the *Félire* of Óengus expresses eloquently their christian triumphalism, already evident in the hagiography. Óengus's metaphor is the kingship of the christian saints, here seen as representatives of their earthly foundations, the great churches and monastic federations (*paruchia*) of his contemporaries, and their aristocratic rulers.

'Tara's mighty burgh perished with the passing of her princes; with a host of venerable champions great Armagh abides. Rathcroghan has vanished with Ailill's victorious offspring; fair the sovranity over princes in the city of Clonmacnoise. The famous kings have been stifled; the Donnalls have been plagued; the Ciaráns have been enkinged; the Crónáns have been magnified' (Stokes 1905, 23-27).

Óengus's attitudes are well-founded. Armagh and the Uí Néill kings were collaborating for mutual benefit. Monastic Kildare was the Leinster royal capital, its abbots and abbesses members of the royal dynasty or of the great Leinster aristocratic families. In Emly, some three of its abbots were kings of Munster in the ninth century. Family had long been the most important single consideration in succession to church office: succession was by inheritance, and the great clerical families were usually cadet branches of royal lineages that survived as aristocrats in church offices and on church estates. Once there, they were very hard to dislodge. Some examples. A branch of the Ciannachta, settled about Portrane and Lusk, dominated the monastery of Lusk from the late seventh to the early ninth century while their secular kinsmen went under to the Uí Néill power in the early eighth. Another branch of the Cianachta, who seem to have been conquered by Uí Néill early in the ninth century, held out as senior clergy at Monasterboice until the twelfth century and produced many scholars, among whom the historian, Flann Mainistrech (d. 1056). A branch of the local aristocracy ruled Dunleer the eighth to the tenth century. Uí Chrítáin, another aristocratic kindred, were hereditary clergy at Dromiskin. They ruled the monastery without an obvious break from the mid-ninth century to 978. These four monasteries were all much exposed to the Vikings, and Monasterboice, Dunleer and Dromiskin were in Viking-ruled territory

when they were sacked mercilessly by Domnall ua Néill during an attack on the Vikings in 970.

Most of genealogical corpus is the work of dynastically-minded clergy and betrays their mentality. Some examples. The Airgialla genealogies were preserved at Armagh by the clerical lineages of the dynasty who held the highest offices in the church of Armagh and its dependents. The Múscraige genealogies were kept at the monastery of Lorrha. These quote records from *Lebor Sochair Lothra*, the monastic incomes book (which must date from c.750-c. 800) and list the Múscraige families that own a dozen local churches and their lands. These are the files of a hereditary clergy who justify their office-holding and possessions by right of descent (Ó Corráin 1981, 327-41).

Monasteries formed federations and there was a steady build-up of organisation in the late seventh and eighth centuries. Proprietary rights were well guarded and rivalry was keen. So much we know from Tírechán who reports adversely on the greed of Clonmacnoise. Property bulks large in the Lives of the saints. Some monastic federations and their properties stretched all over Ireland (Kildare, for example, had far-flung properties in the late seventh century), and even overseas. Cork claimed most of the churches in its hinterland and came into open conflict with Ross on the west, and even fought with more distant Clonfert in 807 when 'there was an innumerable slaughter of the ecclesiastical men and superiors of Cork'. In 760 Clonmacnoise and Birr were at war. Four years later, there was a major battle between Clonmacnoise and Durrow, and Bressal mac Murchada, who led Clonmacnoise to victory on that occasion, was murdered shortly after. Kildare plundered the *céle Dé* monastery of Tallaght in 824. The annals record only the major events: the countless legal wrangles and local scuffles will have escaped the record. Annalistic entries about these struggles dry up in the late ninth century. Perhaps they stopped because a somewhat stable situation had come about. Some would attribute the change to a feeling of solidarity in the face of the threat from the Vikings, but this is very doubtful.

The greater monasteries and their expanding federations encroached on the lesser churches. For example, the Lives of Finnbar show the monastery of Cork swallowing up the church of Eolang at Aithbe Bolg and a dozen other independent foundations. The increase in pluralism (clerical double-jobbing) among the abbots and lesser clergy of the great monasteries in the late eighth and ninth centuries is strong evidence for this type of consolidation, and we can be sure that the same process was at work lower down. The annals record instances of pluralism from 742, but the practice is of course much older. Some think that its increase in the ninth century was a result of the Viking attacks, but this is unlikely.

The wealth of the great monasteries and their political connections brought violence and even warfare in their train. The battles at Ferns between 769 and 817, for example, were part of a segmentary struggle for supremacy in the area, in which the monasteries were participants and victims. Ferns lost 400 men, lay and

cleric, at the hands of Cathal mac Dúnlainge, king of Uí Chennselaig, and his ally, the monastery of Taghmon. The kings tried to control the monastic towns and draw on their resources—and these were significant. Bodbgal, abbot of Mungret, had enough troops to do battle with the king of Uí Fidgente in 752 (he fell at the head of his monastic troops in another battle in 757), and the Uí Néill drew heavily on the troops of Durrow in 776. No attacker could afford to ignore the monastic town of his enemy—his ally, sometimes his main residence, even his treasury. And so the churches were drawn into the general pattern of secular warfare. The Viking raiders fell on no innocent monkdom but on populous centres and towns with a long history of violence. It is no surprise then that Taghmon should join forces with the king of Uí Chennselaig to drive off Viking raiders in 828, that forces from Armagh should be the aggressors in doing battle with the Vikings as far afield as Carlingford Lough in 831, or that the abbot of Terryglass and Clonenagh and the vice-abbot of Kildare should fall fighting the Vikings at the head of their monastic levies at Dunamase. The Viking wars did not, then, bring to an end a traditional immunity of the monasteries and their clergy from war and violence: immunity of this kind did not exist (Lucas 1967).

In the seventh century, monasteries were big, and getting bigger. Their extensive lands and services from their *manaig* ‘monastic tenants’, the offerings of the faithful, bequests, burial dues and income from relic circuits made the churches wealthy. Already, some monasteries were becoming towns. The early life of St Munnu represents his monastery (*civitas*) of Taghmon as containing seven places marked with crosses where the main buildings were. Cogitosus describes Kildare as ‘a great metropolitan city’—and a real city, though he has to admit that it is not walled. In drawing up the regulations about the precincts of monastic towns, the canonists of the seventh century quote the extensive measurements of holy places from Ezekiel 45 and speak of large areas of sanctuary, surrounded by their suburbs, and identify the clergy with the well-endowed Levites of the scriptural text. Again, in describing the divisions of the monastery into areas that are holy, holier and holiest they speak of the second as an area ‘into the streets of which we allow to enter the crowds of rustics not much given to wickedness’. And outside this is an area of the monastery not forbidden to sinners, even killers and adulterers.

Without detailed archaeological surveys (cf. Swan, 1983; Swan 1991) or early medieval extents it is difficult to form any estimate of the likely population of the monastic towns. The ninth- and tenth-century annals do give some indications but these may not be true for the earlier period and one is left with rough estimates at best. In 764, for example, Durrow and Clonmacnoise fought a pitched battle in which 200 of the men of Durrow fell. It is not likely that more than a third of the troops of Durrow fell and certainly not more than a half. Here then Durrow fielded an army of between 400 and 600 men, and it is likely that a total population (counting all heads) of between 1500 and 2000 would be needed to put that number in the field. In 869 the Vikings raided Armagh and 1000 people were either killed or taken prisoner; in a subsequent raid in 895, some 710 people were

captured and there is no suggestion in the annals that Armagh closed down temporarily because of it. On the contrary, life continued as usual. It is not at all likely that the numbers given by the annalists are wildly inaccurate, even if they are inexact, and we are justified in thinking that large numbers of people were involved in these incidents.

The Vikings were attracted to the monasteries because they were rich in stocks, provisions and treasure. As Lucas (1967) says, ‘a short experience in the country would have taught even a free-lance Viking band that a raid on an Irish monastery was a sound economic proposition’. They cared not at all for religion and even later, when christian, they cared more for plunder.

2. INITIAL RAIDING AND LOOTING, 795–836

Erunt enim dies illi tribulationes tales quales non fuerunt ab initio creaturae quam condidit Deus usque nunc, neque fient. Et nisi breviasset Dominus dies, non fuisset salva omnis caro; sed propter electos, quos elegit, breviavit dies.

For in those days shall be such tribulations as were not from the beginning of the creation which God created until now; neither shall be. And unless the Lord had shortened the days, no flesh should be saved; but, for the sake of the elect which he hath chosen, he hath shortened the days

In the Book of Armagh at folio 65v, opposite this passage in St Mark’s Gospel containing the Christ’s prophecy of the miseries at the destruction of Jerusalem (Mk 13:19-20) the name ‘Cellach’ is written (John Gwynn 1913; Kenney 1929, 337-38 §131). This cryptic comment throws a sudden light on an otherwise dark landscape: the very early years of the Vikings raids and the reaction of the leaders of the Irish church to the sudden misfortunes of the great monastery of Iona. For them, it brought to mind the destruction of Jerusalem. Cellach was abbot of Iona from 802 until his resignation in 814 (he died in 815) and during his abbacy disaster struck. In 802 Iona was burnt by the Vikings and in 806 sixty-eight members of the community were killed during another Viking raid. The leadership was so badly shaken that a search began for a safer location for its ecclesiastical treasures and perhaps senior personnel, and in 807 the building of the new monastery at Kells in the territory of the Southern Uí Néill was begun, on land probably donated by Clann Cholmáin (Mac Airt & Mac Niocaill 1983, 258, 260, 262, 270). It seems likely that the scribe Ferdornach wrote this copy of the Gospels (including Mark’s gospel) at the behest of Torbach, abbot of Armagh (+808) (Sharpe 1982, 3-28). This, then, is a contemporary comment on the vicissitudes of Cellach and the early years of the Viking raids. If so, it is a good deal more tight-lipped than Alcuin’s eloquent horror in his letter to the bishop and monks of Lindisfarne consoling them after the Viking raid of 793. He has in mind the lamentations of the prophet Isaiah (5:25): ‘ . . . when the pagans desecrated the sanctuaries of God and poured out the blood of saints about the altar, laid waste

the house of our hope, trampled on the bodies of the saints in the temple of God like dung in the street', and urges (at some length) moral reform and penitence for the lapse that brought on the misfortune. And declaring helpfully that God chastises more harshly those he loves more, he commends them to the protection of the divine pity in their adversity (Haddan & Stubbs 1871, 472-73; Whitelock 1955, 778-79 §194). As we shall see, the Irish churches (including Armagh) supplemented their prayers with self-help and the contemporary monastic annalists record the raids and the killings with the wry detachment of church leaders and administrators of great institutions who were well used to the violence of contemporary society.

Yet, Iona remained an important monastic site and another dramatic incident in its history is reported in a continental source. Walafrid Strabo (c. 808-849), distinguished scholar, favourite of Louis the Pious and tutor of his son Charles, met many Irish *émigrés* at Reichenau and at the imperial court. He wrote a verse *Life*, based on their reports, of the martyr Blathmac, who was killed by Vikings during another raid on Iona in 826. For him, Blathmac is a royal heir, a future king who instead became a monk. Subsequently, coveting the martyr's crown, he went to Iona, knowing that the pagans had already been there. Expecting their return, he advised his fellow-monks to flee: some did, some remained. He hid the shrine of Columba's relics in the earth. When the Vikings came, he refused to reveal where it was, and they killed him and his companions (Mac Airt & Mac Niocaill 1983, 282; Colgan 1645, 128-29; Dümmler 1884, 297-301; Anderson 1922, 263-65). The incidents may be as reported, but the whole is overlaid with the hagiographic conventions of holiness. Nonetheless, it and annalistic entries about the comings and going of abbots of Iona (in 829, 831, 849, 865 and 878) show that monastic life continued there. But, as Dr Herbert observes, 'the foundation of Kells initiates a new era in the history of the Columban *familia*, as its main focus begins to shift from Iona to Ireland'. The Viking attacks and subsequent settlements drove a wedge between Ireland and Scotland. The western seaboard of Scotland fell to the Vikings and the rising Scottish monarchy shifted its power base eastwards and made Dunkeld its church centre. In Ireland, the Columban *familia* competed unsuccessfully with Armagh for the political favours of the Uí Néill kings, and its long decline had begun (Herbert 1988, 68-77 esp. 70). The coming of the Vikings had changed the geography of power.

The Viking raids began abruptly. The Annals of Ulster report under the year 794 *Vastatio omnium insularum Britanniae a gentilibus* 'The devastation of all the islands of Britain by pagans'. This pattern of sudden raids on islands and on coast lands was to continue for a generation. The first recorded Viking raids on Irish soil took place in 795: *Loscadh Rechrainne o geinntib 7 Sci do choscradh 7 do lomradh* 'The burning of Rechru by the pagans and Skye was plundered and robbed'. Rechru is often identified with Lambay Island, but this must remain very uncertain. Rechru is the old name of both Rathlin and Lambay Island.¹ Though the

¹ There is, in addition, Rechru Muintire Birn (Rathlin O'Byrne), off Teelin in the parish of Glencolumbcille, Co Donegal, but this may be less likely than Rathlin.

church on Lambay was a Columban foundation and therefore of immediate interest to the annalist (Reeves 1857, 280; Herbert 1988, 42), it is more likely that Rathlin, an island rich in monastic foundations and on the path of south-bound fleets, was the victim of the raid of 795. Evidently, the annalist believed that the same fleet plundered Skye. The Vikings soon swept south into the Irish Sea: in 798 the annalist reports ‘the burning of Inis Pátraic by the pagans and they took the cattle-tribute of the territories and they smashed the shrine of Do-Chonna and they made great incursions both in Ireland and in Scotland’. Inis Pátraic is St Patrick’s Island near Skerries, co Dublin, and St Do-Chonna is its patron.

So far the raids were haphazard and exploratory, and likely to be the work of two or three ships rather than larger fleets that would have been difficult to manage in strange and distant waters. The rich monastic centre of Iona, which they had bypassed, was found and turned upon in 802 and 806. By 807 they had rounded the headlands of Donegal and made their way into the west-coast bays and harbours. They burned the island monastery of Inishmurray off the coast of Sligo and attacked Roscam, near Oranmore, on the inner waters of Galway Bay. Now they concentrated on the north and west coasts, but on occasion at least they met with determined opposition from the local Irish lords. In 811 the annalist reports ‘a slaughter of the pagans at the hands of the Ulaid’. In 812 Fir Umail (of the Owles of Mayo, about Clew Bay) defeated the Vikings but the Vikings, in turn, slaughtered the Conmaicne Mara in the west of co Galway. In the same year, Viking raiders reached the harbours of the Kerry coastline but they were slaughtered in an encounter with Cobthach mac Mael Dúin, king of the Eoganacht of Loch Léin. In 813 Fir Umail were defeated by the Vikings and their king fell in battle against them.

Meanwhile, they pushed down the Irish Sea. In 821 they raided Howth and ‘took a great prey of women out of it’, no doubt for ransom. In the same year, they plundered the monasteries on the small islands in Wexford Harbour. By 822 they had reached Cork on the south coast and in 824 they raided the remote island monastery of Skellig, eight miles off the Kerry coast. They captured Étgál its superior, probably as a prisoner for ransom but he died of ill-treatment at their hands. But this raid did not put an end to the monastery of Skellig as subsequent reference to its leading clerics (950, 1044) shows.

So far, raids were confined to remote monasteries on islands and exposed coastline. Now came a change of tactics: a major assault was mounted on the main monasteries of the north-east and the east coast as far south as the Boyne. The first of these was an attack on Bangor, on the base of the Ards peninsula and on the south shore of Belfast Lough in 824. The Vikings plundered the monastery, destroyed the oratory, shook the relics of St Comgall, its founder and patron, out of their shrine, and killed the scholars and bishops. In 825 they attacked Moville, at the head of the sheltered Strangford Lough: they burned the monastery and its churches. The local rulers, the Ulaid, counter-attacked successfully and defeated the raiders in Lecale where monasteries dependent on Armagh would have been an

attractive source of booty. In 827 the Vikings plundered the monastery of Lusk on the fertile coastline of Co Dublin and they ravaged the lands of the local rulers, the Ciannachta Breg. They returned to raid the territory of Ard Ciannachta, a different local kingdom to the north of the Boyne next year. They killed its king and burned the monasteries of Lann Léire (Dunleer) and Clonmore. The local rulers resisted: in 828 the king of Dál nAraide in the south of Co Antrim defeated the Vikings and in the south-east the king of Uí Chennselaig and the monastery of Taghmon joined forces to defeat the raiders.

Now Viking pressure mounted dramatically. In 831 the Vikings raided Conaillne in the north of Co Louth, captured its king and his brother, and carried them off to the ships as prisoners for ransom. The community of Armagh, it appears, put troops into the field to defend its monastic interests in the area about Carlingford Lough from the same raiders. They were heavily defeated and many prisoners were taken. This brought the power and wealth of Armagh to the notice of the Vikings when Armagh itself was deeply divided by an internal power struggle. Early in 832 it experienced its first Viking raids: three times in one month. This was followed by raids on Muckno, Louth and other churches. Then Duleek and all the churches of the territory of Ciannachta were raided. Tuathal mac Feradaig, who was later to be abbot of the Columban houses of Durrow and Lambay and who died in 850, was taken prisoner at Donaghmoynne, co Monaghan, and the shrine of Adomnán was taken with him. He was possibly on circuit with enshrined relics of Adomnán normally kept at a large centre such as Kells. The cleric was ransomed; the fate of the shrine is unknown.

The raiders continued their activities, penetrating deeper and deeper inland with growing confidence, as they had begun to do in mainland Europe: in 832 they plundered Maghera and Connor in the north; in 833 the Northern Uí Néill defeated the Vikings who raided Derry; on the east coast, they raided Clondalkin, near Dublin and the Dromiskin, co Louth; in the south, they attacked the great monastery of Lismore and its dependent church at Kilmolash and slaughtered the men of south Munster in battle. In 834, Glendalough, to the south of Dublin and Slane, situated on the Boyne seven miles above Drogheda, and Fennor, an important monastery a few miles to the south of Slane, were plundered. In the south-east, the two major monasteries under the patronage of St Maedóc and patronised by the kings of south Leinster—Ferns in co Wexford and Clonmore in co Barlow—were raided in 835. In the same year, Mungret in co Limerick and other West Munster monasteries were attacked by the Vikings.

In 836 the Vikings attacked Glendalough from the coast at Arklow. They came up the valley of the Avonmore—a march of over twenty miles through hostile and difficult terrain, attacked unexpectedly from the south-east, and burned half the monastery.

For the first forty years or so, from 795 to about 836, Viking raiding follows a clear pattern. The raids themselves were hit-and-run affairs by small sea-borne

forces whose ships, under sail and oar, were fast enough to give them the tactical advantage of surprise. Very probably, these were led by independent freebooters unrestrained by any general plan or leadership. No Viking leaders are named in the Irish record before 837. These raiders appear suddenly, attack mainly island and coastal monastic settlements (and their surrounding territories, on occasion), and disappear just as quickly. They confined themselves to the periphery: no Viking raids are recorded for areas much further inland than about twenty miles from the sea or a navigable river. Coastal defence, in Ireland as in Francia, was very difficult because the raiders had speed and surprise on their side. There seem to be no Irish references to coast guards or to the setting up of forts like the Frankish ones built along the Rhine estuary in the 830s and it is generally assumed that Irish fleets were not well developed. However, from the beginning, the Vikings were often and successfully attacked by the local Irish rulers, especially on the north and west coasts.

3. INTENSIFIED RAIDING AND SETTLEMENT

In the 830s, the Viking raids became more intense in Ireland as they did in England and mainland Europe, and as the Vikings grew more familiar with the coastline they penetrated further and further inland. From 836 major territorial attacks began in earnest. In that year, the annalist reports ‘the first prey of the pagans from Southern Brega . . . and they carried off many prisoners and killed many and took very many captives’. This was followed, probably in the autumn, by what the annalist calls ‘a most cruel devastation of all the lands of the Connachta by the pagans’ (*Uastatio crudelissima a gentilibus omnium finium Connachtorum*)—and here we may suspect that a fleet was active on the Shannon and its lakes. Finally, the Vikings defeated and slaughtered the Déis Tuaiscirt in battle. Their lands lay in east Clare and in north Limerick, straddling the Shannon. This is the first encounter of the Vikings with a dynasty, soon to be called Dál Cais, that would leave its mark on the history of Ireland (and of the Vikings) from the tenth to the twelfth centuries. The annals also report that St Maedóc’s monastery of Clonmore was burned by Vikings on Christmas Eve, that many were killed and very many were taken captive. Viking activity from autumn to mid-winter, and especially the taking of large numbers of prisoners for ransom and enslavement at this time of year, must show that already the raiders were over-wintering in Ireland, possibly on offshore islands.

In 837, a fleet of sixty ships appeared on the Boyne and another fleet, also of sixty ships, on the Liffey. These large fleets, acting in concert, must have come from bases much nearer than Norway for it would have been very difficult to keep forces like these together during a long voyage (Sawyer 1982, 80-81). They ravaged the valley of the Liffey and the plain of Brega (i.e. eastern Meath) and robbed monasteries, fortresses and houses. The Uí Néill of Brega attacked them, routed them, and killed 120 of them. This was soon followed by a major battle at *Inber na mBarc*² where the forces of the whole of Southern Uí Néill were defeated ‘in a countless slaughter but the principal kings escaped’. The Vikings now began

² Unidentified placenames are printed in italics.

to appear regularly on the inland waterways. In 837 they were on the Shannon and they burned Inishcaltra (Holy Island on Lough Derg) and neighbouring churches. Probably the same Vikings were defeated at Cahernarry (Carn Feradaig), to the south of Limerick. At the same time, there were Vikings on the Erne and all the churches of the Erne basin, including Clones and Devenish were plundered by them. These are probably the raiders who were later slaughtered at Assaroe on the Erne. And they were also active on the Boyne and defeated an Irish force near Slane. In 838 they defeated the Connachta in battle and killed Mael Dúin mac Muirgiusa, son of the king of Connacht.

In 839 the Vikings put a fleet (one of the annals calls it *murchoblach* ‘a sea-fleet’) on Lough Neagh, the largest Irish lake and linked to the north coast by the Lower Bann, and from that strategic base ‘they plundered the kingdoms and monasteries of the north of Ireland’, as the annalist observes (Mac Airt & Mac Niocaill 1983, 196). In 840 they attacked Louth from Lough Neagh—probably overland through Newry—and took ‘bishops, priests and scholars captive and killed others’. A little later, Armagh, only ten miles from Lough Neagh, was burnt—oratories and stone church—and some annalists blame the Vikings of Lough Neagh for this. In the *Annals of Ulster* for the year 841 the first entry reads: *Gennti for Loch Eachach beós* ‘Pagans still on Lough Neagh’ (Mac Airt & Mac Niocaill 1983, 298). Clearly the annalist expected that they should have gone, and it is reasonable to conclude that the Vikings overwintered on Lough Neagh for the first time during the winter of 840-41.

In 841 the annalists notices two other significant developments for the first time: the setting up of a *longphort* or naval encampment at Linn Dúachail (Annagassan, co Louth) and at Duiblinn (the site of the future Viking city of Dublin). From Annagassan, the Vikings plundered the midlands and especially Westmeath; from Dublin they plundered the lands of the Leinstermen and the Uí Néill as far as Slieve Bloom; and they robbed church and laity equally. It is probably these Vikings who plundered Clonenagh and destroyed Clonard and Killeigh (about four miles south-east of Tullamore). Again, the annalist had not expected the naval camp at Dublin to be permanent and he notes in his second entry for 842: *Geinnti for Duiblinn beos* ‘Pagans still in Dublin’ (Mac Airt & Mac Niocaill 1983, 300). The Vikings had come to stay, and fortified settlements were attempted in several places.

The Vikings of Annagassan plundered Clonmacnoise in 842 and they captured the abbot of Clogher, and he later died at their hands. There was still a force of Vikings based on Annagassan in 852 when they devastated Armagh from there. The Vikings of Dublin plundered the monasteries of Birr and Seirkieran on the borders of Munster and in 845 they set up a military encampment near Tullamore. These activities involved long overland expeditions through hostile territory. In 852, another Viking fleet stationed itself far up river near Slane on the Boyne, opposite Rosnaree. Another fleet anchored at *Linn Sailech* on the coast of Ulaid. Yet another was at Caeluisce, Narrow-water between Newry and Warrenpoint. Besides, there were Vikings based on Lough Ree in 844 and they set up a base or

encampment (the annalist calls it *dúnad*) there in 845. And from this base the Vikings plundered Connacht and Meath and burned Clonmacnoise, Clonfert, Terryglass, Lorrha and other monasteries. Very likely, these were the Vikings, based on the Shannon, who captured the leading ecclesiastic in Ireland, Forannán, abbot of Armagh, and his retinue while he was on circuit in Munster, and carried him (and his halidoms) off to the ships at Limerick. He returned from Munster with the halidoms of Patrick in 846, doubtless after payment of a large ransom. This event would have alarmed and disturbed his clerical contemporaries. The Viking Turges, who may have been a leader of the fleet of Lough Ree, was taken and put to death by the king of Tara, Mael Sechnaill, in 845, but the fleet remained active. It plundered the monastery of Baslick in Roscommon and defeated the Connachta in battle in 846.

This Turges or Turgesius cuts a fine figure in the historiography. The general histories of Ireland in this period have various and contradictory accounts of his activities: that he arrived in Ireland in command of a great Viking fleet in 832 or 840, that he levied a danegeld, that he was overlord of the Vikings of Ireland and that Irish society fell to pieces under his tyranny, that he took possession of the monastery of Armagh and made himself abbot there, that he was a confirmed pagan and tried to replace christianity with the worship of Thor, that he took control of the Erne and the Shannon and installed his pagan wife Ota in Clonmacnoise where she gave oracles from the high altar as priestess, that he was a determined and able general and the founder of the first Viking state in western Europe. Finally, Mael Sechnaill captured him and drowned him in Lough Owel (Kendrick 1930, 5-6, 276-77; Brøndsted 1960, 57; Arbman 1961, 68-69; Jones 1968, 204-07).

The only truth in this colourful narrative is that Mael Sechnaill took him and drowned him in Lough Owel in 845. The record of this event occurs in the main hand in the *Annals of Ulster*. Another entry occurs a little earlier in the same annal: 'There was an encampment of the Foreigners on Lough Ree, and they plundered Connacht and Meath, and burned Clonmacnoise with its oratories, and Clonfert and Terryglass and Lorrha and other monasteries'. An interpolating hand glosses the word 'Foreigners' with 'under Turges'. It is a reasonable inference that Turges was the leader (or a leader) of the Lough Ree fleet that was plundering Meath, and other places. Mael Sechnaill was king of Meath and it is likely that when he caught Turges, he did not take him far to drown him. Lough Owel is twenty miles from Lough Ree and even less from the navigable parts of the river Inny that flows into it. The association of Turges with the encampment of Lough Ree is plausible. Most of the rest derives from *Cogad Gaedel re Gallaib*, a piece of brilliant twelfth-century propaganda, glorifying Brian Boru, the victor at the battle of Clontarf, and written in support of the claims of his descendants to rule over Ireland and Viking Dublin (Todd 1867, 8-15 §§9-14). In this highly tendentious text, the historical annals are excerpted but the entries are run together out of sequence, a false succession of events is suggested, and the whole is flavoured with three highly emotive verse prophecies concerning the suffering the Vikings

will inflict on Ireland, attributed naturally to great saints of the remoter past. The effect is to create a super-Viking whose raiding and plundering, and particularly whose attack on Armagh, was meant to demonstrate the evils the Vikings had inflicted on Ireland and the ineffectiveness of the Uí Néill in defending the country and the church of Armagh in particular. This is meant as a backdrop to an account of the triumphs of Brian written in highly colourful and hyperbolic language.

However, the Viking attack of the mid-ninth century was intense. It seemed, to some contemporary clerics at least, that Ireland was about to be overrun and made subject to the Vikings, and this is the view of the Irish *emigré* sources that lie behind the *Annales Bertiniani* for 847: ‘After they had been for many years under attack from the Vikings, the Irish were made tributaries to them; the Vikings have possessed themselves without opposition of all the islands round about and have settled them’ (Rau 1980, 70).

So far, the greater Irish kings did not combine against the attackers. They devoted their energies to a matter that appeared more pressing to them: the power-struggle between themselves. The clerics took a hand in their defence, as they had earlier. In 845, for example, Aed mac Duib dá Chrích, abbot of Terryglass and Clonenagh and Cethernach mac Con Dínaisc, deputy abbot of Kildare, were killed at the head of their monastic levies during a Viking attack on the fortress of Dunamase. The text preserved in the *Annals of the Four Masters* adds piously that Aed ‘suffered martyrdom for the sake of God’. In 842 the first explicit (if cryptic) reference to co-operation between the Irish and the Vikings occurs: Commán, abbot of Linn Dúachaill, was killed and burned by Vikings and Irish. We are given no explanation of this event and the annalist expresses no opinion about it. It is likely, however, that co-operation had already taken place, for the Vikings had now been part of the Irish life for almost half a century.

Slowly, the major kings turned on the Vikings. In 845 Niall Caille mac Aeda, king of Tara and king of the Northern Uí Néill, defeated the Vikings in battle at Mag nÍtha (in Donegal). In 846 and 847 Cerball mac Dúnlainge, king of Osraige, ably defended his territory and the annalists claim that he killed over 1200 of the enemy. In 848, Mael Sechnaill, king of Tara since the death of Niall Caille in 846, defeated the Vikings in battle at Farragh, near Skreen (co Meath), and killed 700 of them. In the same year, Ólchobar mac Cináeda, king of Munster, and Lorccán mac Cellaig, king of Leinster, joined forces and defeated the Vikings in a major battle at Sciath Nechtain, near Castledermot, co Kildare. Here fell earl Tomrair whom the annalist calls *tanise righ Laithlinne* ‘heir-designate of the king of Laithlinn’, and 1200 of his troops. The victorious Ólchobar went on an expedition to Cork to destroy its Viking fortress. The Eoganacht of Cashel followed this up with a victory over the Vikings at *Dún Maíle Tuile* in which 500 fell. And Tigernach, king of Lagore (Southern Uí Néill), defeated the Vikings in Meath and killed 1200 of them.

This string of victories is the background to an important embassy sent to Charles the Bald in 848 and reported in the *Annales Bertiniani*: ‘The Irish attacked the Vikings and with the help of our Lord Jesus Christ they were victorious and drove them out of their territory. For that reason, the king of the Irish sends ambassadors with gifts to Charles for the sake of peace and friendship and with the request to allow him free passage to Rome’ (Rau 1980, 72).³ Gerard Murphy (1928, 43-44) believed that this was an embassy of Mael Sechnaill ‘high-king of Ireland . . . announcing a victory over the Norsemen and requesting a free passage on a pilgrimage to Rome’. But this must remain uncertain. Traube and other scholars see this as possibly the occasion when Sedulius Scottus and other Irish scholars associated with him arrived in the court of Charles the Bald, but this, too, is very uncertain. To this circle of scholars belongs the St Gall Priscian, a copy of the first sixteen books of Priscian’s Grammar heavily glossed in Old Irish, written in Ireland about 845 in monasteries connected with the cult of St Maedóc and then brought to the continent. One well-known comment on the Vikings occurs in a marginal poem in that manuscript (Stokes & Strachan 1903, xix-xxiii, 290; Thurneysen 1949, 39; Carney 1967, 22-23):

*Is acher in gaíth innocht
fu-fuasna fairggae findfholt
ní ágor réimm mora minn
dond láechraid lainn ua Lothlind*

The wind is fierce to-night
It tosses the sea’s white hair
I fear no wild Vikings
Sailing the quiet main.

It is often said that the Viking raids of the mid-ninth century caused an exodus of Irish scholars, poets and teachers to Francia. Murphy notes seventeen references to ‘Nortmanni’ in poems of the reign of Charles the Bald (Traube 1886, 151-240). All are by Irishmen—thirteen by Sedulius Scottus, four by Johannes Scottus Eriugena. Of the six references to Dani (Danes), one is by Sedulius. Murphy takes the lines of Sedulius:

*Nos tumidus Boreas vastat—miserabile visu-
Doctos grammaticos presbiterosque pios
Namque volans Aquilo non ulli parcat honori
Crudeli rostro nos laniando suo
Fessis ergo favens, Hartgari floride praesul
Sophos Scottigenas suscipe corde pio*

‘The swollen North Wind ravages us—piteous to see- / Learned grammarians and holy priests/ For the rushing North Wind spares no persons/ lacerating us with his
³ Scotti super Nordomannos irruentes, auxilio domino nostro Iesu Christi victores, eos a suis finibus propellunt. Unde et rex Scottorum ad Karolum pacis et amicitiae gratia legatos cum muneribus mittit, viam sibi petendi Romam concedi deposcens.

cruel beak/ Therefore, a helper of the weary, O flourishing prelate Hartgar,/ receive with kindly heart us learned Irishmen'

as a clear reference to the Viking raids on Ireland and as an explanation of the exile of the poet and his two companions (Traube 1886, 168; Murphy 1928, 45-46). In his poem to Charles the Bald (Traube 1886, 180-81) he contrasts the activity of Irishman and Viking, two foreigners in Francia: *Scottus amore sonat vestrum laudabile nomen/ Nortmannusque tremens splendida castra timet* 'the Irishman pronounces your admirable name with love / and the trembling Viking fears your splendid fortresses'. Sedulius's references are to the Viking raids, but these are unlikely to be the cause of the poet's exile. Firstly, the Irish were present and influential at the Carolingian court and elsewhere in mainland Europe long before the Viking attack became significant, and well after the worst had blown over (Holtz 1991, 147-56; Riché 1989, 69-79, 89-92, 102-110; Riché 1982, 735-45; Contreni 1982, 758-98; Kenney 1929, 530-604). Secondly, Sedulius was a scholar-courtier, even court poet, ever adept at flattery and at making his case for patronage: Francia was under most severe Viking attack for much of the reign of Charles the Bald and Sedulius was well able to use that very experience of the Franks to win sympathy for himself and his fellows by pleading that they were the exiled victims of the very attackers the Franks now found so difficult to deal with. The truth is that leading Irish scholars were not driven out by the Viking raids; rather, they were attracted to Francia by the patronage afforded by the Carolingians, and especially by Charles the Bald (Nelson 1991, 37-54), when Francia was under much more severe attack than Ireland.

By the middle of the ninth century the Vikings had become a familiar element in Irish life; they had small but fairly permanent military settlements and had become part of the country's patchwork quilt of competing lordships— a factor in the country's politics—and they were accepted as such. The Irish aristocracy had got to know them well and found that they had their uses as allies and mercenaries. From this point Norse-Irish alliances become commonplace—they were useful for the Irish and profitable for the Vikings—and such activities were not looked upon with reproach. The annalists report frequent Irish-Viking alliances in the ninth century (e.g. 850, 858, 859, 861, 862, 868, 871, 882, 889, 895, 898) at the very highest levels of Irish society.

An interesting examples of Viking-Irish alliance occurred in 850. Cináed mac Conaing was king of Northern Brega (also called king of Knowth) and claimant to the kingship of the whole of Brega. His dynastic rival was Tigernach, king of Southern Brega (also called king of Lagore), who bitterly resented Cináed's claim to kingship over the whole of Brega. The king of Tara, Mael Sechnaill of Clann Cholmáin, was hostile to both and he used the internal feuds of the Brega dynasty to divide and weaken Brega and thus keep it subject to himself. Cináed revolted against the overlordship of Mael Sechnaill, allied himself with the Vikings, and plundered the lands of his Uí Néill rivals from the Shannon to the sea, sparing neither churches nor secular communities. He treacherously sacked the *crannóg* of

Lagore (where Tigernach lived) and levelled it to the ground. He also burned the church of Trevet with 260 people in it. Trevet was a major monastery in Tigernach's kingdom. This was an ordinary military campaign in Irish circumstances and the plundering of churches was an integral part of war. In 851 Mael Sechnaill and Tigernach settled the score with Cináed: he was captured and 'was cruelly drowned in a pool . . . in spite of the guarantees of the nobles of Ireland and the abbot of Armagh in particular'. What upset the annalist was that guarantees of safe-conduct given by prominent ecclesiastics were violated. Later (for the feud continued), one of the reasons given by Aed mac Néill, king of the Northern Uí Néill, for rebellion against Máel Sechnaill was his treatment of Cináed. Nowhere do the annalists suggest that Cináed's conduct was wicked: on the contrary, they have nothing but sympathy for him (Ó Corráin 1979, 305-09; cf. Smyth 1977, 129-32)

In 849 a sea-going expedition of 120 ships arrived in Ireland. It is described as a fleet of 'the people of the king of the Foreigners', that it came to exact obedience from the Vikings of Ireland, and that it upset the whole country. We do not know (and presumably the annalist did not know) who this king of the Foreigners was but it is likely that violent feuds broke out amongst the Vikings. In an attempt to profit from these struggles, Mael Sechnaill and his ally, Tigernach of Southern Brega, plundered Dublin. This was merely the prelude to further troubles. In 851 a fleet of Dubgeinte (Danish Vikings) arrived in Dublin, most probably from England; they attacked the Finngaill (Norwegian Vikings settled in Ireland) and they plundered the naval encampment of Dublin. They also attacked the settlement at Annagassan, but here they were defeated. In the following year, a fleet of 160 Norse Viking vessels attacked the Danes at Carlingford Lough, but in the fierce battle that followed the Norse were heavily defeated. Of the leaders of the Norse, Stain escaped and Iercne was killed: Stain is not heard of again but the sons of Iercne were later active in Dublin affairs (883, 886)

In 853 the annals have the following entry: 'Amlaíb, son of the king of Laithlind, came to Ireland and the Foreigners of Ireland submitted to him and he received tribute from the Irish'. Nothing is certain about the origins of this Amlaíb or Olaf or of the Laithlind from which he came though a great deal has been written about him (Hunter Blair 1939, 1-35; Smyth 1977, 101-53; Ó Corráin 1979, 296-300; Radner 1978, §§239, 259, 292, 347, 400, 401). In 857 we find Amlaíb allied with one Ímar (Ívarr) fighting against the Gallgoídil⁴ in Munster. In 858 Ímar is in ⁴ The Gallgoídil or 'Foreigner-Irish' first appear in the annals in 856: : *Cocadh mor eter gennti 7 Mael Sechlainn co nGallghoidelaib leis* 'Great warfare between the pagans and Mael Sechnaill with the Gallgoídil'. Later in the same year, Aed mac Néill, king of the Northern Uí Néill, defeated them and slew many of them at Glenelly, near Strabane. In 857 Ímar and Amlaíb defeated Caitill Find and his Gallgoídil in Munster. In 858 Cerball of Osraige and Ímar of Dublin defeated the Uí Fiachrach, who were allied with the Gallgoídil. They seem to be mixed Norse-Scots forces from western Scotland, adventuring on their own account, mostly as mercenaries, in the 850s. Later beliefs about them will be found in Radner, 1978, §§247, 260, 263. The statement that they were apostate Irish and fosterlings of the Vikings (§§247, 263) is not credible.

alliance with Cerball mac Dúnlainge, king of Osraige, fighting in north Munster against Cenél Fiachach (of the Southern Uí Néill) and the Gallgoídil. Next year, Amlaíb and Ímar joined with Cerball on a major attack on Mael Sechnaill's kingdom. They harried as far as the Fews in south Armagh and forced the north to submit. But Mael Sechnaill paid little attention to their activities and concentrated his efforts on establishing his sovereignty over Munster.

Mael Sechnaill's struggle to dominate Munster and then the North took up the greater part of his considerable energies. In 854 he marched into Munster as far as Clonmel and he took the hostages of the Munstermen. He returned to Cashel in 856 and again took the hostages of Munster. In the same year, he turned aside briefly to deal with the Vikings: the annalist reports 'a great war between the Vikings and Mael Sechnaill (who had the Gallgoídil with him)'. In 858, Mael Sechnaill again marched into Munster as far as the Blackwater where he encamped for ten days and he ravaged Munster southwards to the sea. He took the hostages of Munster 'from Gowran to Dursey Island and from the Old Head of Kinsale to Aran', and that can only mean the hostages of the whole of Munster. He followed up this achievement by holding a great royal council of the leading notables, clergy and laity, at Rahugh in Westmeath 'to establish peace and concord among the men of Ireland'. There, too, Osraige was formally brought under the overlordship of Mael Sechnaill and the king of Munster warranted its alienation, that is, he renounced all claim to the overlordship of Osraige in the presence of the abbot of Armagh and other dignitaries. Sometime between this council and his death in 862, Mael Sechnaill had a high-cross erected in Osraige (it now stands in the grounds of a country house near Kinnitty) with the inscription: OR DO RIG MAEL SECHNAILL M MAELRUANAID OROIT AR RIG HERENN 'A prayer for the king Mael Sechnaill mac Mael Ruanaid. A prayer for the king of Ireland' (de Paor 1987, 140). That this cross should have what is likely to be a representation of Samuel calling David to the kingship (1 Kings 16: 1-13) may be an appropriate symbol of the church's acceptance of Mael Sechnaill's new position. It is a clear statement of his own priorities.

Cerball, king of Osraige, now promptly dumped his Viking allies. Early in 860, Mael Sechnaill marched north to Armagh, with an army drawn from Leinster, Munster, Connacht and Meath, to enforce Aed Finnliath, king of the Northern Uí Néill, to submit to him. The expedition yielded no decisive result and a desultory war continued between Mael Sechnaill and his enemies. His enemies—Aed Finnliath of the Northern Uí Néill and Flann mac Conaing, king of Brega—allied with the Vikings to embarrass Mael Sechnaill. In 861 Aed Finnliath joined with the Vikings and attacked Mael Sechnaill's kingdom and plundered it. Mael Sechnaill defeated the Vikings of Dublin in Drumomuy in Offaly and his new ally, Cerball of Osraige, joined with him in driving off his attackers, Aed Finnliath and Amlaíb of Dublin. Aed Finnliath was back on the attack in 862—with his allies 'the kings of the Vikings' and Flann mac Conaing. Mael Sechnaill died in November 862. In reporting his death, the annalist calls him *rí hÉrend uile* 'king of the whole of Ireland'. His achievement lay in enhancing the power and prestige of the kingship

of Ireland. This—and not his struggles with the Vikings—is what the annalist celebrates and what was important in the eyes of contemporaries (Binchy 1962, 129-30).

With the passing of Mael Sechnaill, his former rival, Aed Finnliath, succeeded to the kingship of Tara, and soon emerged as the most powerful king in Ireland. As usual, alliances shifted and adjusted to the new situation. Mael Sechnaill's successor in Meath now allied himself with the Dublin Vikings and ravaged the lands of his hereditary enemy Flann mac Conaing in 863 and during this attack they searched out the pre-historic tombs on the bend of the Boyne 'which had not been done before', notes the annalist. During these struggles between the Irish kings, the Vikings played an important role. They were not the initiators of large-scale campaigns and they did make the running. They were useful but dangerous allies and mercenaries and they played these roles in some major Irish struggles. For example, in the battle of Killineer (Cell Ua nDaigri) near Drogheda between Aed Finnliath on one side and the kings of Brega and Leinster on the other, 300 or more Vikings took part and very many of them were killed. Here they were small-time players in a major struggle. They profited from the in-fighting of the Irish rulers but they never succeeded in making sizable territorial conquests.

In the second half of the ninth century, the Vikings of Ireland were independent adventurers for the most part. Dublin was by far the most powerful centre but along the Irish coast there were other independent settlements and *longphoirt*. There was a Viking fleet at Waterford that, came up the Nore to attack Cerball of Osraige in 860 and was routed below Kilkenny. The aggressive king of Loígis, Cennétig mac Gaíthéne, destroyed a Viking *longphort* at Dunrally, just south of Portarlinton and near the Barrow in 862. In 866, Aed Finnliath, king of Tara and king of the Northern Uí Néill plundered all the *longphoirt* of the north, in Cenél Eogain and Dál nAraide, took their flocks and herds—a statement that could mean that they farmed lands about their fortresses. He then defeated the Vikings of Lough Foyle and killed 240 of them. Ironically, his success may have held back the economic development of the north and ultimately prevented the growth of port towns like those on the east and south coasts, on which the Leinster and Munster kings subsequently depended for much of their wealth.

Some northern Vikings either survived or came back: Vikings from Lough Foyle attacked Armagh in 898 and a fleet appeared on Lough Neagh in the beginning of January 900. There was another settlement on Strangford Lough. They were probably the victors in a squabble (*belliolum*) with Albdand (Halfdan), the leader of incoming Danes, in 877. In 879 they captured two senior Armagh clerics—the *princeps* (abbot) and the *fer léigind* (head of the monastic school)—and probably held them to ransom.

There was a settlement at Youghal on the south coast, but its fleet was defeated in 866 by the Déisi and its *longphort* destroyed. A year later, Gnímbeolu, the leader of the Cork Vikings, whose forces later raided the monastery of Cloyne, was killed

by the Déisi. The Vikings who killed the abbot and deputy-abbot of Cloyne in 888 may have belonged to Cork. There were Limerick Vikings who were slaughtered by the Connachta in 887. Osraige seems to have been particularly vulnerable to Viking attack: it was attacked unsuccessfully in 863 and again in 872 during a snowfall on 1 February. Some of these troubles may have been due to the Vikings of Waterford, Wexford and St Mullins, who were defeated by the Osraige in 892. These operated independently like the other adventurers mentioned in the annals from time to time, like earl Tomrarr who plundered Clonfert in 866 and died within a few days of reaching his *longphort*—killed by the vengeance of the saint, the annalists note with satisfaction.

Members of the Dublin élite tried their hand at opportunistic raiding far from base as, for instance, Amlaíb's attack on Lismore in 867, the attack on the same monastery by the son of Ímar in 883 and the killing of the joint-king of the Ulaid by Eloir mac Iercne. And then there are the hit-and-run attacks where no aggressor is named (or perhaps known to the annalist), like the killing of the lord of Corcu Baiscind on the west coast in 864.

One can only sketch the history of Viking Dublin in this period: the settlement was unstable and insecure, the background and interrelationships of its rulers must remain uncertain, and the annalistic record is patchy (Smyth 1975-79; 1977). In 866 Amlaíb and Auisle of Dublin turned their attention to Pictland. They plundered the Picts and took their hostages. In 867 his kinsmen murdered Auisle and this struggle may have been the occasion for an Irish attack. An Irish force burned the fortress of Amlaíb at Clondalkin and killed 100 of his followers. They followed this up with an attack on Dublin itself. But Amlaíb of Dublin was back in business in 869: he plundered Armagh, burned its oratories and 1000 of its inhabitants were either killed or taken prisoner. Next year, he and his fellow-ruler, Ímar, turned to Scotland: they besieged and captured Dumbarton on the Clyde, destroyed it, and plundered it. Early next year, they returned to Ireland in triumph with 200 ships and many captive Angles, Britons and Picts.

Dublin was soon being fought over by at least three rival families. Amlaíb now disappears from the record and Ímar died in 873. Amlaíb's son, Oistin, was murdered in 875 by one Alband. He may be identical with the Alband killed in Strangford Lough in 877. Another Dublin leader, Barid (who may have been a son of Ímar), led a sea-going fleet from Dublin to south-west Munster in 873. He attacked the monastery of Duleek in Meath in 881 and took many captives. The annalist describes him as 'a great Viking tyrant' and attributes his subsequent death and burning in Dublin to the miracles of God and of St Cianán, the founder of Duleek. There were more dynastic feuds and killings in 883 and 888. In 893 there was a major conflict between the Vikings of Dublin and they divided into two main groups, one led by the son of Ímar and the other by earl Sigfrith. In 896 his fellow-Vikings killed Sitric son of Ímar and the Conaille of Louth killed his brother Amlaíb.

The Dubliners were still able to raid the monastic centres in Irish hinterland. In 890-91 they plundered Ardraccan, Donaghpatrick, Dulane, Glendalough, Kildare and Clonard—all major monasteries within easy striking distance. In 895, led by one Glún Iairn, they attacked Armagh and took 710 prisoners. A year later, they killed Flannacán mac Cellaig, king of Brega. But, the power of the Vikings of Dublin was ebbing fast. The decisive defeat came in 902 when the kingdom of Brega to the north of them and Leinster to the south of them joined forces against them. As the annalist records, ‘The pagans were driven from Ireland, i.e. from the fortress of Dublin . . . and they abandoned a good number of their ships, and escaped half-dead after they had been wounded and broken’. The first Viking settlement of Dublin had ended.

Ireland no longer offered rich pickings compared with Francia in the reign of Charles the Bald. Easy settlement was not to be had, and probably from the last decades of the ninth century, secondary Viking migrations were taking place from Ireland to Iceland and to the north-west of England. There is good evidence of the Irish origin of many Viking settlers in Iceland and in Cumbria. It is likely that these migrations were caused by the attacks of the Irish kings. The opening up of Iceland, the opportunities in the Irish-Sea area, and the ease with which the thinly populated area of north-west England could be settled, helped to take the pressure off Ireland.

3. THE IMPACT OF THE FIRST VIKING AGE

The upset and disruption caused by the first Viking age in Ireland is difficult to assess. In the case of the church and the monastic schools and culture the Vikings have been held responsible for a calamitous decay. Dr Françoise Henry, in a highly emotive account of the Viking attack, states: ‘They brought havoc, cutting mercilessly through the network of family relations and established loyalties. Pagans, they violently shocked a society which had become essentially Christian. They plundered without restitution, destroyed without redress . . . The invaders became a permanent plague rooted in the land . . . First of all the effect on the monasteries has to be examined, because, as we have seen, they were the centres of civilization and artistic patronage. On them the impact of the Vikings was catastrophic’ (Henry 1967, 5, 10-11, 17). For Kathleen Hughes ‘the effect of the Viking terror on the church was physically and mentally devastating . . . Respect and veneration had been accorded to the church for so long that the Viking treatment left men bewildered’ (Hughes 1966, 199-200). The claim that the Viking attacks had a profound effect on the Irish churches leading to the growth of abuses and a general decay and secularization in a society that was coarsened and demoralized by violence from the Vikings (and their Irish imitators) must be considered very carefully.

The ninth-century Irish scribe of the Reichenau Bede fragment, who may have belonged originally to a community much exposed to Viking attack, that of Mochua at Clondalkin near Dublin, expressed the sentiment of many clerics when

he wrote: *Di thólu aechtrann et námat et geinte et fochide di phlágaibh tened et nóine et gorte et galrae n-ile n-écsamle* ‘Save us from a flood of foreigners and foes and pagans and tribulations; from plagues of fire, famine and hunger and many divers diseases’ (Stokes & Strachan 1903, 256). He sets Viking attacks in their proper context—amongst the other unpleasant occurrences in early medieval human life for which the remedy was most often prayer and the mercy of God. He would have had the same weary reaction to Irish royal plunderers of monasteries—the foes of the church.

It is important not to exaggerate the frequency or extent of Viking monastic plundering. In the period 795-806 four Irish monasteries were plundered and Iona and Skye, between them, were the victims of four attacks. In 807 there were two monastic plunderings and no more are recorded until 822. From 822 to 829, a period of intense raiding, fifteen monasteries were plundered. This adds up to 25 monastic raids in 34 years. Even if we argue that the annalists record only one-third of the raids, the count is still very low given the number of monasteries and churches in Ireland. The Vikings can have had little significant effect on the Irish church before 830.

For about fifteen years, from 830 to 845, the raids on monasteries were intense. In that period, the annalists name some fifty monasteries as the victims of specific Viking raids, and nine times they add a general notice of extended territorial raids ‘on peoples and churches’ in some extensive regions such as north Leinster and the Uí Néill lands in Brega. For example, in 832 they report the burning of Duleek and of ‘the land of the Ciannachta with all its churches’; in 835 they record the burning of Mungret ‘and of many other churches of west Munster’. It is likely that the Vikings concentrated on major monasteries where there were things worth stealing and notables worth kidnapping for ransom. There was nothing much to take in the small local churches, those of the community’s everyday experience, and these may have escaped disruption.

Attacks were not equally severe throughout the country. Some well-known churches escaped for a long time: for example, the annalist records the first plundering of the great Munster monastery of Emly as late as 847 and only one other raid on it is reported for the whole of the Viking period. Seirkieran and Birr were only once the victims of a raid (842). Aghaboe, Kilcullen, Kells, Coleraine, Scatterry, Leighlin and Ross (Ros Ailithir) seem to have escaped unscathed through the ninth century though they were attacked in the tenth. Others that were attacked in the ninth century (e.g. Swords, Skellig, Mungret, Moville, Monasterboice) entirely escaped the renewed assault of the tenth century. Still others are never mentioned as the victims of the Vikings: Fore, Killeshin, Moone, Fahan—though we know that these were important churches and the recipients of significant patronage. We must infer that raids have gone unnoted, but we must be careful not push such inferences too far and make the Vikings out to be more effective than they were. Clearly the Vikings concentrated on the major monastic towns: Armagh, Glendalough, Kildare, Slane, Clonard, Clonmacnoise, Lismore and a few

others. These houses were the leaders of the Irish church before the Viking period; they emerged from it the same position, and sometimes, perhaps, even more influential. The monastic annalists do not provide a full record: their coverage is dispassionate, laconic, tight-lipped, skimpy and obviously uneven, but they are the best guides to the general course of events, as perceived by members of communities who saw themselves as being particularly the victims of Viking attack at certain times.

The disruption caused by the Vikings has been held responsible for such practices as lay abbots, pluralism, clerical marriage and hereditary succession to church offices—some historians (like reforming canon lawyers) call these ‘abuses’ but they probably did not appear at all so to contemporaries. As we have seen already, these predated the Vikings. The upsets of the Viking period may have worsened behaviour and coarsened the quality of monastic life but the opposite may equally have been the case: martyrdom may have strengthened devotion and the crisis may have hardened discipline and tightened administration.

More important is the widely-held opinion that the Viking raids caused a growth in violence towards the church and its clergy and brought an end to their immunity. We have seen that this view is not supported by the historical evidence and in an exhaustive study Lucas (1967, 172-229; cf Hughes 1972, 148-59) has shown that attacks on churches preceded the Viking wars, continued during them, and survived long after them. Some further examples. In 775 there was a skirmish at Clonard between the community of Clonard and Donnchad Midi, king of Tara, in whose kingdom Clonard lay. In 786 there occurs in the *Annals of Ulster* the cryptic entry: ‘Febordaith abbot of Dulane was murdered and the retribution of him i.e. of Dulane. Donnchad was the victor’—Donnchad is the same Donnchad Midi already mentioned. The reasons for this violence were complex: structural social and economic reasons made the monastic settlements vulnerable to attack. These involved sanctuary (a well-developed institution in Ireland) (Ó Corráin 1987a, 284-310) and the breach of it by men of violence, the close kinship of churchmen and secular rulers, violent conflict between rival church lineages, and the raiding of church stores and treasure in times of famine by the starving population. The Irish did not need to learn to attack monasteries, and their reasons for attacking them were to stand.

Sometimes, then, reasons why the Vikings and Irish attacked the monasteries were the same: as the most economically advanced areas in the country and as safe-deposits, they were rich in food and in treasure. Here, however, there is a striking difference: the Vikings deliberately plundered church treasure, altar-plate, shrines and various kinds of halidoms. The evidence is provided by the annals and by the survival of Irish church artifacts in Norway that were brought back as loot (Namers 1983, 277-306). As Lucas (1967, 211-12) points out, however, once monasteries were raided they could not quickly replenish their store of precious vessels and shrines and besides the bullion value of early Irish metalwork is low—the value of the objects depends more on the religious and artistic perceptions of

their owners. It is likely that the Vikings soon learned that such objects fetched a much higher ransom price than their bullion worth. And they quickly discovered the profits to be made from people as a commodity—as hostages for ransom and as slaves. The hit-and-run affairs down to the 830s lent themselves to the taking of high-status persons for ransom, for example, the capture of the king of Conaillne and his brother in 832; but slave-taking on a relatively small scale was a regular feature of raids, for example, the large prey of women taken from Howth in 821.

Large-scale raiding of major monasteries for slaves occurs much later. Amlaíb of Dublin plundered Armagh in 869, burned its oratories, did much damage besides and 1000 persons were either killed or taken captive. This was the action of a man whose fortress of Clondalkin had been burned in 867 and a hundred of its keepers killed, whose fortress of Dublin had been attacked in the same year, and whose son had been killed in battle at Killineer, fighting with his Leinster and Brega allies against Aed Finnliath, the king of Tara and protector of Armagh. He needed revenge on Aed and the means to impress and reward his troops: the plunder of Armagh and its population met both requirements. Other major slave-raids on monastic towns are reported: on Duleek in 881 when many captives were taken, on Kildare in 886 when 280 captives (including the deputy abbot) and ‘much wealth besides’ were taken, on Armagh in 895 when 710 persons were taken and much damage was done. It is unclear how these slaves were marketed, but is likely they were sold onwards to Scandinavia (Holm 1986, 317-45). Slave raiding was another of the novel and violent contributions of the Vikings to Irish life: the Irish rulers turned it against the Vikings, but not against one another.

On a broader level, some historians have held that the Vikings attacks made Irish society much more violent and that violence brought rapid socio-political change in its train. Binchy (1962, 119-32) has argued that

in pre-Norse times, all wars, inter-tribal and inter-provincial alike, followed a curiously ritual pattern. They were hedged around with taboos; one did not continue to fight after one’s king had been slain; one did not annex the enemy’s territory or confiscate any of their land; one did not dethrone the ‘sacred’ tribal dynasty; one refrained from attacking a number of ‘neutral zones’ on enemy soil—the monastic settlements, the property of the learned castes (*áes dána*), and so on. Now, however, the Irish found themselves faced with an alien foe who respected none of the traditional conventions . . .

Further

In fact, as early as the tenth century some radical transformations had occurred; and I believe that most if not all of them may be ascribed to the impact of the Norse invaders upon the traditional order of society. Indeed, I regard the challenge from the Norsemen as a watershed in the history of Irish institutions.

These opinions derive from too narrow and too selective an interpretation of the Irish law texts, coloured by literary texts of uncertain date that are open to a different interpretation. Some of these texts, legal and literary, were, in any case, written in the ninth century and later. The ‘old order’—an archaic and almost unchanging social structure—is very much the product of Binchy’s own singular interpretation of the law tracts. As we have seen, the annals and genealogies reveal a pre-Viking Ireland ruled by aristocrats and great kings, some claiming to be kings of Ireland, who were engaged in precisely the activities he would refer to the Viking impact (Ó Corráin 1972, 29-32, 44-45; 1978, 8-11).

4. THE SECOND VIKING AGE: THE STRUGGLES OF THE KINGS, IRISH AND VIKING

By the early years of the tenth century there was an extensive area of largely Hiberno-Norse control on the coast lands of the north Irish Sea including the Isle of Man, part of south-western Scotland, the Hebrides, and the English coastline from Solway Firth to the Wirral. The evidence for the Hiberno-Norse nature of these settlements and their extent comes mainly from place name studies. The early role of the Dublin Vikings as colonists here is obscure, but it is likely that many settlers in the Wirral came from Dublin and its hinterland and dependencies (Stenton 1970, 214-23, 312; Wainwright 1948, 145-69; Smyth 1975-79, i 75-92). Wainwright (1948, 145, 164-65) considers this to be a great colonizing movement that led to intense and largely peaceful settlement from the Dee to the Solway and beyond. Settlement extended eastwards to Yorkshire north of the Humber, as shown by place names in *-by* made with Irish personal names (e.g. Melmerby < *Mael Muire*, Melsonby < *Mael Suthain*, Duggleby < *Dubgall*) (Stenton 1970, 312). The exiled Dublin leaders soon took political and military control here. They were aggressive. First they attacked Pictland. In 904, two ‘grandsons of Ímar’ killed the king of Pictland in battle. In the same year, Ímar ua hÍmair, who had been king of Dublin until he was expelled in 902, was killed in Strathearn during a war on Pictland. Another member of the dynasty, Ragnall ua hÍmair, may have ruled the region in succession to his kinsman Ímar and may have campaigned in Northumbria as early as 910. At any rate, he won an important victory over the English and the Scots at Corbridge in 914 and granted lands to his followers (Smyth 1975-79, i 62-63, 100-13). This new Scandinavian power in northern Britain, which united the Hiberno-Norse west with the Danish east, was a serious threat to its neighbours and already its influence was felt in Ireland. In 913 a sea-fleet of the Ulaid was defeated on the English coast by the Vikings—evidence, perhaps, that the north-east coast of Ireland felt vulnerable and was involved with English interests in containing Ragnall. In 914, Ragnall extended his activities to Man.

In Ireland, the second Viking age appears to begin suddenly: the annalist records ‘the arrival of a great sea-fleet of pagans in Waterford Harbour’ in 914. This fleet came originally from Brittany, made an unsuccessful attack on the Severn estuary

and sailed for Ireland in the autumn. It arrived before 1 November, and probably went into winter camp—the annals say nothing of its doings in 914. Next year, large Viking forces of unknown provenance arrived in Waterford and ravaged the kingdoms and churches of Munster including Cork, Lismore and Aghaboe. They killed some local rulers, but they were defeated at Rahan in 917.

In 917 two leaders of the exiled Dublin dynasty joined in the renewed Viking attack. It is not clear what relationship they had with the Waterford fleets of 914 and 915, but on their arrival in Ireland, they took control of Viking activities. Ragnall, who is called *rí Dubgall* ‘king of the Danes’ presumably because he ruled Danish Northumbria, came with a fleet to Waterford. His kinsman, Sitric Caech, came with a fleet to *Cenn Fuait*, on the border or coastline of Leinster.⁵ Viking raiders were defeated on the Munster Blackwater and again by the Eoganacht and the Ciarraige in local encounters.

The arrival of large forces under well-known leaders sparked off a major conflict between the newcomers and the king of Tara, Niall Glúndub mac Aeda, king of the Northern Uí Néill. He had succeeded the elderly Flann mac Mael Sechnaill in 916 and would have been anxious to establish his prestige and, as a northerner, he was well aware of the threat of Ragnall’s northern kingdom to north-eastern Ireland as well as to Scotland and England. And the belief that the king of Tara was king of Ireland and defender of the land was by now well established, certainly in Uí Néill circles. In August 917, leading the troops of the Uí Néill, he marched to the plain of Cashel ‘to make war on the pagans’. He attacked Ragnall’s forces but each leader acted cautiously and no decisive engagement took place though the campaign lasted for three weeks or more. Niall persuaded the Leinstermen to attack Sitric’s encampment at Cenn Fuait. They were heavily defeated: the king of Leinster, the bishop of Leinster and many other leaders were slain. Following on this victory, Sitric took possession of Dublin. And in 918, Ragnall led the Viking fleet of Waterford to north Britain and to campaigns that made him king of York and ruler of Northumbria. He had failed to make worthwhile conquests in Ireland.

Soon there was war between Niall Glúndub and Sitric of Dublin, and one feels that the laconic entries in the annals conceal great political stresses in the Leinster-Brega area as the new king of Dublin established himself. The king of Northern Brega allied with Dublin to preserve his kingdom, but this ploy failed. The conflict ended in disaster for the king of Tara. In September 919, he marched on Dublin with the forces of the Northern and Southern Uí Néill. He was heavily defeated at Islandbridge, river from Dublin, and he and many Uí Néill leaders were killed (Curtis 1990, 99). An annalist records ironically that it was Céle Dábaill, abbot of Bangor and Niall’s confessor, who incited him to battle, and that the cleric gave the king viaticum in exchange for the king’s horse so that he himself could escape from the battle. (That prudent and learned abbot died in religious retirement in Rome in 929.) Never before had so many notables been killed in battle by the

⁵ *Cenn Fuait* has been identified as Confey, near Leixlip on the Liffey or, alternatively as Glynn, near St Mullins on the Barrow in south Carlow. Neither is certain.

Vikings and the defeat clearly shocked contemporaries. Next year, the new king of Tara, Donnchad ua Mael Sechnaill, routed and slaughtered the Vikings in an engagement in Brega. Then, suddenly, Sitric left Dublin. The annalist attributes his going to ‘the power of God’: the real reason was his claim to the kingdom of York.

As we have seen, Ragnall and his fleet had left Waterford to return to his kingdom in Scandinavian north Britain in 918. On the way, they attacked Scotland and sacked Dunblane in Perthshire. At Tynemouth, they defeated the English and Constantine, king of the Scots. Ragnall followed up this victory by taking York in 919—a city that he may have controlled previously. In 920, he submitted, as king of Northumbria, to king Edward. Now, York and Dublin were in the hands of a single dynasty and this was to have important consequences for Ireland and England.

According to the annals Ragnall died in 921 (he may, in fact, have died in 920) and in his obit he is called *ri Finngall 7 Dubgall* ‘king of the Norse and the Danes’—a fair description of his mixed Scandinavian kingdom in north Britain. His successor in York was his kinsman, Sitric, king of Dublin, who ruled York peacefully until his death in 927. He met king Athelstan in conference at Tamworth in 926, became a christian of sorts and was given the king’s sister in marriage.

His kinsman, Godfrid, ruled Dublin in his place and was active as a raider and slaver. In 921 he attacked Armagh on the eve of the feast of St Martin (11 November), when the place was full of food and well-loaded pilgrims, but he spared the church and the charitable institutions. And he harried the countryside to the east and north of Armagh. This may be part of an intense Viking campaign in eastern Ulster from about 921 to 927 (and begun again later), led by Dublin and using large fleets, to create a Scandinavian kingdom like that on the other side of the Irish Sea (Smyth 1975-79, ii 23). In 923 a Viking fleet on Carlingford Lough raided the monastery of Killeavy. Next year, the Vikings of Strangford Lough killed the *rígdamna* (‘royal heir’) of Ulaid, but they lost ‘a great sea-fleet’ on the bar of Dundrum Bay where 900 or more of them were drowned. In 926 the Strangford Vikings plundered Dunseverick, a fortress on the Antrim coast, and killed and took captive a large number. The attempt to set up a regional kingdom on the east Ulster coast was foiled by Muirchertach mac Néill, king of the Northern Uí Néill. He defeated the Carlingford Vikings in 926 and killed 200 of them. The Strangford fleet, under Alpthann, son of Godfrid, moved south to Annagassan in September 926 to avoid him. But Muirchertach defeated them, killed Alpthann, and he besieged them near Newry until they were relieved by an expedition from Dublin led by Godfrid himself.

In 927, on the death of Sitric, king of York, king Athelstan took control of Northumbria. Godfrid hurriedly left Dublin to claim York, but he was driven out by Athelstan and returned to Dublin within six months, a defeated man. In his absence, Tomar mac Ailche, the powerful independent Viking lord of Limerick

since 922, allied with Godfrid's rivals (the Uí Ímair of Limerick) and took Dublin. This was part of a longer struggle for supremacy between Dublin and Limerick that was to continue after Godfrid's death. Godfrid retook Dublin, but the struggle with Limerick went on. In 927 Limerick joined with the Irish and defeated Waterford in battle at Kilmallock. In 928 the Limerick Vikings put a fleet on Lough Neagh and ravaged its environs; from 929 there was a Limerick fleet on Lough Corrib and Lough Ree; and in 930 there was a major Limerick attack on Osraige, strongly opposed by Godfrid in 930-31. Limerick had fleets on the Erne waterways in 933 and 936, and raided Connacht repeatedly. Its forces were a menace to the whole of the west and north of Ireland, and a serious threat to Dublin. In 934 Godfrid died of an illness. Unusually, the annalist describes him as *ri crudelissimus Nordmannorum* 'a most cruel king of the Norseman'—a comment due to his evil reputations as a monastic raider and slaver.

His successor was his son Amlaíb who had already commanded a fleet in the harbours of east Ulster. In 933 that fleet was allied with the king of the Ulaid in a major plundering of Airgialla (the kingdom in which Armagh lay and which was under the protection of the Northern Uí Néill). They were soon defeated by Muirchertach mac Néill, king of the Northern Uí Néill. Amlaíb and the fleet of Strangford Lough then raided Armagh on the feast of St Martin in 933. He attacked Southern Uí Néill in 935 and sacked Clonmacnoise in 936: the king of Tara replied by burning Dublin. The threat from Limerick was just as serious, but in August 937 Amlaíb defeated and captured the Limerick leader on Lough Ree, smashed his fleet, and brought him prisoner to Dublin. This striking victory occurred as Amlaíb turned his attention to York and to a north British alliance that led first to his defeat in the battle of Brunanburh, and then to the kingship of York.

There are detailed and roughly contemporary accounts of the battle of Brunanburh in the Irish annals and in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (Smyth 1975-79, ii 1-88). On the English side were Athelstan and his brother Edmund and the troops of Wessex and Mercia; their opponents were Amlaíb, king of Dublin with the Vikings of Dublin and the north of Ireland, Constantine king of the Scots, and the king of Strathclyde. The result of this 'great, lamentable and horrible battle' (as the Ulster annalist calls it) was a great victory for Athelstan. Amlaíb made his escape, and returned to Dublin in 938, perhaps after a period in Scotland.

The essential background to Brunanburh was the insecurity of the regional kingdoms of northern England and Scotland (including the Scandinavians) in the face of the expanding power of Wessex under Athelstan. The submission of Constantine, king of the Scots and Owain, king of Strathclyde, to Athelstan at Eamont/Dacre in 926 marked a significant stage in Athelstan's expansion (Stenton 1970, 218). Soon, the conditions were ripe for a grand alliance of the periphery against Athelstan, but how this came about is very obscure and at the centre of the obscurity is Amlaíb of Dublin, the ringleader, if we may judge from the annals. Amlaíb was battling with the Limerick Vikings in August 937 and Brunanburh took place before the onset of winter in the same year—too short a period to cook up

the grand alliance to challenge the all-but king of England and too local a victory to give Amlaíb the status to be its leader. Amlaíb must have been seen to be in a position to lead such an alliance long before his victory over the Limerickmen. And this must suggest that the king of Dublin was the foremost figure in Viking society in the British Isles. Florence of Worcester calls him ‘the pagan Anlaf [Amlaíb], king of the Irish and of many islands’ (Smyth 1975-79, ii 78) and this is how he may have appeared to English observers. We must infer that Dublin had real power and influence in the north Irish Sea, the Hebrides, Scotland and northern England—resources that made it much more formidable than the somewhat limited assets in land and manpower that it and its satellite Waterford held in Ireland. Dublin was a sea-kingdom, the centre of economic and political interests at a remove from the observation of those who gave us our written sources for Ireland and England, and thus poorly documented.

The defeated Amlaíb returned to Dublin towards the middle of 938. His first act was a great surprise attack on Kilcullen, an important monastery to the south-west of Dublin, where he took 1000 prisoners—a raid for slaves and treasure and an attack on Leinster. Donnchad the king of Tara and Muirchertach king of the Northern Uí Néill joined forces and counter-attacked swiftly: they led an army to Dublin, besieged the city but did not take it, and plundered the lands of Dublin southwards from the city to Mullaghmast. Next year, the Vikings avenged themselves by capturing Muirchertach in a surprise attack on his fortress of Ailech. He had to ransom himself.

Evidently, Dublin’s main interests still lay overseas and when Athelstan died in October 939 Amlaíb sailed with his fleet for England. He reached York before the end of the year and was made king by the Northumbrians who needed a leader of status in their struggle against the dominant power of Wessex. He followed this up with a major campaign south of the Humber, accompanied and supported by Wulfstan, archbishop of York. The result was a negotiated settlement between king Edmund, Athelstan’s brother and successor, and Amlaíb, by which Amlaíb was recognised as king of York and ruler of Danish Mercia—almost half the kingdom of England (Smyth 1975-79, ii 89-103). He died in 941.

In 940 Amlaíb Cuarán, first cousin of Amlaíb and son of Sitric, former king of Dublin and of York, went to York. In 941 he succeeded to the kingship of York, but he soon lost Danish Mercia to the English king, Edmund. In 943 the kings were at peace with each other and Edmund stood sponsor for Amlaíb Cuarán at baptism, but before the year’s end Amlaíb Cuarán was expelled from the kingship of York—the background is unclear—and replaced by his cousin, Ragnall. Amlaíb Cuarán returned to Ireland in 945 and took the kingship of Dublin from his cousin Blacair.

Dublin had had mixed fortunes in his absence. Muirchertach mac Néill, king of the Northern Uí Néill, had become very powerful in the north and in the midlands, and in 941 his fleet plundered the Viking bases on the Hebrides. In the same year, the

Dubliners were heavily defeated during a raid in north-west Leinster. Early in 943, the Strangford fleet was practically wiped out by local Irish forces. However, Blacair won a notable victory at Ardee: here Muirchertach mac Néill, ‘the Hector of the western world’ as the Ulster annalist calls him, was defeated and slain, and next day Blacair plundered Armagh. Soon after, the king of Leinster was killed whilst plundering Dublin.

There was now a major shift in Irish politics when two outsider claimants to the kingship of Tara appeared. The first was Congalach mac Mael Mithig of Síl nAeda Sláine (Southern Uí Néill) whose kingdom lay close to Viking Dublin. The second was Ruaidri ua Canannáin, king of Cenél Conaill (Northern Uí Néill) in the far north-west. The two were keen rivals. Congalach allied himself with the new king of Leinster and together they attacked and sacked Dublin with a new ferocity: ‘The destruction brought upon it was this: its houses, house-enclosures, its ships and its other structures were burned; its women, boys and common folk were enslaved; its men and its warriors were killed; it was altogether destroyed, from four persons to one, by killing and drowning, burning and capture, apart from a small number that fled in a few ships and reached Dalkey’. And the victors plundered the city for jewels, valuables and textiles. In 945 the unsuccessful Blacair surrendered the kingship of Dublin to the newly returned Amlaíb Cuarán.

From this victory over Dublin, Congalach is recognised as king of Tara, and it seems that authority over Dublin (and this included some control over its economic resources) was now part of the claims of the king of Tara. As king of Dublin, Amlaíb Cuarán was Congalach’s ally and subordinate. In 945 he fought beside Congalach in an encounter with Ua Canannáin’s troops in Louth, and again in 947, when Ua Canannáin came on an expedition to Slane in the heartland of Congalach’s kingdom, Amlaíb Cuarán’s forces took heavy losses. But events in England drew Amlaíb Cuarán to brighter prospects: the death of king Edmund and the succession of Eadred opened the way for a second and successful attempt at the kingship of York, which he held probably with the consent of the English king from c. 948 until his expulsion in 953 (Smyth 1975-79, ii 155-90). Blacair resumed the kingship of Dublin but he was slain by Congalach in the battle of Dublin in 948 when 1600 of his troops were either killed or taken prisoner.

Ua Canannáin now launched a major attempt to overthrow Congalach. He came on two great expeditions to Meath and Brega in 950, encamped for six months, reduced Congalach to great straits, and began to be recognised as king of Ireland. In November he inflicted a crushing defeat on the Vikings of Dublin—two thousand or more were slain—but he himself fell in the battle. The Dubliners now raided Congalach’s kingdom: they burned the round tower of Slane, full of refugees clutching the church treasure and in 951, basing themselves at Kells, they plundered Kells itself, Donaghpatrick, Ardbraccan, Dulane, Kilskeer and other churches, taking 3000 or more captives and spoils of herds, gold and silver.

The ex-king of York, Amlaíb Cuarán was back as leader in Dublin in 953, and was now the ally of the king of Leinster. When Domnall ua Néill of the Northern Uí Néill, Congalach's rival, raided Brega in 954 he did so with the agreement of the Dubliners. In 956 Congalach's flagrant and humiliating attempt to dominate Leinster brought him face to face with a Leinster-Dublin alliance: he was killed in a surprise attack by the Dubliners on the banks of the Liffey, on his way back from a campaign against Leinster. And Dublin acted on the instigation of Leinster.

His successor, the powerful Domnall ua Néill, king of Tara from 956 until his death in 980, used most of his vast energies in an attempt to build up a centralized Uí Néill kingdom in the north and the midlands. In these struggles, Dublin behaved politically much like a powerful local Irish kingdom. By 962 Dublin and Leinster were in league with each other, and Dublin played a role in local Leinster affairs. In 967 a Leinster-Dublin force raided and ravaged Brega, an area regarded by Domnall as part of his kingdom. Next year, Domnall led an army into Leinster and plundered it from the Barrow to the sea. He besieged the Vikings and the Leinstermen, perhaps at Dublin, for two months and many Leinster notables were slain. In 969 Amlaíb Cuarán and Murchad, king of Leinster, plundered Kells, a major monastic town in the lands of ua Néill. He pursued them and inflicted a defeat on them. Next year, Amlaíb and the Leinstermen again raided Kells and took large spoils and defeated the Uí Néill in an encounter near the Boyne. And the king of Brega and Amlaíb Cuarán defeated Domnall in battle.

Domnall soon took his revenge on his enemies. His son Muirchertach and Murchad, king of Ailech (one of Domnall's subject kings) ravaged the monasteries of Louth and Dromiskinand killed many people. Domnall himself made a ferocious attack on Monasterboice and Dunleer in the course of which 350 people were burnt alive. The son of the king of Ailech torched the refectory of Dunleer and killed or burned to death 400 men and women. The annalist states that these attacks were carried out *for Ghallaibh* 'against the Vikings' - a term we must take literally. These were monasteries to the north of Brega and near the old Viking base at Annagassan. They lay in territory under Dublin control, and were very vulnerable, because of their position, to attack from the north. Evidently, these long-established and prosperous monastic towns played the same economic and political role in Viking-ruled lands as they did in Irish kingdoms since otherwise the king of Tara would have no cause against them. And this is interesting evidence for cultural assimilation, and for the integration of the church into the structures of authority within the Viking areas.

Early in 971, Domnall and his army of occupation were expelled from Meath and driven north of the Fews. He returned with a great northern army to avenge himself on Meath and on the Vikings. He ravaged all the fortresses of Meath and spoiled north Leinster, and he put a local garrison on every *tuath* from the Shannon eastwards to Kells.

In 976 the Dublin-Leinster entente broke down and Dublin, though now without allies, felt strong enough to attack its neighbours and expand its territory by conquest, perhaps to build a kingdom like that of York. In 977, Amlaíb Cuarán killed Muirchertach, a son of Domnall ua Néill, who may have been governor of Meath and Brega and the most important military leader in the area. Next year, the Dubliners defeated and killed the king of Leinster in a pitched battle near Athy, and in 979 they captured his successor and sacked Kildare. But, Clann Cholmáin of Southern Uí Néill now had an able leader: Mael Sechnaill mac Domnaill, who signalled his arrival by inflicting a crushing defeat (the annalist calls it ‘a red slaughter’) on the Dubliners at Tara in 980. Amlaíb Cuarán commanded the troops of Dublin and the Hebrides. The presence of Hebridean troops and the location of the battle must suggest that the encounter was part of a major and long-planned attack on the Uí Néill heartland. It failed, and this defeat broke the military power of Dublin. Mael Sechnaill followed up his victory by leading a large army to Dublin and besieging the city for three days and three nights. The Dubliners made terms with him: the freeing of all Irish hostages including the king of Leinster and the hostages of the Uí Néill, the handing over of treasure and valuables, the freeing of all the lands of the Uí Néill from the Shannon to the sea from tribute and exaction. Mael Sechnaill further proclaimed the liberty and return of all Irish slaves in the territory of the Vikings—that, says the annalist, was ‘the Babylonian captivity of Ireland, second only to the captivity of hell’. Amlaíb Cuarán went to Iona as a penitent, and died there in religious retirement later in the year.

Dublin was now under the indirect rule of Mael Sechnaill, and remained quietly so until Sitric Silkenbeard, son of Amlaíb Cuarán, succeeded in 989 and apparently made a bid for independence. Mael Sechnaill defeated the Dubliners and besieged the city for three weeks until they promised to meet his conditions to the full as long as he was king. One of these conditions was an annual rent of an ounce of gold on every tenement, to be paid at Christmas.

The Viking attack on Munster in the early tenth century and the hostility of the Uí Néill overturned the Eoganacht kingship of Munster and this is the context of the foundation and survival of the Viking cities of Waterford, Limerick and Cork. Waterford dates from 914, and its early rulers were probably closely related to those of Dublin. In 939, Waterford was ruled by Macc Acuind (son of Haakon) who was an ally of Cellachán, king of Munster, in his raids on the midland monasteries (Ó Corráin 1974, 4). From 984 Waterford came under Irish control. The rulers of Limerick, the most powerful Viking settlement after Dublin, were separate from those of Dublin and there may have been three distinct families vying for the kingship in the tenth century, the most successful being the descendants of one Ímar, who appear to have Limerick and Hebridean connections.

Gradually, the more powerful Irish kings asserted their authority over Dublin and as the great struggle for the kingship of Ireland gathered momentum Dublin became a major prize in the political game. Whoever would be king of Leinster or of Ireland must hold Dublin. Mael Sechnaill, who resumed the kingship of Tara on

Brian's death, turned on Dubliners and the Leinstermen in 1015, but less effectively than Brian. He attacked Dublin and burned the *dún* and all the houses that lay outside it, and then ravaged Leinster. In 1016 the Dubliners plundered Kildare, Glendalough, Clonard, and Armagh, and again Mael Sechnaill defeated them. Finally, a month before his death in 1022, he won a victory over them at Athboy, to the north of Trim, and slew many of them. After his passing, there was no strong power to threaten Dublin and the annals record merely the tit-for-tat raids for treasure and clashes between a much-weakened city and its neighbours—Meath, Brega, Leinster, and the aggressive king of Ulaid who defeated Dublin in a sea-battle in 1022. When Donnchad mac Briain came north to take the hostages of Meath and Brega in 1026, he encamped in peace for three days beside the *dún* of Dublin. The Dubliners now knew how to kowtow and the Irish king knew that there were more profitable ways of dealing with Viking Dublin than ravaging the city.

Now control over Dublin passed from one to the other of the greater Irish kings. First, Leinster dominated it. Diarmait mac Mael na mBó, king of Leinster since 1042, led a great expedition to Dublin in 1052, drove its king Echmarcach overseas, and seized the kingship for himself. Next year, Donnchad mac Briain, king of Munster, joined with Diarmait's regional enemies, invaded the territory of Dublin, and forced Diarmait to hand over hostages—that is, forced Diarmait to hold Dublin of him. But in 1054 and 1057-58 Diarmait was using the army and fleet of Dublin to help him king-make in Munster and by 1059 he had installed his son Murchad as king of Dublin. Murchad defeated the exiled king of Dublin on Man in 1061 and levied tribute on the island. He died in 1070: the annalists call him 'lord of the Foreigners and king of Leinster under his father'. His father Diarmait was killed in battle in 1072.

Tairdelbach ua Briain, king of Munster and claimant to the kingship of Ireland, moved immediately to assert his authority over Leinster and Dublin. The Dubliners granted him the kingship of the city and later Gofraid ua Ragnaill, the king of Dublin, did homage and submission to him and recognised his suzerainty. When they fell out in 1075, ua Briain expelled him from Ireland and he died overseas, and ua Briain's son, Muirchertach, was formally inaugurated king of Dublin. Muirchertach became king of Munster on his father's death in 1086. In 1094 when a great northern alliance challenged Muirchertach, it did so at Dublin and with the fleet of Gofraid Meránach who had become king of Dublin in 1091. And when the alliance fell apart Muirchertach exiled Gofraid and tightened his grip on Dublin. He used its fleet in his campaigns against the north in 1100 and its army in 1103. When the abbot of Armagh tried to make peace between Muirchertach and his northern enemies in 1105, he went to Dublin to do—clearly Dublin had become one of Ua Briain's capitals. In 1111 Muirchertach travelled to Dublin—it was a journey, not a military expedition—and remained there for three months, from Michaelmas (29 September) to Christmas. When challenged by Leinster interests, he defeated them in battle at Dublin in 1115 and made his son Domnall king of Dublin. Ua Briain dominated the Viking cities—Dublin, Limerick, Waterford,

Cork—dealt craftily with the colourful Magnus Barelegs, king of Norway, who appeared in Irish waters, and played politics with Henry I of England. He supported the revolution in church government proposed by the reformers, gaining himself prestige abroad and the opportunity to arrange the diocesan share out to his advantage; and he took care to have bishops to his liking appointed to the new urban dioceses—Cork in 1085, Dublin in 1095, Waterford in 1096, Limerick in 1106/7 (Gwynn 1942a, 1942b, 1946, 1950, 1955).

When a new claimant to the kingship of Ireland appeared—Tairdelbach Ua Conchobair, king of Connacht—he signalled his intentions by attacking Munster and Dublin in 1118. He besieged Dublin and took the hostages of the northern half of Ireland by force from the city—evidently, Muirchertach Ua Briain, as king of Ireland, kept his northern hostages there. He expelled Domnall, king of Dublin, and he himself took the kingship of Dublin—an office he soon granted to Énna, king of Leinster and his ally and subordinate. When Énna died suddenly in 1126, Ua Conchobair's first care was Dublin where he came with an army: the Dubliners submitted to him, and he installed his son Conchobar as king. In the 1130s, when Ua Conchobair was beset by enemies on all sides, Diarmait Mac Murchada, king of Leinster, grasped the resources of Dublin—200 ships, as the annals record in 1137.

From 1145 Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn, king of the Northern Uí Néill, was a contender for the kingship of Ireland. When he made a circuit of Ireland in 1149 Diarmait Mac Murchada made his submission to him in Dublin and Mac Lochlainn 'made a perfect peace between the Vikings and the Irish'—a cryptic phrase that at the least implies that Mac Lochlainn had control of Dublin. In 1150 whatever settlement was made was upset by Tairdelbach Ua Briain, king of Munster, who brought an army to Dublin and forced it into submission. When Mac Lochlainn's cause prospered, he too wished to rule Dublin more directly. In 1154 he marched on the city and the Vikings accepted him as king; in return for their submission, he gave them *tuarasdal* or a royal grant of 1200 cows—an enormous sum in contemporary terms. His ally, Mac Murchada, joined with him in dominating the Vikings. In 1161 Mac Murchada crushed the Vikings of Wexford. In 1162 Mac Lochlainn and Mac Murchada attacked Dublin. They spent a week plundering the territory of Dublin and burning its corn. Mac Lochlainn besieged the city, but his cavalry was routed in an engagement, and he abandoned the struggle without battle, leaving it to Mac Murchada to finish the task. In the words of the annalist, 'he plundered the Foreigners and he obtained great sway over them, such as was not obtained for a long time', and they handed over 120 ounces of gold in compensation to Mac Lochlainn.

Mac Lochlainn's cause collapsed suddenly early in 1166 and Ruaidrí Ua Conchobair, king of Connacht, moved swiftly to make himself king of Ireland and crush his enemies, among them Diarmait Mac Murchada. He marched on Dublin, took the hostages of the Dubliners who formally recognised him as king of Ireland, and they joined forces with Ua Conchobair. Now as sub-kingdom after sub-kingdom fell to Ua Conchobair, the Dubliners and the Leinstermen revolted against

Mac Murchada; his enemies invaded, joined with rebels, and unkinged him. Ua Conchobair displayed his royal power by holding a great council at Athlone where 'he was enkinged as honourably as any king of the Irish was ever enkinged'. He granted *tuarasdal* to the sub-kingdoms of Ireland. Dublin heads the list and received the enormous grant of 4000 cows and to pay this 'he levied a tax on the men of Ireland for them'. One can compare the grants to large local kingdoms: Cenél Conaill 240 cows, Osraige 25 steeds, Desmond 70 steeds.

Diarmait Mac Murchada, the defeated king of Leinster, who left Ireland looking for foreign help, came back in 1167 with a small force of Norman knights and won back his kingdom quietly. Ua Conchobair, accompanied by the Dubliners, marched to Leinster and, after lengthy talks and some scuffles, took his hostages. A large force of Normans arrived in May 1169, were joined immediately by Mac Murchada, and turned upon Wexford. The men of Wexford fired the suburbs of their city so that besiegers would have less cover and retired within the walls. Their attackers besieged them and burned their fleet in the harbour but the citizens defended themselves vigorously. On the second day of the attack, they treated for terms. Mac Murchada granted the city and all its lands to his Norman allies, fitz Stephen and fitz Gerald. He campaigned against other local kingdoms, negotiated a truce with Ua Conchobair and in 1169/70 he and his Normans made their first attack on Dublin. They brought fire and sword into the territory of Dublin, but they did not besiege the city: the citizens sued for peace and gave securities for their future good conduct.

In May 1170 Reimund le Gros landed with a small force of Norman knights and archers near Waterford. His camp was attacked by the men of Waterford and by local Irish leaders, but they were defeated. The prisoners taken, including seventy of the leading citizens of Waterford, were killed in cold blood. In August 1170, Richard de Clare, Mac Murchada's tardy ally, landed at Crook with 200 knights and about 1000 other troops. He was joined by Reimund le Gros, and next day they attacked Waterford. They took it with great slaughter—700 of the citizens were killed—and De Clare garrisoned it.

Mac Murchada and his Normans now decided to march on Dublin. The ruler of Dublin, Asgall mac Torcaill, was already in touch with Ua Conchobair who marched to the city. He encamped at Clondalkin, about five miles to the south-west, where he could guard the approach to Dublin west of the Wicklow mountains. Mac Murchada and the Normans came through Glendalough and suddenly appeared before the walls. All three parties now began talks, and the negotiators included Laurence O'Toole, archbishop of Dublin. But while these talks were going on, the Normans stormed the city. The city was torched, and a large part of it including the *dún* was burnt and many citizens were killed. Ua Conchobair struck camp, Asgall and some of his troops escaped from the city, and Mac Murchada's Normans took possession of it. The city fell on the feast of St Matthew, 21 September 1170, a date that marks the end of Viking Dublin as a political entity (Orpen 1911, Curtis 1908). The Ostman cities became property of

the English crown and their populations were gradually lost their separate identity (Curtis 1908, Bugge 1900b, Bugge 1904, Sommerfelt 1957).

5. SETTLEMENT, CULTURE AND LITERATURE

Dublin is the only city on which we have any evidence of political structure. From the contemporary annalistic entries for 980 we learn that in the Dublin of Sitric Silkenbeard his son Ragnall was his *rígdamna* ‘heir designate’, he had a viceroy (one Conmael, an Irish name) and a law-speaker. These were office-holders of high status. All three commanded troops, and were slain in battle. The city held Leinster and Uí Néill hostages, and could impose tribute on at least some lands of the Southern Uí Néill. Further, the rulers had a servile Irish population in the extensive rural hinterland of the city. *Cogad Gaedel re Gallaib* speaks of a more elaborate organisation: four heir-designates, four viceroys and four commanders of the fleet, but the value of this evidence is doubtful. (Todd 1867, 164). An annal for 1023 has reference to the assembly or thing: the king of Brega was taken prisoner at it, though he went there under the protection of Colmcille (here perhaps that of the abbot of Kells, but since the Columban monastery of Swords lay within the territory of Dublin and there was at least one Columban church within the city one cannot be sure).

The territory of Dublin (the Ostmen called it *Dyflinarskiri*, ‘shire of the Dubliners’) was extensive even in the tenth century. An annal for 938 shows that it stretched from the city to $\frac{1}{4}$ th Truisten, near Mullaghmast, and from Drinan (near Kinsealy) to Howth according to an annal of 1013. Documents from the twelfth century and later show that it extended from Ballygunner and Windgate in Wicklow, to Skerries and Balbriggan in the north, and from the sea to Leixlip and Lyon Hill. At a conservative estimate, it corresponded then to all the modern county Dublin and parts of Wicklow and Kildare, and the littoral between the river Nanny in the north and Arklow in the south (Bradley 1988, 49-62). This is the area of settlement but, as we have seen, Dublin’s area of political control was wider and fluctuated with circumstances. Within it were the wealthy monasteries of Swords, Lusk, Lambay, Finglas, Glasnevin, Clondalkin, Kilmainham, Tallaght, Shankill, and many more smaller foundations. These (and their estates) coexisted with Ostman settlers and Irish aristocrats—and all had their servile populations. In the twelfth century (and perhaps earlier) the rulers of Dublin took taxes in horses, cows and provisions from Mac Gilla Mo-Cholmóc’s lands lying to the south and east of the city (Gilbert 1854, 231-31, 405-06). Dublin, as the archaeological evidence shows, was dependent on the hinterland for 90% of its meat, for fruit and nuts, for timber and firewood, and for other raw materials; and it needed that hinterland to guarantee its supplies in a frequently hostile environment (Bradley 1988, 49-53).

In Limerick the cantred of the Ostmen formed the eastern part of the rural deanery of Limerick, on both sides of the Shannon, from Bunratty in the west to Plassey in the east and from Ballyneety in the south to the foothills of Slieve Bearnagh in the north. And for much of the time, the Ostmen controlled the strategic stretch of the

Shannon from Limerick city to Lough Derg. Waterford comprised the barony of Gaultier and much of the barony of Middlethird and it controlled the littoral westwards to Dungarvan and Helvick. In Cork, the Ostman lands comprised Kerrycurrihy, most of the Liberties of Cork and parts of the barony of Kinalea. The Wexford settlement corresponded to the rural deanery of Forth.

In the eleventh century and in the first half of the twelfth, the Hiberno-Viking (perhaps better called Ostman) cities were politically subordinate to the more powerful regional kings (de Paor 1976, 34). For the most part, Dublin and Waterford were autonomous, though they were sometimes ruled directly. Diarmait, brother of Muirchertach Ua Briain, is called *dux* of Waterford. Limerick was under the thumb of the Dál Cais kings: they had a governor in the city. Generally, the Irish kings milked the cities for men, fleets and taxes, and it is likely that they encouraged their wealth-creating trade. Irish writers certainly appreciated the skills of the merchants and this may reflect the attitudes of the political class that they served: *seolad crann dar muir co beacht/ cráes Gall is cennaigeacht* ‘sailing ships skilfully over the sea/ the gluttony and commerce of the Vikings’ (Meyer 1897, 112-13; Young 1950, 11).

There is evidence—often only place names—for scattered Viking settlements along the coastline. Scattery, an island monastery in the mouth of the Shannon, was controlled by Limerick and its kings took refuge there: the name is an Old Norse re-formation of Irish Inis Cathaig. In the extreme south-west, the Blaskets (earlier Blasques) contain the Old Norse element for ‘island’ (the first element is uncertain, perhaps *blaesc* ‘shell’); the fine harbour of Smerwick (Old Norse *Smørvík*) nearby means ‘butter bay’ in Old Norse, a term of praise, perhaps for the fertile monastic lands that lie about it (Ofstedal 1976, 132); and at Beginish, on the western tip of the Iveragh peninsula, a cross-inscribed rune stone points to Hiberno-Norse settlers in a monastic context (Bradley 1988, 66-67). The claim that Skellig (Ir. *Sceilg*) is Old Norse (Ofstedal 1976, 128-29) is without foundation. Norse names on the south coast (Blaskets, Smerwick, Dursey, Fastnet, Fota, Helvick, Waterford, Saltees, Selskar, Tuskar) and on the east coast (Wexford, Arklow, Wicklow, Howth, Ireland’s Eye, Lambay, Skerries, Carlingford, Strangford) passed from Old Norse directly into English. Names and landmarks in the lingua franca of Ostman sailors and merchants, they left no trace in Irish-language toponomy. Dalkey near Dublin is a part translation of Irish Delginis. Inland, purely Old Norse as distinct from names formed in the Irish way but with Old Norse elements, are scarce: Leixlip from Old Norse *lax-hløyppa* ‘salmon’s leaping place’ is one of the few. Names with Old Norse elements are common enough in the territory of Dublin: Ballyfermot contains the Old Norse personal name *Thormundr*, Ballygunnar the personal name *Gunnarr*. Most significant of all, Old Norse names are very few in Ireland compared with England, Wales and the west of Scotland (Ofstedal 1976; Bugge 1900, iii).

Norse loan words in Irish have been discussed often (Bugge 1912, 291-306; Marstrander 1915 (cf. Sommerfelt 1922); Pokorny 1919, 115-29; Greene 1976).

Linguistic contact began early and was certainly in full swing by the mid ninth century. Our datable evidence, however, comes not from the common speech but from the literary register, and that is slow to admit borrowings. The earliest ordinary loan-word is *erell*, *iarla* from *jarl* ‘earl’- the Irish were impressed by these military leaders (Ó Corráin 1987b). There are three important farming terms: *punnann* from *bundan* ‘sheaf (of corn)’; *garrdha* from *gard\ʀ* originally ‘messuage’, later ‘fenced vegetable garden’; and *pónair* from *baunir* ‘beans’. This shows that there were substantial numbers of Norse-speaking farmers, presumably on the east coast.

The most significant loanwords have to do with the areas of life where the Vikings were most innovative: shipping (*ancaire* from *akkeri* ‘anchor’; *bád* from *bátr* ‘boat’, *scód* from *skaut* ‘sheet’, *stiúir* from *stýri* ‘rudder’, *laídeng* from *leid\angr* ‘naval forces’, *cnarr* from *knorr* ‘ship’), fishing (*langa* from *langa* ‘ling’, *tros* from *þorskr* ‘cod’, *dorgha* from *dorg* ‘fishing-line’), commerce and traded goods (*margad* from *markaðr* ‘market’, *pinginn* from *penningr* ‘penny’, *scilling* from *skillingr* ‘shilling’, *scuir* from *skyrta* ‘shirt, cloak’, *cnaipe* from *knappr* ‘button’, *bróg* now ‘shoe’ from *brók* ‘hose, trousers’), warfare (*boga* from *bogi* ‘bow’, *elta* from *hjal* ‘hilt’, *merge* from *merki* ‘battle-standard’). There are a few terms for food, notably *builín*, *builbhín* ‘a loaf’ probably from *bylmingr* ‘a kind of bread’, *beoir* ‘beer’ from *bjórr* (very likely a different kind of ale from what the Irish had). Social terms are limited: *ármand* ‘officer, commander’ from *ármádr* ‘Norse stewards of royal farms’, *lagmann* from *lqgmaðr* ‘lawyer, local aristocrat’, *portchaine* from *portkona* ‘whore’, *súartlech* from *svartleggja* ‘mercenary’, *traill* from *þræll* ‘slave, servant’. There are only a few verbs: *leagadh* ‘lay down, knock down’ from *leggja*, *crapadh* ‘shrink, contract’ from *krappr*, *rannsughadh* ‘search, rummage’ from *rannsaka* (English ‘ransack’ is borrowed from Old Norse too)—all have to do with typical Viking activities. The Old Norse contribution to Irish is modest—well under fifty words and Norse loan words were probably never more than 0.2% of the vocabulary (Greene 1976, 80).

Irish forms of Old Norse personal names appear in Irish writings early in the ninth century: the earliest is Saxolb from *Sqxulfr*, the name of a Viking leader killed in 836. The most common are *Amlaíb* from *Oláfr*, *Gothbrith*, *Gothfrith*, *Gofraid* from *Gøðrøðr*, *Ímar* from *Ívarr*, *Ragnall* from *Rognvaldr*, *Sitriuc* from *Sigtryggr*, but there are many others (Ó Cuív 1988, 80-88). According to the historical record, Irish aristocrats borrowed Norse names only in the very end of the tenth century, and commonly in the eleventh and twelfth centuries: we have no idea what the lower classes did. *Amlaíb*, *Ímar*, *Ragnall*, and *Sitric*—the usual royal names amongst the Viking leaders—are the ones most commonly borrowed, and in turn these gave rise to Irish surnames. The Vikings themselves borrowed Irish names a little earlier and we find Ostmen in the early eleventh century bearing purely Irish names like *Gilla Ciaráin*, *Gilla Pátraic*, *Mathgamain*. Some few are translations from Old Norse into Irish. The best example of this is *Glún Iairn* from *Iarnkné* ‘iron knee’—a name that occurs in the ninth century in the Irish sources as *Ierne*, *Ergne* (Marstrander 1915, 45-46). *Glún Iairn mac Amlaíb* was king of Dublin,

980-89. The pattern of borrowing shows that deep intermingling began to occur from the middle of the tenth century.

When Amlaíb Cuarán died in religious retirement at Iona in 980 the annalist respectfully entitled him *airdrigh ar Gallaib* ‘high-king over the Foreigners’. He was a patron of poets: Cináed ua hArtacáin (+975) wrote of him (E. J. Gwynn 1903, 52):

*Amlaíb Átha Cliath cétaig
ro gab rígi i mBeind Étair
tallus lúag mo dána de
ech d’echaib ána Aichle*

‘Amlaíb of populous Dublin
who ruled as king over Howth
I received the reward of my poem from him -
A steed of the steeds of Achall’

Another fragment may also refer to him, but this is uncertain (Meyer 1919, i 13; Thurneysen 1891, 15, 32; cf. Ó Cuív 1988, 87-88):

*Amlaíb airchingid
Átha airtheraig
Érenn iathaige
dagrí Dublindi
déne dúthaige
tréne triathaige*

Amlaíb champion
of eastern Áth Cliath
of rich-landed Ireland
the good king of Dublin -
keen, patrimonial,
powerful, regal.

Important twelfth-century literary texts, one in Old Norse and the others in Irish, throw light on the attitudes and preoccupations of the Ostmen and Irish. The Old Norse text, an account of the battle of Clontarf, is *Brjánssaga*, much of which is extant in *Njála* (Sveinsson 1954, 440-60) and *Þorsteinnsaga Síðuhallssonar* (Goedheer 1938, 87-102; Lönnroth, 1976, 1-22, 226-36, for a survey of the critical literature). *Brjánssaga* was written in Dublin, probably by a cleric (Hill 1981, 437-44; Sveinsson, 1954, 452), in the period of Ua Briain rule, and therefore before 1118.

Brian is presented as an exemplary king—holy, just, forgiving, powerful, the ancestral saint-king. His ex-wife Gormlaith is painted blackly (‘she did all things ill

over which she had any power’) and egged on her son Sitric to kill Brian. Sitric deviously puts together the alliance to do so—Sigurd earl of Orkney and Brodir, apostate mass-deacon and sorcerer. Evil portents convince his comrade Ospak, a heathen but the wisest of men, that the undertaking is doomed, and he sails to king Brian at Kincora, is baptised, and reveals the plan. The saga describes the battle and the death of Brian. In the rout, Brodir emerged from hiding in a wood and killed the king. The lad Tadc, who was guarding him faithfully threw his arm in the way of the stroke and the sword cut it off and beheaded the king. When the king’s blood came on the severed arm, the lad’s wound was miraculously healed. Later, Brian’s severed head miraculously joined his trunk. The odious Brodir is disembowelled and killed by Brian’s followers and the wicked conspiracy defeated. This saga belongs to christian Dublin in the early twelfth century.

The battle of Clontarf and the death of Brian, it says, were the work of pagans, apostates and traitors, not of the ancestors of the Christian burghers of Dublin and good subjects of Brian’s great-grandson—an astute and anodyne reinterpretation of a now embarrassing event in Dublin’s history. Gormlaith and her son Sitric can be painted black because their descendants are now of no account. Gormlaith, the text says, is mother of none of Brian’s children, but this is actually false: she was the mother of Donnchad. But Donnchad’s descendants were by now an excluded segment bitterly hostile to the present king, and the author *Brjánssaga* expertly disinherits them. The present rulers descend from Tadc, the beneficiary of the saintly king’s first miracle. The accurate forms of the proper names and some motifs (Goedheer 1938, 99-102) suggest that it was written in Ireland and transmitted to Scandinavia in written form. We must conclude from this that a literary and historical culture existed in Ostman Dublin in the early twelfth century, and a contemporary reference to the hostile testimony of *senchaidi Gall 7 Lagen* ‘the historians of the Ostmen and the Leinstermen’ should be taken at its face value (Todd 1867, 188 §108).

Cogad Gaedel re Gallaib (Todd 1867) is a brilliant propaganda tract put together about the same time as *Brjánssaga* and written in the interest of the Uí Briain kingship of Dublin and of Ireland. It falls into two main parts: selected annalistic excerpts (some from sources now lost) detailing the plundering of the Vikings and the miseries of Ireland, and a triumphal account of the heroism and victories of the Dál Cais over the Vikings, culminating in the battle of Clontarf. The second part is written in the bombastic style that came into favour in the early twelfth century and is full of patriotic hyperbole. The most of the text belongs probably to the years before 1118, but there are later additions: for example, a poem to Aed Ua Néill attributed to Gilla Comgail Ua Sléibhín, who died in 1031 (Todd 1867, 120) and a citation from a poem by Gilla Modutu Ua Casaide composed in 1143 (Todd 1867, 140). The Vikings are ‘furious, ferocious, pagan, ruthless, wrathful people’ who ravish an innocent and saintly land and whose tyranny was finally ended by Brian ‘the beautiful ever-victorious Augustus Caesar . . . the strong irresistible second Alexander’. The Dál Cais are ‘the Franks (i.e. the Normans) of Ireland . . . the sons of Israel of Ireland’ meaning that the Dál Cais, as God’s chosen dynasty, will

dominate Ireland as the Normans kings have recently dominated England (Todd 1867, 204). This historical propaganda is meant to put the Dubliners in their place within the Uí Briain kingdom and, on a wider scale, it justifies the Uí Briain kingship of Ireland by portraying their ancestor as the heroic saviour of the land.

Caithréim Chellacháin Chaisil is a work of like purpose, written between 1127 and 1134, and glorifying Cormac Mac Carthaig, king of Munster, by portraying his ancestor, Cellachán of Cashel (c. 936-54), as a great battler against the Vikings (Bugge 1905; Ó Corráin 1974, 1-69). It is less sophisticated and never had the historical and historiographical influence of *Cogad Gaeidel re Gallaib*. The long poem, *Móirthimchell Éirenn uile* (O'Donovan 1841; Hogan 1901) is ostensibly a celebration of the triumphs of Muirchertach mac Néill, king of Ailech, who died fighting the Vikings in 943. It tells how he made a great circuit of Ireland and took the hostages of the Irish and the Vikings. In fact, it was written between 1156 and 1166, to celebrate the triumphs of his namesake, Muirchertach (mac Néill) Mac Lochlainn, king of Ireland. And the lordship over the Vikings described in the text refers to Mac Lochlainn's very real ambitions regarding Dublin.

History was reworked to serve new purposes, especially the glorification of the rulers who wanted to be kings of Ireland. Authority over Dublin and control its resources was an important part of that kingship. One can deduce that from activities of the great kings as the annals report them. The same is stated clearly and in a most interesting way in a piece of legal commentary that dates, very likely, from the reign of Muirchertach Ua Briain (Hancock & O'Mahoney 1869, 224; Binchy 1978, v 1779):

.i. do righ Erunn cin freasabra, 7 taris dogabside rath o ri Romain uel cumudh o comurba Padruid dobertha rath do ri Erunn .i. in tan bit na hinbir fui, Ath Cliath 7 Port Lairge 7 Luimniuch olcheana.

i.e. to the king of Ireland without opposition and beyond he receives *rath* from the king of the Romans [Holy Roman Emperor] or *rath* is given to the king of Ireland by the successor of St Patrick i.e. when the estuaries are under his control: Dublin and Waterford and Limerick besides.⁶

Rath (also called *tuarastal*) is the gift of an overking to a subordinate and is the formal mark of subordination. The Irish lawyer thinks in current hierarchical terms, he is keenly aware of the contemporary problem of church and empire in Europe, and he skilfully avoids coming down on one side or another as far as Irish authorities are concerned. He has the same keen grasp of where power lies in Ireland: only a king who controls the Viking cities is king of Ireland.

Literature indirectly reflects the significance of the Viking cities. The Viking past, which now looked more and more like a remote heroic age, a time when dynastic

⁶ I am grateful to Professor Liam Breatnach for drawing my attention to this text and for discussing its significance with me.

ancestors fought and defeated a fearsome foe, was drawn upon for the historical propaganda that gave status to contemporary kings and expressed their ambitions. The relatively peaceful Ostmen were the whipping boys of this new royal patriotism. Ironically, their world of urbanisation, trade and communications provided the means by which these very kings grew great.

7. THE VIKINGS, CHRISTIANIZATION AND THE CHURCH

In the Annals of Ulster, a source that is punctilious about titles and political nomenclature, the terms used for the Vikings vary: *geinte/gentiles* ‘pagans, heathens’, *gail* ‘foreigners’, *nortmanni/nordmainn* ‘Northmen’, *Danair* ‘Danes’. From 794 to 859 *geinte* is by far the most common, from 870-879 there are only three examples, and after 880 it disappears. It suddenly reappears with the new forces of Vikings who landed in the south of Ireland in 914-15 but it becomes very infrequent after 930 (four examples between 930 and 1000). *Geinte* is the only one of these terms with explicitly pagan connotations and one assumes that the annalists used it deliberately to denote pagan Vikings. On this basis one could suggest that the acculturation and christianisation of the Vikings proceeded very quickly after permanent settlements were made in the mid ninth century, and that the same thing happened the pagans amongst the new arrivals from the second third of the tenth century. Study of settlement and toponomastics in north and north-west England in the early tenth century (Ekwall 1924; Smith 1928; Wainwright 1948; Smyth 1975-79, i 75-92) shows that the colonists were hibernicised Norwegians from Ireland, Man and Scotland, and many of them were exiled Dubliners. Therefore, the Viking settlers of Ireland were bilingual in the beginning of the tenth century and culturally hibernicised. The placenames and the field-monuments—tombstones, crosses and churches—show that many were already christian. During the tenth century the Ostman leaders of Dublin became a christian aristocracy, closely intermarried with their Irish counterparts (Young 1950, 27). Major monasteries survived and prospered in the Viking areas—Swords, Clondalkin, Tallaght and others in Dublin, the great monastery of St Finnbar in Cork—and these will have influenced and attracted the settlers at an early period, by the late ninth century if we may judge from the Hiberno-Viking colonists in England. As we have seen, Sitric, king of Dublin, who ruled York from c. 921 to 927, became a christian of sorts when he married the sister of king Athelstan (Smyth 1975-79, ii 4-6). When Godfrid, who succeeded him in Dublin, plundered Armagh in 921 he ‘spared the oratories with their Céli Dé and sick and the monastic building itself apart from a few houses that were burnt through carelessness’, that is, he confined his raiding to plundering the town and its resources. This may suggest that he was a christian. Amlaíb Cuarán formally became christian in 943 and died in religious retirement in Iona in 980. There is no reason to doubt that his sons and successors, Glún Iairn (980-89) and Sitric Silkenbeard (989-1036, ob. 1042), were christian kings.

Sitric made a pilgrimage to Rome in 1028 and his son, Amlaíb, was killed by the Saxons on his way there in 1034. It is possible (but far from certain) that the setting up a territorial diocese of Dublin took place about the time of these Dublin

pilgrimages to Rome (Gwynn 1941; cf. Flanagan 1989, 11-18). The late elegy (attributed to Mac Liac, ob. 1016, but not his) on Tadc Ua Cellaig, king of Uí Maine, who was killed at Clontarf, offers an image of christian Dublin (Meyer 1912, 229; Gwynn, 1941, 100; Ó Lochlainn 1942-44), whose people the poet calls ‘seed of Aralt, remnant of the warriors of Lochlainn’:

*Leasg amleasg sind gu Ath Cliath
co dun Amlaíb na n-orsciath
o Ath Cliath na lland ‘s na lecht
is dian is mall m’imthecht.*

*A lucht Atha cliath na clog
eidir abaigh is easbog
na cuirid uir tar Tadc toir
co tairig duinn a dechain.*

‘Unwillingly and willingly I fare to Dublin, to the fort of Amlaíb of the golden shields; from Dublin of the churches and the graves, swift and slow will be my going. O people of Dublin of the bells, both abbot and bishop, do not put clay over Tadc in the east until I have been able to see him’.

It fits well with the image of Dublin in a poem of the twelfth century that is largely concerned with staking Armagh’s claim to primacy over it, and to the immense income derived from that primacy (Macalister 1942, 125v).⁷ It belongs perhaps to the early years of bishop Gregory of Dublin, to the period between the death of bishop Samuel in 1121 and the death of Cellach of Armagh in 1129. It begins with an aetiological legend expressing Armagh’s claim to primacy over Dublin: how St Patrick visited Dublin, how he raised the son and daughter of the king of Dublin from the dead, how he conferred gifts of character and fortune on the Dubliners, and how, in consequence, St Patrick’s church of Armagh has a right to dues and largesse from the Dubliners. It is entitled to a ‘scruple’ of an ounce of gold from every man, a further ounce of gold for every nose. And there are other dues:

a horn of mead from every vat
a comb from every comb-maker
a shoe from every shoemaker
a vessel from every glorious silversmith
a scruple from every moneyer . . .
a cowl from every merchant ship.

To the abbot of Armagh of the wide lands,
however short or long he shall be in Dublin,
is due from the Vikings without perfidy
his full maintenance on his circuit.

⁷ An edition of this poem, with translation and commentary, is in preparation.

The saint is made to say:

‘If you cause this tax to reach me
every year at Lyon Hill
the men of this earth
will not be able to ravage your fortress’

Then, in the fashion of the Irish saints, he confers a whole series of ‘gifts’ or benefits on the Dubliners: that there will always be a king in Dublin, that there will be retainers and young warriors, that their churches will be venerable, that they will be skilful in settlement and trade, that their girls will be beautiful, that they will have good ale and drinking parties, and victory in battles and conflicts.

From Patrick’s time, there must always be a bishop from Armagh and a priest from Down in Dublin:

Whilst these two are there
in the royal fortress of the Irish and the Vikings
there will be mast in their woodlands
and fish in their harbours.

And Armagh is entitled to a tithing of all the taxes Dublin levies on Viking merchants trading out of Dublin with the interior. The poem ends with a list of the major churches of Dublin: St Patrick’s, St Michael le Pole, St Michan’s, St Paul’s, St Peter’s, Christchurch, St Mary de Dam, St Bride’s, an unnamed church within the fortress (perhaps St Olave’s), and some unidentified churches including a Cell mac nAeda that is said to be the first church founded in Dublin.

Early in the eleventh century, Dublin became a diocese, corresponding in extent to the Ostman kingdom and closely linked, at least from 1074, with Canterbury (Gwynn 1968, Gwynn 1941, Gwynn 1955; Flanagan 1989, 11-24). Its bishops—Patrick (1074-84), Donngus (1084-95), Samuel O hAindlige (1095-1127), Gregory (1121-61)—were ordained by the archbishop of Canterbury and were subject to him as metropolitan. Samuel was chosen by Muirchertach Ua Briain, acting as king of Ireland and of Dublin, and by the people of Dublin and sent to Anselm, archbishop of Canterbury for consecration (Gwynn 1942a). Next year, at a synod held at Waterford in the presence of Samuel of Dublin and other bishops and presided over by Muirchertach Ua Briain, Ostman Waterford became a diocese and the candidate chosen to be its bishop was sent for consecration to Canterbury (Gwynn 1942b). By 1106/07 Ostman Limerick had a diocese and a bishop—Gilbert, a dedicated reformer and a friend of Anselm of Canterbury but evidently consecrated in Ireland (Gwynn 1946; Flanagan 1989, 11-25, 63).

A radical episcopal reorganization of the Irish church had been in progress since the late eleventh century. The Ua Briain kings of Ireland were patrons of this movement and profited from it as it went from strength to strength in the early

twelfth century. And the Ostman cities led the way. With the death of Muirchertach Ua Briain in 1119 two different interests make themselves felt. First, leadership of the reform movement passed to bishop Cellach of Armagh, who was anxious to make Armagh's primacy effective over the whole of Ireland. Second, bishop Samuel of Dublin, now free of Ua Briain dominance and at the centre of a rivalry between Armagh and Canterbury, began behaving as an archbishop, a claim that neither party recognised. When he died in 1121 Armagh moved on Dublin.

The annals report that on Samuel's death 'Cellach, successor of St Patrick, took the bishopric of Dublin by choice of the Vikings and the Irish', but matters were more complicated than this partisan report suggests. A party within Dublin wrote to Ralph, archbishop of Canterbury, as they sent him a candidate for consecration: 'We gladly submit ourselves . . . Know in truth that the bishops of Ireland have a great envy against us, and especially the bishop who dwells in Armagh; because we are unwilling to obey their rules, but wish always to be under your government. Therefore we humbly beg your favour, that you may raise Gregory to the holy order of the episcopate, if you wish to keep that diocese that we have for so long kept safe for you'. Canterbury did not manage to keep its diocese. Gregory eventually got possession, but by 1129 he seems to have been a suffragan of Armagh. The other Ostman dioceses followed suit, and in the synod of Kells/Mellifont in 1152, all the dioceses of Ireland, Ostman and Irish, were united under the primacy of Armagh. Canterbury did not forget or forgive (Flanagan 1989, 31-55)

Paradoxically, the institution the Vikings first attacked proved most adept at absorbing them, and their christian descendants were among the pioneers of an episcopal reform movement that ruined the monastic church, and much of the culture it supported.

It is widely held that the Viking attacks brought feudalism into existence in Carolingian Francia and one could argue that their conquests assured the rise of the Wessex dynasty in England and, so to speak, cleared the ground for the unification of England by Athelstan and his successors, even if that unification was delayed for a while by the efforts of the Hiberno-Norse dynasty of York and Dublin. Did they have any such fundamental impact on Ireland? They did shake up the major Irish kingdoms, but we must be careful not to exaggerate the consequent disorder especially in the first Viking age, as older historians have done. In Ireland, unlike Scotland, England and Francia, no major kingdom or region was lost to the Vikings. However, the territories taken, though relatively small in area, were strategic and, from the tenth century, the cities founded in them were very important economically and politically. The economic changes that came in the wake of Viking urban settlement in the second Viking age—especially the unprecedented growth of international trade, and thus of royal income—provided the greater dynasties with the means to build up their power dramatically and fuelled the great struggle between them for the kingship of Ireland in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. I imagine that the example of Athelstan and later English

kings was not lost on the Uí Néill or on their Uí Briain successors, particularly since the relationship between Dublin and York ensured that the leading Irish kings followed closely the changing fortunes of English-Viking relations. The idea of the kingship of Ireland, worked out in great detail by the eleventh-century historians and propagandists and pursued with vigour in the eleventh and twelfth centuries owed as much to foreign example and to the changed economic and political situation brought about by the Viking impact as it did to long-established inherited ideas. The vigorous warfare of the great kings—the use of cavalry, fleets, fortifications and encastellation—owed much to techniques brought to Ireland by the Vikings, and latterly to Norman influence mediated by contact with England through the Viking ports. And at the level of lordship there were rapid changes in landownership, location and status as a dependent nobility was transformed into a feudal cadre holding land by military service, and this was a direct result of the changed nature of kingship (Ó Corráin 1974, 67-69; Ó Corráin 1978, 32-35; Byrne 1987). Above all the Vikings were enablers of communication, ultimately the most powerful influence for change in all societies. Their activities brought Ireland into much closer political and economic contact with Britain and the European mainland and with the tide of innovation and change that flowed strongly in the eleventh and twelfth centuries: in government, church, commerce. This, in the end, was their most important contribution to Irish history.

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Fir Arda Ciannachta & Monasteries and Vikings.

- U828 Mucár mór di muccaib in airer nArddae Ciannachta o Ghallaibh 7 martre Temhnen
- U828 Guin Cinaeda m. Cummuscaigh ri Ardae Ciannachtae o Gallaib 7 loscadh Laine Leire 7 Cluana Moer o Gallaib
- U832 Orggain Mucshnama 7 Lugmaidh 7 Oa Meith 7 Droma moccu Blae 7 ala n-aile ceall
- U833 Loscadh Droma Inesclaind o genntibh
- U840 Orggain Lughmaidh di
Loch Echdach o genntibh qui episcopus 7 praespositeros 7
sapientes captivos duxerunt 7 alios mortificaverunt
- U841 Longport oc Linn Duachaill asarorta tuatha 7 cella Tethbai
- U842 Comman abbas Linne Duachaill do guin 7 loscadh o genntibh 7 Goidelaibh
- U 852 Vastatio Aird Macha o Gallaib Lindae die Samchasc
- M897 Mael Eitigh mac Feradhaigh tighearna Fer Rois do mharbhadh la Gallaibh

I. Viking raids and monastic plundering, 795-835

Locations of the main monasteries in co Louth. Louth, Dromiskin, Monasterboice and Dunleer in the territories of Fir Rois and Fir Airde Ciannachta lay within Viking-controlled territories. There were major Viking bases on Carlingford Lough (possibly at Narrow-water and Carlingford) and at Annagassan.