

# Viking Ireland—Afterthoughts

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Coming, as I do, at the end of a very successful conference that has provided many new scholarly insights, some very lively discussion, and a pleasant social ambience where much good talking was done, I find myself in an awkward position. There is no point in attempting a summary of papers already presented in full, though this bad and bumptious habit is common enough in conference proceedings. Neither should I try a review of the papers or an assessment of the achievements of the conference. There are plenty critics only too willing to do that and it would be a pity to spoil their fun when the proceedings appear. And in any case I do not know enough to play the reviewer. It might be more useful to offer some reflections on three topics discussed at this conference: the political and social condition of Ireland when the Vikings came, the provenance of the Vikings and their early raids, and the cultural relations between Ireland and Iceland.

As Charles Doherty has pointed out, too much was said in the past about the alleged backwardness and retarded political system of Ireland before the Viking period.<sup>1</sup> Irish society has been seen as archaic, isolated, backward-looking, and tribal—an ‘old order’ that had survived unchanged since antiquity (if not remote Indo-European times, whenever they were) and that was shattered by the Viking attack.<sup>2</sup> The Vikings were thought to have shaken the Irish out of their rut but in doing so they made Irish society much more violent and that, in its turn, caused rapid socio-political change. D. A. Binchy 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

1. Above, pp. 289–94.

2. D. A. Binchy, ‘The passing of the old order’, in Brian Ó Cuív (ed.), *Proceedings of the international congress of Celtic Studies ... Dublin 1959* (Dublin, 1962), pp. 119–32; idem, ‘Secular institutions’, in Myles Dillon (ed.), *Early Irish society* (Dublin, 1954), pp. 52–65; idem, *Celtic and Anglo-Saxon kingship* (Oxford, 1970). Alf Sommerfelt (review of *Proceedings of the international congress of Celtic Studies*), *Lochlann* 3 (1965), pp. 452–59) agreed with Binchy’s view.

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so on. Now, however, the Irish found themselves faced with an alien foe who respected none of the traditional conventions ~...<sup>3</sup>

These opinions derive from too narrow and too selective an interpretation of the Irish law texts, deeply coloured by literary texts of uncertain date that are open to a different interpretation. Some of these, legal and literary, were in any case written in the ninth century and later.<sup>4</sup> The ‘old order’ is very much the product of Binchy’s singular reading of the law tracts. The annals and genealogies tell a different story and reveal a pre-Viking Ireland ruled by aristocrats and kings, some claiming to be kings of Ireland, who had long been engaged in precisely the activities he would refer to the Viking impact—and engaged in them for a long time.<sup>5</sup>

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. Inherited and exotic, native and christian elements were mingled in the Irish idea of kingship—clear enough to historians (others tend to dabble in primitivist and Indo-Europeanist fantasies),<sup>6</sup> 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 humans and nature became fertile were elaborately articulated in the sagas (many are contemporary with the Viking period, some later) and skilfully integrated, at least as early as the seventh and eighth centuries, with christian concepts of kingship derived very largely from the potent images of Old Testament kingship<sup>7</sup>—and the literary and legal-theoretical expressions of these ideas belong together for they are the work of the same clerical scholars. At an early period—very likely, from the beginnings of christianity in Ireland—the churchmen sought a christian kingship. They were the advisers and confidants of kings, urging

3. Binchy, ‘The passing of the old order’, p. 128.

4. For example, *Cath Maige Tuired*, ed. Elizabeth Gray, Irish Texts Society 52 (1982), pp. 28, 36–38 (§§25, 50–51); John Carey, ‘Myth and mythography in *Cath Maige Tuired*’, *Studia Celtica*, 24–25 (1989/90), pp. 53–69. Carey makes the point that *Cath Maige Tuired*, regarded as the single most important source for early Irish mythology, reflects the ninth-century Viking wars including such notable events as the plundering of the Boyne tombs and the Viking references are not to be excised as intrusive.

5. D. Ó Corráin, *Ireland before the Normans* (Dublin, 1972), pp. 29–32, 44–45; idem, ‘Nationality and kingship in pre-Norman Ireland’, in T. W. Moody (ed.), *Nationality and the pursuit of national independence*, Historical Studies 11 (Belfast, 1978), pp. 1–35, at pp. 8–11.

6. K. R. McCone, *Pagan past and christian present* (Maynooth, 1990), pp. 107–37.

7. S. Hellmann (ed.), *Ps-Cyprianus De XII abusiuis saeculi*, Texte und Untersuchungen 34 (Leipzig, 1909); H. Wassersleben (ed.), *Die irische Kanonensammlung* (Leipzig, 1885), pp. 76–85 (‘De regno’); Fergus Kelly (ed. and transl.), *Audacht Morainn* (Dublin, 1976); Kuno Meyer (ed. and transl.), *The instructions of king Cormac*, Todd Lecture Series 15 (Dublin, 1909) is perhaps best seen as ninth-century courtly literature that expresses similar ideas; for ninth-century developments of these ideas on the continent see S. Hellmann, *Sedulius Scottus*, Quellen und Untersuchungen zur lateinischen Philologie des Mittelalters 1 (Munich, 1906).

them to rule justly if they wished for peace, and that their success and that of their dynasty depended on justice.<sup>8</sup> These ideas were brought to England and the continent by Irish scholars and were influential, especially in the Francia of Louis the Pious (†840).<sup>9</sup> Churchmen had 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"'.<sup>10</sup> This made the king holy, God's anointed, and was a welcome claim on legitimacy in the hard world of dynastic politics. Kings took it seriously. Indeed there are annalistic examples of royal ordination just on the eve of the Viking wars: Artrí mac Cathail was ordained king of Munster by the abbot of Emly in 793, but the ideas and practices are much older.<sup>11</sup> In 804, Condmach, abbot of Armagh, presided over a mixed synod of the senior Uí Néill clergy and lay leaders to pacify the warring branches of the dynasty and, most likely on that occasion, anointed Aed Oirníde ('the ordained') as king of Tara.<sup>12</sup> The Viking world of the eighth and ninth centuries was far removed from such complex ideas about the king's office.<sup>13</sup>

Knut Helle points out the limited nature of the sources for early Norse kingship. Far too little is known of Norwegian history in the early Viking Age to be of much help to us in making a historical image of Viking kinship and society. Verse of the Viking Age, Edda and skaldic praise-poetry, may have been cultivated for generations orally, but this can hardly be taken seriously as a historical source. The genealogies that occur in the sagas may tell of the ambitions of the great when the sagas were being written in the twelfth century and later but little or nothing of the Viking Age. The social structure appears to have been one of freemen of varying social conditions and a large

8. Scholars have tended to stress unduly the pagan and inherited aspect of this set of ideas: Myles Dillon, 'The Hindu act of truth in Celtic tradition', *Modern Philology*, **44** (1947), pp. 137–40; idem, 'The archaism of the Irish tradition', *Proc Br Acad*, **33** (1947 [1951]), pp. 245–64; 'The consecration of Irish kings', *Celtica*, **10** (1973), pp. 1–8.

9. Michael Edward Moore, 'La monarchie carolingienne et les anciens modèles irlandais', *Annales ESC*, **51/2** (1996), pp. 307–24.

10. Wasserschleben, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

11. Michael J. Enright, *Iona, Tara and Soissons: the origins of the royal anointing ritual*, *Arbeiten zur Frühmittelalterforschung* **17** (Berlin, 1985).

12. D. A. Binchy, 'The fair of Tailtiu and the feast of Tara', *Ériu*, **18** (1958), pp. 113–38, at pp. 118–19; D. Ó Corráin, 'Congressio senatorum', *Peritia*, **10** (1996), p. 252.

13. The first overt reflection in Old Norse on social roles (including kingship) occur in *Rígsþula*, variously dated from the tenth to the thirteenth centuries and attributed to various Old-Norse-speaking areas from the British Isles to Norway, and it may in the end be inspired by Insular biblical exegesis (Thomas D. Hill, 'Rígsþula: some medieval analogies', *Speculum*, **61/1** (1986), pp. 79–89; Jean I. Young, 'Does Rígsþula betray Irish influence?', *Arkiv for nordisk filologi*, **49** (1933), pp. 97–107).

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indigenous unfree or slave population, ruled by aristocrats and petty kings, some of whom are celebrated in verse. Skaldic verse (for what it is worth) memorializes the naval victory of king Harald Hárfagri at Hafrsfjord in Rogaland in the late ninth century. Whether this made him king of Rogaland, Hordaland and another county or two is not clear.<sup>14</sup> Saga-writers like Snorri Sturluson thought he had unified Norway and that he was descended from the Yngling kings of Vestfold, but this cannot be taken as historical.<sup>15</sup> All that we can expect in the early Viking ages are local kings and lords over which a few more powerful kings exercised personal and fitful overlordship. Effective Norwegian royal power emerged in the early eleventh century. In the early Viking Age there were no Norwegian kings able to direct and control raiding and settlement in Scotland or Ireland and the kings or sons of kings mentioned in the Irish annals (for example, Tomrair erell, *tanise righ Laithlinde*,<sup>16</sup> Amlaim mac righ *Laithlinde*)<sup>17</sup> cannot be linked to any Norwegian dynasty. Quite apart from being seen through Irish eyes and Irish terminology, they probably belong in another historical context. The early raids on Ireland were aristocratic free enterprise and only later, perhaps in the middle of the ninth century, was there any attempt by any Viking kings to coordinate the attacks, and these kings probably originated in the Viking settlements in Scotland.

In Ireland, power 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—systematics that did not, of course, correspond crudely with reality but, in an important sense, expressed concerns about social order and propriety.<sup>18</sup> There was no one administration that a conqueror could seize and make effective—neither was there in ninth-century England or Scotland. Binchy's notion that because there was no central administration—in other words, because Irish political institutions were primitive and because the country was divided into provincial kingships and lordships—the country was difficult to conquer is star-

14. Knut Helle, above, pp. 254–57.

15. Claus Krag, *Ynglingatal og Yglingsaga: en studie i historiske kilder* (Oslo, 1991); P. H. Sawyer, 'The background of Ynglingasaga', in Steinar Supphellen (ed.), *Kongsmenn og krossmenn: Festskrift til Greth A. Blom* (Trondheim, 1992), pp. 271–75; attempts have been made to link some named ninth-century Viking leaders in Ireland to the Yngling genealogies but these are mistaken: Peter Hunter Blair, 'Olaf the White and the Three Fragments of Irish Annals', *Viking*, 3 (1939), pp. 1–35; Alfred P. Smyth, *Scandinavian kings of the British Isles, 850–880* (Oxford, 1977), pp. 101–17 and chart V. The contradictions and anachronisms of these genealogies are discussed expertly by Jón Steffensen, 'A fragment of Viking history', *Saga-Book*, 18 (1970–73), pp. 59–78.

16. AU 848.

17. AU 853.

18. Francis John Byrne, *The rise of the Uí Néill and the high-kingship of Ireland* (Dublin, [1970]); idem, *Irish kings and high-kings* (London, 1973), pp. 1–69, 254–75.

ting.<sup>19</sup> The provincial kingdoms of Anglo-Saxon England, that fought amongst themselves with vigour, did little to protect it from Danish attack in the mid ninth century, and Scotland was no different. And it is hard to see how their ideas about royal government are more sophisticated than the Irish. The reason for Ireland's more successful resistance (and one may add that the size of the Viking fleets attacking Ireland was roughly the same as those active in England and Francia)<sup>20</sup> is a historical question that needs to be addressed. The difference between the Viking (and Norman) experience in Ireland and Britain is altogether striking and it suggests some interesting questions. Why were Viking conquests in Ireland limited and peripheral while large parts of England and Scotland were relatively easily taken? One reason is that the Irish took the struggle with the Vikings very seriously. The mid ninth-century Irish counter-attack was violent and successful, and Viking invaders who failed in Munster in the early tenth century succeeded readily in York. Several major Irish kings fell in battle against the Vikings—Niall Glúndub (†919), king of Tara; Muirchertach (†943), king of the North; Ruaidrí ua Canannáin (†950), claimant to the kingship of Tara; Congalach Cnogba (†956), king of Tara; Brian (†1014), king of Ireland<sup>21</sup>—but few Anglo-Saxon or Scottish kings did. Another reason may be the strong sense of identity, achievement, and cultural cohesion that had been created by the Irish learned classes.

The island was united culturally and linguistically, and a sophisticated historical myth derived its dynasties and peoples from a single source.<sup>22</sup> This myth was so powerful that the Vikings were given a place within its structures only towards the end of the middle ages and for reasons other than a concern for Viking history.<sup>23</sup> Had they been more successful they would have been fitted in. Self-consciously, the literati saw the Irish as a people or *natio*, to be compared with the Goths, the Franks, or the peoples of classical antiquity. As far as the genealogists were concerned, 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.

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

19. Binchy, 'Passing of the old order', p. 123.

20. N. P. Brookes, 'England in the ninth century; the crucible of defeat', *Trans Roy Hist Soc*, **29** (1979), pp. 1–20, at pp. 5–9.

21. Bart Jaski, 'The Vikings and the kingship of Tara', *Peritia*, **9** (1995), pp. 310–53.

22. D. Ó Corráin, 'Irish origin-legends and genealogy: recurrent aetiologies', in Tore Nyberg, Iørn Piø et al. (ed.), *History and heroic tale: a symposium* (Odense, 1985), pp. 51–96 and the literature cited there.

23. Alexander Bugge (ed. and transl.), *On the Fomorians and the Norsemen* (Christiania [Oslo], 1905). This development may have more to do with providing the Scottish Hiberno-Viking families (McLeod and McCabe) with a genealogy. Nonetheless, this text seems to be based largely on materials current in Dublin in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

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Solomon, was their mythical ancestor Cormac mac Airt.<sup>24</sup> There were two main branches of the dynasty, the Southern Uí Néill in the midlands, the Northern Uí Néill in Ulster. For geo-political reasons—the direction of the Viking attack, the disposition of Ireland's resources, and the critical importance of the Irish Sea to Viking interests—the Uí Néill kingdoms took the main thrust of the warfare. The Louth-Wickow gap is the point of entry to the fertile eastern lowlands and is the key to Ireland. Here lay the over-kingdom of Southern Uí Néill, ruled by the Clann Cholmáin dynasty. These took the kingship of Tara only in 743, but after that they completely excluded the rival Brega dynasty, 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.<sup>25</sup> 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 Uí Néill had carried on a long border struggle with Leinster whose dominant dynasty occupied the plains south of the Liffey. This conflict on the Uí Néill/Leinster frontier was to shape the history of Dublin in centuries to come.

Scotland and the Irish-Sea littoral of England were crucial to Viking interests, and therefore the north-eastern quadrant of Ireland had an important strategic role, and here and to the west lay the over-kingdom of Northern Uí Néill, who had split into two branches, Cenél Conaill and Cenél Eogain. Cenél Eogain became dominant in late eighth century after a long struggle and expanded south-eastwards across the mid-Ulster plain in the eighth and ninth centuries. This brought the kingdom of Airgiolla and the great monastery of Armagh under their control. They saw the north and north-east as their territory and defended themselves with vigour against Viking raiding and attempted settlement in the ninth century and especially in the tenth—and this had significant consequences for the geo-politics of the Irish Sea area when the Vikings controlled the Scottish, Cumbrian and probably the Welsh coastlines.

According to the annals there was an intense Viking campaign in eastern Ulster from about 921, led by Dublin and using large fleets, to create a Scandinavian territory like that on the other side of the Irish Sea.<sup>26</sup> Godfrid king of Dublin attacked Armagh in 921 and harried the countryside to the east and north of Armagh. In 923 a Viking fleet

24. Tomás Ó Cathasaigh, *The heroic biography of Cormac mac Airt* (Dublin, 1977). The central text 'Scéla Éogain Cormaic' (here edited and commented on by Ó Cathasaigh), belongs to the 820s or 830s and is more concerned with the relationship of the Uí Néill and the monastery of Armagh in the early years of the Viking raids than with remote antiquity (D. Ó Corráin, 'Historical need and literary narrative', in D. Ellis Evans, John G. Griffith and E. M. Jope (ed.), *Proceedings of the seventh international congress of Celtic Studies* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 141–58, at pp. 151–52).

25. Francis John Byrne, 'Historical note on Cnogba (Knowth)', in George Eogan, 'Excavations at Knowth. Co. Meath', *Proc. Roy. Ir. Acad.*, **66 C**, (1968), pp. 383–400 (with a genealogical table); Francis John Byrne, *Irish kings and high-kings*, pp. 87–105.

26. A. P. Smyth, *Scandinavian York and Dublin*, 2 vols (Dublin, 1975–79), **2**, p. 23.

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 drowned. In 926 the Strangford Vikings plundered Dunseverick, a fortress on the Antrim coast, and killed large numbers and took many captives. This 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. Óláfr son of Godfrid commanded a fleet in the harbours of east Ulster. In 933 that fleet joined with the king of the Ulaid in a major plundering of Airgialla (where Armagh lay). Muirchertach soon defeated them. Óláfr and the fleet of Strangford Lough then raided Armagh on the feast of St Martin in 933. He succeeded his father as king of Dublin in 934 and directed much of his energies to England—and this took the pressure of the north-east coast for a while. Óláfr returned to Dublin towards the middle of 938, after his defeat at Brunanburh. Shortly after, Muirchertach and the king of Tara led an army to Dublin, besieged the city, failed to take it, and plundered Dublin's territories to the south of the city. Next year, the Vikings avenged themselves by capturing Muirchertach in a surprise attack on his fortress of Ailech. He had to ransom himself. In 941 Muirchertach's fleet plundered the Viking Hebrides. Very early in 943, the Strangford fleet was practically wiped out by local Irish forces. However, the Vikings had a notable victory at Ardee: here Muirchertach, 'the Hector of the western world' as the Ulster annalist calls him, was defeated and slain, and next day they plundered Armagh. His sons destroyed the Viking fleet on Lough Neagh in 945. By now the attack on the north-east coast had failed, and the centre of conflict moved to Dublin and its immediate neighbours.<sup>27</sup>

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 saints', remote and legendary in one sense, present and immediate as guardians of their churches and heavenly patrons of their communities in another (and willing, as the annalists state from time to time, to avenge themselves on Viking plunderers of their churches). 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 (c.830),<sup>28</sup> the prologue to the Martyrology of Óengus expresses eloquently their christian triumphalism, already evident in the hagiography. Óengus makes no reference to the Viking raids: for him *genti*

27. For the above events, see *AU*.

28. Pádraig Ó Riain, 'The Tallaght martyrologies redated', *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies*, 20 (1990), pp. 21–38, at p. 38.

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‘pagans’, the normal term for Viking raiders, means the pagans of antiquity or the pagan ancestors of the Irish. His metaphor is the kingship of the christian saints, here seen as representatives of their earthly foundations, the great churches and monastic federations of his time, 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 Domnalls have been plagued; the Ciaráns have been enkinged; the Crónáns have been magnified.<sup>29</sup>

Óengus’s attitudes reflect historical realities. 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 the holding of 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 (†1056). A branch of the local aristocracy ruled Dunleer from 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. The Viking onslaught did not dislodge the hereditary clergy here. These monasteries were all very 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.

Property rights were well guarded and rivalry was keen. So much we know from Tírechán, writing in the late seventh century, who reports adversely on the territorial greed of Clonmacnoise. Property bulks large in the Lives of the saints (seventh to twelfth centuries). Some monastic federations and their properties stretched all over Ireland (Kildare, for example, had far-flung properties in the late seventh century),<sup>30</sup>

29. Whitley Stokes (ed. and transl.), *The martyrology of Óengus the Culdee*, Henry Bradshaw Society 29 (London, 1905; repr. Dublin, 1984), pp. 23–27.

30. D. Ó Corráin, ‘Irish vernacular law and the Old Testament’, in Próinséas Ní Chatháin and Michael Richter (ed.), *Ireland und die Christenheit: Bibelstudien und Mission* (Stuttgart, 1987), pp. 284–310, at pp. 297–99.

and even overseas. Cork claimed most of the churches in its hinterland and came into 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’—the very year that the Vikings burned Inishmurray and attacked Roscam.<sup>31</sup> In 760 Clonmacnoise and Birr went to 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. In 817 the community of Taghmon joined with the local king and defeated the community of Ferns in a battle in which 400 are said to have fallen.<sup>32</sup> Kildare plundered Tallaght in 824<sup>33</sup> (ironically, the same year as the Vikings plundered Bangor). The annals record at least twenty-seven violent incidents involving monasteries in the eighth century, some pitched battles in which important kings took part. 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 more stable situation had come about, perhaps the recording itself stopped. 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 encroached on the lesser. 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.<sup>34</sup> 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 good evidence for this kind of consolidation, and it is likely 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. There was, of course, a great variety of monasteries and churches: the small local churches of which three or four might share the services of a priest (if available), the tiny family-owned church, the monastic church dependent on a great monastery such as Emly or Kildare. These were the churches of the local community’s everyday life. How did they fare in the Viking period? We know of the great from the annals. The others are hardly mentioned and the Vikings must soon have found out that they had little worth taking, but even these (unnamed in the record) will have suffered when the

31. *AU*.

32. *AU*.

33. *Ann. Inisf.*

34. Charles Plummer (ed.), *Vitae sanctorum Hiberniae* 2 vols (Oxford, 1910; repr. 1968), **1**, pp. 65–74; Charles Plummer (ed. and transl.), *Bethada náem nÉrenn: Lives of Irish saints*, 2 vols (Oxford, 1922; repr. 1968), **2**, pp. 11–22; Pádraig Ó Riain (ed. and transl.), *Beatha Bharra: St Finnbar of Cork, the complete Life*, Irish Texts Society **57** (London, 1993 [1994]), pp. 66–70, 76–82, 151–56; Pádraig Ó Riain, *The making of a saint: Finnbar of Cork, 600–1200*, Irish Texts Society, Subsidiary Series **5** (London, 1997).

Vikings ravaged whole territories, as in 837 when the newly-arrived fleet on the Boyne and the Liffey ‘ravaged the churches, fortresses and farms’ of the vale of the Liffey and of Brega or as in 841 when ‘communities and churches were ravaged as far as Slieve Bloom’ from the Dublin.

The leaders of the Irish church, then, were aristocrats with close ties to the dominant dynasties, and were inured to power struggles (clerical as well as lay) and to the violence that accompanied them. This will have conditioned their reaction to the Viking raids: they trusted in God and in their own strength, for they knew God helped those who helped themselves. In institutional terms, the Vikings fell on no simple and unworldly monkhdom but on a confident church organisation determined to defend itself.

That determination meant aggression as well as defence. Armagh was on the attack when it first encountered the Vikings in 831: ‘the heathens defeated the community of Armagh in the Carlingford Lough area and great numbers of them were taken captive’<sup>35</sup>—evidently Armagh troops were defending its dependent coastal churches that were under attack. In 845, the abbot of Terryglass and Clonenagh and the deputy abbot of Kildare were killed at by Vikings at the fortress of Dunamase leading their monastic levies<sup>36</sup>. Dunamase is about 13 km from Clonenagh, 24 km from Kildare—near enough to show they were engaged in local defence.<sup>37</sup> When the Vikings defeated Flann mac Máel Sechnaill in 888, the bishop of Kildare and the abbot of Kildalkey (a pluralist who ruled other churches as well) were amongst the slain.<sup>38</sup> When Sitric overthrew the Leinstermen in 917 one of the fallen Irish leaders was Máel M’Aedóc mac Diarmata ‘sage and bishop of the Leinstermen’.<sup>39</sup> A contemporary ironic comment on the efficacy of prayers for defence occurs in the notice of a raid on Armagh in 895:

Alas, holy Patrick!  
unavailing your orisons—  
the Vikings with axes  
are hacking your oratories.<sup>40</sup>

Whatever about such sardonic attitudes, the Irish monastic houses survived and functioned even in Viking-held areas. Within the kingdom of Dublin Clondalkin, which was a Viking fortress for a time, continued as a monastery, Finglas maintained a scriptorium in the ninth century, Lusk had a scriptorium in the tenth century and the annals

35. *AU* 831.

36. *AU* 845

37. *AU* 845.

38. *AU* 888.

39. *AU* 917.

40. *AU* 895; translation by Donnchadh Ó Corráin.

record the obits of its abbots and bishops. There was no collapse of church organisation like that in the English Danelaw and no important Irish monastery disappeared from the record. Was the resilience of the Irish church due to its large resources, flexible organisation, aristocratic cadre, and its hereditary clerical lineages?

Time was when we knew where our Vikings came from, and why and when they came, but a quarter of a century of Scandinavian archaeology and history will seem to have made these matters less certain and more complex.<sup>41</sup> Is the Viking age a continuation of the Iron Age, without any serious (not to say violent) discontinuity or is it the disorderly prelude to the middle ages, a belated barbarian invasion, and thus a radical new departure? And how much is it coloured by the imaginative genius of the medieval saga-writers, and by the modern cravings of various nationalisms that hanker after glory in the past as the guarantee of the present? Are there ‘historical’ and ‘archaeological’ Viking Ages that do not sort well with one another? As Bjørne Myhre shows, the principal difficulties arise in the dating of artifacts, and new dates that come from the natural sciences (for example, the dendrochronology) tend to upset the cosy consensus of historians and archaeologists and have serious consequences for those trying to establish from the physical remains when the Viking period began. Material culture is often an enduring phenomenon (what the French call the *longue durée*), a historical event or change (for example the beginning of raids on the British Isles) may come about suddenly.

Myhre contests the so-called ‘Shetelig axiom’, viz. that the Viking Age started with the raids on the British Isles in the end of the eighth century and that Insular objects reached Scandinavia only after these events, regardless of their putative date of manufacture. Graves dated by Bakka and Wamers to c.800 may belong according to Bjørne Myhre to the middle and later eighth century.<sup>42</sup> He makes the interesting point that such a date would bring the graves ‘more into line with the time of production of the Insular objects found in them since many of these objects were made in the British Isles ... during the eighth or even the seventh century. ... If it is correct that such Insular objects came to Norway during the eighth century, they may be an indication of early Norse plundering, but ecclesiastical objects could also have been traded as prestigious objects or as symbols of an early Christian faith’. Whatever about the archaeological dating criteria (about which I know very little), these novel historical

41. Bjørne Myrhe, above, pp. 3–36; Knut Helle, above, pp. 239–58; Bjørn Myrhe, ‘The beginnings of the Viking Age—some current archaeological problems’, in Anthony Faulkes and Richard Perkins (ed.), *Viking revaluations: Viking Society centenary symposium 1992* (London, 1993), pp. 182–204, and the literature there cited; P. H. Sawyer, ‘The Vikings and the Irish Sea’, in Donald Moore (ed.), *The Irish Sea province in archaeology and history* (Cardiff, 1970), pp. 86–92; idem, ‘The causes of the Viking age’, in R. T. Farrell (ed.), *The Vikings* (London & Chichester, 1982), pp. 1–7.

42. Myrhe, ‘The beginnings of the Viking Age—some current archaeological problems’, pp. 182–204, at pp. 187–88.

conclusions are open to question. As for Insular objects, production is one thing chronologically, theft by Vikings quite another. And there is a further difficulty: the dating of pre-Viking Insular objects is itself very uncertain and the suggested chronological congruence is a hypothesis that cannot support itself, not to speak of anything else. If there had been serious Viking raids in the earlier eighth century within Irish areas of interest the annalists would have recorded them—contemporary recording begins almost two centuries earlier—and it is very difficult to imagine how a trade in ecclesiastical objects with pagans—a trade that would be repugnant to christians in any case—could possibly have come about.

Myhre reopens the question of the possible settlement of Scandinavians in the Northern and Western Isles in the eighth century<sup>43</sup> but this is vigorously contested and rejected by others.<sup>44</sup> The only documentary straw in wind is the much discussed raid on Eigg in Scotland and Tory and Connor in Ireland reported in the Annals of Ulster for 617 but this isolated annal offers no basis for Viking activity in the west in the early seventh century.<sup>45</sup> Sommerfelt cites linguistic evidence for contact between the Picts and the Scandinavian before AD 700, but this is no evidence for settlement or for the kind of raiding that is characteristic of the Viking Age.<sup>46</sup>

The long-held view that the Viking Age began because an expanding population put unbearable pressure on resources and that farms extended to marginal and unprofitable land as settlement expanded rapidly, is now largely abandoned. Archaeology and place-name studies show that sites of the Roman and Migration periods were resettled only in the high middle ages (1050–1350), and Myrhe concludes that there was no great population pressure on resources in the early Viking Age, or just before it<sup>47</sup>. However, the demographic resources for raiding and settlement abroad (and the numbers were significant) had to come from somewhere and one could argue that it was

43. A. W. Brøgger, *Den norske bosetningen på Shetland-Orknøyene: studier og resultater* (Oslo, 1930); C. D. Morris, 'Viking Orkney: a survey', in C. Renfrew (ed.), *The prehistory of Orkney* (Edinburgh, 1985) pp. 210–42; idem, 'Native and Norse in Orkney and Shetland', in C. Karkov and R. Farrell (ed.), *Studies in Insular art and archaeology*, *Amer Early Mediev Stud* 1 (Oxford OH, 1991) pp. 61–80; idem, 'The Norse impact in the Northern Isles of Scotland', in Jens Flemming Krøger (ed.), *Norssjøen: handel, religion og politikk*, Karmøyseminaret 1994/1995 (Karmøy, 1996), pp. 69–83; Barbara Crawford, *Scandinavian Scotland* (Leicester, 1987), pp. 39–40 (bases, not settlement).

44. F. W. Wainwright, 'The Scandinavian settlement', *Northern Isles* (Edinburgh, 1962), pp. 117–62; Iain A. Crawford, 'War or peace—Viking colonisation in the Northern and Western Isles of Scotland reviewed', in Hans Bekker-Nielsen, Peter Foote and Olaf Olsen (ed.), *Proceedings of the eighth Viking congress* (Odense, 1981), pp. 259–69 (where I am well chidden for having followed Brøgger in 1972).

45. Carl Marstrander, *Bidrag til det norske sprogs historie i Irland* (Christiania [Oslo], 1915), pp. 1–4; Alf Sommerfelt, 'On the Norse form of the name of the Picts and the date of the first Norse raids on Scotland', *Lochlann*, 1 (1958), pp. 218–22.

46. *op. cit.*

47. See above, p. 16.

precisely colonisation abroad that took the pressure of resources at home, and such pressure resumed in the high middle ages when the Viking Age was over. Knut Helle differs appreciably from Myrhe in his interpretation of the evidence. He argues that there was a steady growth in the Norwegian population from the Iron Age down to the end of the Viking Age. He finds that the clearest evidence for this increase is the extension of agrarian settlement within Norway itself, and there is archaeological and onomastic evidence for this. Resources in land appear adequate except in south-west Norway, and from here came the Vikings who raid Ireland. ‘The Norse colonization of the Atlantic islands to the west can be explained only within a context of less favourable economic conditions at home than in the areas which attracted the majority of colonists’.<sup>48</sup>

Many historians and archaeologists (for example, P. H. Sawyer and Else Rosedahl) tend to hold firmly to the view that raiding in the west is what defines the beginning of the Viking Age and that this begins *c.*800. They can take some consolation from the dendrochronological date of the Oseberg ship to *c.*820. Sawyer sees the key to the onset of Viking activity in an increase in trade between northern and western Europe in the eighth century that stimulated piracy in northern waters. Scandinavian expansion developed, step by step, from piracy, raiding, and tribute-taking by aristocrats to overseas colonisation driven by the prospect of larger farms and a better life. The power of local kings (it often said to have been increasing and one would like to know why) made for dissident aristocrats who turned their energies to characteristic Viking activities.<sup>49</sup> From gradual beginnings and a complex background in the power struggles between local aristocrats, growing piracy feeding off expanding trade, and a concurrent development in sea-faring technology and skills, Viking raiding extended its range rapidly and seemed to break upon the west, and especially Britain and Ireland, without any real warning and with great violence towards the end of the eighth century.

The Viking raids on Britain and Ireland began abruptly: in 794 the *Annals of Ulster* report *Vastatio omnium insularum Britannię a gentilibus* ‘the devastation of all the islands of Britain by pagans’. This is exaggerated (though hardly apocalyptic) probably because of rumour from England and clerical alarm, but it is a model of sobriety compared with the context and wording of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*’s report of the devastation of Lindisfarne by pagans the previous year—dire portents, immense whirlwinds, lightning, and fiery dragons in the sky presaged ‘the ravages of heathen men’ that ‘miserably destroyed God’s church on Lindisfarne with plunder and slaughter’.<sup>50</sup> The attacks on island and coastal monasteries had begun.

48. See above, p. 250.

49. Sawyer, *op. cit.*

50. Dorothy Whitelock (ed.), *English historical documents c. 500–1042* (London, 1955), p. 167 (s. a. 793); cf. the more lurid details of Simeon of Durham (*ibid.*, p. 247).

In Ireland one finds a clear periodization of the first phases of the Viking wars: there is a prelude of scattered raids on coastal monasteries and small territories from 795 to about 825; and this is followed by mounting pressure, larger groups of raiders and deeper inland penetration that leads to the establishment of Dublin and other coastal settlement in the mid-ninth century. Hardly anything is known about raids on England from the plundering of a Northumbrian monastery in 794<sup>51</sup> and the churches of Hartness and Tynemouth in 800<sup>52</sup> until the raid on Sheppey in 835. The record for Scotland is sparser. Apart from the early ninth-century raids on Iona (802, 806 and the final reported raid in 825, when Blathmac was martyred) nothing is known of any Viking raids on any Scottish churches in the ninth century. Evidently, Iona came to an early understanding with the new rulers of the Western Isles: the only untoward incident reported for the rest of the ninth century is that the shrine and halidoms of Columba were brought to Ireland ‘in flight before the Vikings’ in 878. Only for Ireland are there details of the early years of Viking raiding. We can guess that Britain had similar experiences.

This prelude is marked by desultory coastal raids that slowly increase in frequency (see map 1). Naturally, the annals do not report all raids and acts of violence, nor does anyone expect them to do so. Neither can one expect reports of encounters with Vikings as traders, and these may have been early and extensive. But it is probably right to take the annals a reliable general guide to what happened. First came the attacks on Rathlin and Skye in 795. These were followed in 798 by the burning of the church on St Patrick’s Island (off Skerries), and the *bórimne na crích* ‘cattle-tribute of the territories’ taken by the Vikings must refer to a forced levy for provisions on the mainland nearby. In the same entry the annalist refers in a general way to great incursions in Ireland and in Britain. Iona was burned in a raid in 802, and 68 members of the community were killed in another attack in 806. In 807, raiders rounded the north coast of Ireland and attacked Inishmurray off the Sligo coast and Roscam in the inner waters of Galway Bay.<sup>53</sup> For the first time, the annals begin to report battles between the Irish and the Vikings: 811 (a defeat of the Vikings by the Ulaid), 812 (by the Éoganacht Locha Léin in the south-west), later in 812 (by Fir Umail, near Clew Bay), followed by a slaughter of Conmaicne of west Galway by the Vikings. Small groups of two or three ships apiece may have been active on the west coast. They were back in 813 when they slaughtered Fir Umail and killed their king. Then there are no reports of activities on the west coast or anywhere else in Ireland for eight years. Attacks begin again in 821 in the Irish Sea (raids on Howth and on the churches in the islets of Wexford Harbour) and on the south coast, Cork and *Inis Doimle*,<sup>54</sup> in 822. Far away

51. *ibid.*, pp. 167–68, 247.

52. Roger of Wendover, *Flores historiarum* (*ibid.*, p. 255).

53. D. Ó Corráin, ‘Vikings III: Ros Camm’, *Peritia*, **10** (1996), p. 273.

54. My colleague, K. W. Nicholls, makes the plausible suggestion that *Inis Doimle* is the old name for the Saltee Islands.

in the south, Vikings raided the remote monastery of Skellig, 14 kilometres off the Kerry coast and so maltreated its superior that he died as their prisoner. In the north-east, there were concerted attacks on coastal monasteries of the Ulaid: Bangor was attacked in 823 and savagely plundered in 824. In 825 Down and Moville were hit, and the Ulaid defeated those who had attacked the most prestigious monasteries in their kingdom. From this point, there are terse annalistic reports of severe attacks along the east coast on churches and local coastal kingdoms and significant engagements with local Irish kings. The prelude was over: the first Viking Age proper had begun.<sup>55</sup>

This is the background against which one must consider Dr Wamers's excellent analyses of the 500 or so pieces of Insular metalwork found in Scandinavia.<sup>56</sup> Most of the objects are from ecclesiastical contexts; 80% are grave finds, and 85% of the graves with Insular material are women's graves. Wamers makes the point (contra Myhre) that it is scarcely conceivable that altar furnishings and liturgical vessels, most of them commissioned objects of high value, could ever have become common items of normal trade that one could buy in Ireland or Northumbria. He concludes that these objects are loot taken by Viking raiders from Insular churches, mostly Irish ones. He believes (and here he agrees with Egil Bakka's earlier work) that these objects were not traded on a large scale.<sup>57</sup> Seventy-five per cent of the graves date between *c.*800 and *c.*900 and 25% between *c.*900 and *c.*1000 (mostly 900–950). This fits very well with the general historical periodization and the activities reported for each period by the annalists, but for about half the ninth century and all the tenth century, the major monastic raiders in Ireland were settled Vikings, that is to say, for over 60% of the chronological span the expected source of Irish ecclesiastical metalwork would have been Viking coastal lordships in Ireland, mostly Dublin. Therefore much of this material—perhaps 30% to 40%—began its transit abroad as goods traded out of Ireland by resident Vikings. The Blackwater hoard—over 100 items of Insular metalwork hacked from reliquaries, altar plate, croziers and the like and including some Irish and Hiberno-Viking dress ornaments—is thought to date to the end of the ninth century<sup>58</sup> and, according to Wamers, the type and state of the material differs from that found in Norwegian graves only in the absence of the pin-mounts that allow it to be worn as jewellery. Was this material intended for export? Very likely, but there are

55. The early raids are usefully tabulated and discussed in Colmán Etchingham's *Viking raids on Irish church settlements in the ninth century: a reconsideration of the annals* (Maynooth, 1996), pp. 1–16, 60–61, though not all his conclusions appear convincing.

56. Egon Wamers, above, pp. 00–00; idem, 'Some ecclesiastical and secular Insular metalwork found in Norwegian Viking graves', *Peritia*, 2 (1983), pp. 277–306; idem, *Insularer Metalschmuck in wikingerzeitlichen Gräbern Nordeuropas: Untersuchungen zur skandinavischen Westexpansion* (Neumünster, 1985).

57. Wamers, above, pp. 00–00.

58. Cormac Bourke, *Patrick: the archaeology of a saint* (Belfast, 1993), pp. 24–39.

some difficulties. If these goods were traded northwards in the late ninth century and in the tenth, much of the material found in Norway did not come there as loot brought home directly by Viking raiders as impressive jewellery for their womenfolk and as souvenirs. But how are we to account for the extremely small quantities of such goods amongst the grave finds at big market centres such as Hedeby, Kaupang, Helgö, and Birka<sup>59</sup> and the evident absence of any widespread distribution of these objects outside south-western Norway? Are most of the goods in later Norwegian graves family heirlooms, and therefore sourced in Ireland at a much earlier period? If so, raiding in the prelude to the Viking wars must have been far more extensive than the annals report. Was there a specialised trade between the settled Vikings in the west and their old homeland where there was a local market for Insular metalwork as objects of prestige? Was most Insular metal-work that reached areas outside south-western Norway melted down and recycled? There are many unanswered questions.

History, archaeology and linguistics agree remarkably about the earliest phase of Viking-Irish contact—what I have called the prelude. The early graves (identified by Egil Bakka and discussed by Wamers), dating to the decades about 800 (and confirmed by dendrochronology) are concentrated in mid-west Norway, Møre og Romsdal and Sogn og Fordane, and point to when and where the raids began. And the bulk of the loot is Irish, not Anglo-Saxon. For the Irish at least, the Viking Age began just when the annalists say it did.

Relations between Ireland and Iceland in the Viking Age raise difficult if fascinating historical and cultural questions. In Ireland, this matter has hardly got the attention it deserves, but this neglect has been compensated for by northern scholars and especially by the Icelanders.<sup>60</sup> Jónas Kristjánsson conveys the grand and antique flavour of the sagas. Here is a literary scholar who paints with firm and bold brush-strokes and leaves no room on his canvas for shimmering and uncertain lights and a landscape made dark by unremembered time. Yet he skilfully adumbrates the serious questions that beset the Icelandic material. Kristjánsson recommends caution in using the genealogies preserved in the sagas, and rightly. The truth is that the great Icelandic texts—*Íslendingbók*, *Landnámabók* and the early sagas—reflect concerns of the

59. Charlotte Blindheim, 'Trade problems in the Viking Age: some reflections on Insular metal-work found in Norwegian graves of the Viking Age', T. Andersson and K. I. Sandred (ed.), *The Vikings: proceedings of a symposium of the Faculty of Arts of Uppsala University* (Uppsala, 1978), pp. 166–76.

60. W. A. Craigie, 'Gaelic words and names in the Icelandic sagas', *Z Celt Philol* 1, (1897), pp. 439–54; idem, 'The Gaels in Iceland', *Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 31 (1896–97), 247–64; Alexander Bugge, *Vesterlandenes inflydelse paa Nordboernes ... i vikingetiden* (Christiania [Oslo], 1905); Einar Ól. Sveinsson, 'Celtic elements in Icelandic tradition', *Béaloideas*, 25 (1957 [1959]), pp. 3–24; Gísli Sigurðson, *Gaelic influence in Iceland: historical and literary contacts: a survey of research*, *Studia Islandica* 46 (Reykjavík, 1988).

eleventh and twelfth centuries, and are no history of Icelandic origins as such. Theirs is a reconstructed and imagined past, and no less an intellectual achievement for that. Genealogy is a potent means of legitimisation and of claim to social position and material possessions, and it is used for these precise purposes in the Icelandic texts, just as it is in the much more extensive and complex Irish genealogies. The reflexes are those of contemporary contacts in the Viking world, and in some important instances Icelandic relations with Dublin of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, when the city was dominated by Irish kings. Hence the story of Óláfr pá and Muirchertán—he is claimed as the grandson of the greatest king in Ireland, Muirchertach Ua Briain, through an otherwise unknown daughter, Mael Corcra.

Here I wish to discuss briefly, as an example of this kind of material, the references in *Landnámabók* to Cerball, king of Osraige, and his children. When one tabulates the genealogies of the alleged descendants of Cerball who were ancestors of prominent Islanders (see table 1), two significant things emerge: descendants of Cerball in the male line are represented as leaving Ireland for Iceland in the generation just senior to Donnchadh (†1039) mac Gilla Pátraic, king of Osraige, and many more Icelandic kindreds descend from daughters of Cerball, who are represented as settling in Iceland much earlier. The floruit of these women must be in the late ninth and early tenth centuries. One has the obviously Irish name Kormlöð (=Gormlaith) and the two others have less easily explained names, Friðgerðr and Rafarta. In the genealogical table I have added in, on the extreme right, Eðna (Eithne), another daughter of Cerball and mother of Sigurðr digri (killed at the battle of Clontarf in 1014), from another Old-Norse source, the *Orkneyinga saga*. First, the date of *Landnámabók*. Professor Sveinbjörn Rafnsson holds that, since it does not mention the devastating eruption of Hekla in 1104 though that of Katla c.1000 is referred to, it probably originates from before 1104 and this fits with other data. However, interpolation and re-editing does not end until about 1300 and the textual history is complex.<sup>61</sup> What of the role of Cerball *Írakonungr* as king of Ireland and as an ancestor figure? This story has been taken to be a historical reminiscence brought to Iceland by settlers from Ireland (c.870) and preserved by oral tradition for over two centuries. However, other reasons made Cerball important in the two or so generations before *Landnámabók* was written and he must be considered in the light of these circumstances.

If we confine ourselves to the uninterpolated annals, the achievements of Cerball mac Dúnlainge are significant. His kingdom, straddling the Barrow, made him a major player in Viking affairs in the middle and later years of the ninth century, but he was in no way the greatest king of his day, and no Irish source claims that he was king of the Irish, king of Ireland, or king of Dublin.

61. S. Rafnsson, *Studier i Landnámabók: kristiska bidrag till den isländska fristatstidens historia* (Lund, 1974), pp. 114–21, 230, 232.

However, the deeds of Cerball mac Dúnlainge get a lot of attention in a heavily interpolated annalistic collection now known as *Fragmentary annals of Ireland*.<sup>62</sup> His relationship with the king of Ireland Máel Sechnaill (brother-in-law) is stressed and Máel Sechnaill sends him to Munster to demand hostages (§246, AD 856); a chronicle-style circumstantial account of his defeat of the Viking Rodolb and his troops at Áth Muiceda, not in the other annals (§249, date uncertain); a similar account of a victory by him and his Danish allies over Vikings near Killenaule, Co. Tipperary (§254, date uncertain); Cerball's important role in Máel Sechnaill's expedition to Munster and his attempt to bring Leinster under tribute (§260, 858); he plunders Leinster and takes its hostages (§262, 858); he makes a great hosting into Meath with his Viking allies and spends three months plundering it and he is praised by the poets, especially by Óengus *sapiens*, abbot of Clonfertmulloe (§265, 859);<sup>63</sup> he made his peace with Máel Sechnaill at the conference of Rahugh in 'obedience to the successor of St Patrick' (§268, 859);<sup>64</sup> a chronicle-like account of Cerball's victory over the two Viking fleets that came up the Barrow to plunder his kingdom (§277, 860); Cellach celebrated the *óenach* of Raigne (§280, 861); he massacred the followers of the Viking leader Rodolb at Slíab Mairge (§281); with his nephew, Cennétig mac Gaíthéne, he destroyed Rodolb's fleet at Dunrally (§308, 862); he slaughtered the Vikings at Fertagh, near Johnstown (§310, 863); Cerball raided Leinster, the Leinstermen and their Viking allies replied with a raid on Osraige, the Munstermen committed treachery on Cerball, and he devastated their lands and took many hostages (§314, 864);<sup>65</sup> Cerball's sister, Land, urges Áed mac Néill (now her husband) against the Vikings (§327, 866); according to a chronicle-style entry, Cennétig, whose relationship to Cerball is rehearsed, wins a great victory over the Vikings in Munster (§338, date uncertain); the Laigin challenge Cerball to battle, but the abbot of Lethglenn makes peace between them (§365, ?868); a saga-like account of Cerball and Cennétig's roles as allies of Áed mac Néill in a large-scale attack on Leinster (§387, 870). Cerball is described as 'a man who was worthy to possess all of Ireland because of the excellence of his form and his countenance and his prowess' (§260) and he is constantly associated with the great and the good of his time.

This narrative is much more than a string of annalistic entries. Professor Radner has argued that here *Fragmentary annals* preserves extensive materials from an Osraige

62. J. N. Radner (ed. and transl.), *Fragmentary annals of Ireland* (Dublin, 1978). The first edition was that of John O'Donovan, *Annals of Ireland: three fragments* (Dublin, 1860).

63. AI 859 say that he had the Munstermen as allies, that they plundered as far north as the Fews and that the North submitted.

64. There was much more in question here as the other annals make clear, and the most important matter decided was that Osraige was detached from Munster and made subject to Máel Sechnaill (Binchy, 'The passing of the old order', p. 130).

65. FM 862 [=864], in two separate entries, has what appears to be the base annals from which this may have been developed. *Fragmentary annals* purports to give Cerball's thoughts about the Munstermen's actions.

Chronicle, and suggests that it belongs with other dynastic propaganda texts such as *Cogad Gáedel re Gallaib* and *Caithréim Cellacháin Chaisil*.<sup>66</sup> I believe this is correct, and I would link the production of the text directly with the reign of Cerball's descendant, Donnchad mac Gilla Phátraic who made himself king of Leinster (1033–39), the only king of Osraige ever to become king of Leinster, though his son attempted briefly to hang on, but was killed within a year or so by the Leinstermen.<sup>67</sup> The Osraige kingship of Leinster led to a considerable rewriting of history that can still be traced. Donnchad mac Gilla Phátraic celebrated the *óenach* of Carman 'with the optimates of the laity and clergy of Osraige and Leinster'—a prerogative of the king of Leinster—just when he became king of Leinster in 1033<sup>68</sup> and this is reflected in the *Dindshenchas* poem on Carman, evidently written for the occasion.<sup>69</sup> The statement in the genealogies *ní dílsiu do Laignib int ainm as Lagin oldás do Ossairge* 'The name "Laigin" is no more appropriate for the Leinstermen that it is for Osraige', i.e. Osraige are as much Leinstermen as the Leinstermen themselves, supports his new position and is a audacious claim.<sup>70</sup> I believe that Donnchad looked back to the victories of his ancestor, Cerball, as model for his own kingship and the glorious image of Cerball owes much to this dynastic re-writing of history. As king of Leinster, Donnchad also saw himself as overlord of Dublin and the patriotic anti-Viking rhetoric in the Osraige Chronicle is directed towards the Dubliners.<sup>71</sup> The message is clear: if the Vikings of Dublin do not behave as loyal subjects, Donnchad will deal with them as his great ancestor dealt with their ancestors. As in *Cogad Gáedel re Gallaib*, the Vikings are presented in stereotype as pagans, barbarians, and enemies of the church

66. op. cit., pp. xxii–xxvi.

67. Paul Walsh, 'Leinster states and kings in christian times', *Ir. Ecclesiast. Rec.*, **53** (1939), pp. 77–61, at p. 59.

68. AU, AFM 1033.

69. Edward Gwynn (ed. and transl.), *The metrical dindshenchas* iii, Todd Lecture Series **10** (Dublin 1913), pp. 3–25, at p. 14, lines 161–64. Lines 81–192 belong to the year 1033 when Donnchad celebrated the assembly as one can deduce from the flattering references to Osraige (lines 161–64). There has been some rewriting here since there is a reference to Diarmait mac Mael na mBó (†1072) in line 96).

70. M. A. O'Brien (ed.), *Corpus genealogiarum Hiberniae* (Dublin, 1962), p. 101.

71. Note especially the author's view of the Viking wars as a struggle of christian against pagan, and a profound belief that God comes regularly to the help of the christians. When the Danes deprieved the Norse of their booty (AD 851, §233: 'and thus the Lord took from them all the wealth they had taken from the churches and holy places and shrines of the saints of Ireland'). Cinaed mac Conaing, who took part with the Vikings is accused by Mael Sechnaill: 'Why did you burn the oratories of the saints and why did you along with the Norse destroy their holy places and the books of the saints?' (§234, AD 851). Some entries recording defeats of the Vikings end: *Sic enim placuit Deo* (§§342, 349, 409). In attacking a mixed force of Irish and vikings, the king urges his troops: 'Beloved people, spare the christians and attack the idolators' (§366) The intervention of the saints and holy men was effective (§429). And there is an intense patriotism (§§266, 400).

just when they had become urbanised, civilized, and christian. Nonetheless, they were impressed with this reading of their past. The fame of Cerball in the Viking world, and particularly as an ancestral figure in *Landnámabók*, is due to the achievements of his eleventh-century descendant and not to a tenacious oral tradition among the Icelanders that preserved genealogies from the late ninth century to 1100 or later. Any memory of king Cerball current traditionally amongst the Icelanders would have been overlaid by his new literary persona.

In any case, the text of *Landnámabók* indicates that some of the Irish material is much later than any possible historical memories of c.870. Baugr son of Rauðr is represented as coming to Iceland and settling at Fljótshlíð.<sup>72</sup> Vibaldr, grandson of an otherwise unknown Domnall son of Cerball, is said to have come from Ireland, where he was born, and settled in Iceland.<sup>73</sup> What is interesting is that Baugr, Vibaldr and Askill hnokkan are represented as belonging to the generation immediately preceding Donnchad mac Gilla Phátraic—and thus settlers who came to Iceland in the late tenth or early eleventh centuries. The genealogical connections they are given reflect directly the newly enhanced status of the Osraige dynasty.

If historical material deriving from a mid-eleventh-century re-writing of history is reflected in *Landnámabók*, one must presuppose a close connection between the Dublin Vikings and Iceland—close enough to allow for the transmission of many kinds of cultural influences, including historical information. This has sometimes been played down<sup>74</sup> but, as Alexander Bugge has shown, it is a significant formative influence in Icelandic culture. There are, for example, some 40 Icelandic place names with Irish elements, more than there are place names with Old Norse elements in Ireland.<sup>75</sup> These appear to be genuine place names but the accounts of the persons attached to them may not be historical, for the concerns of the writers of *Landnámabók* seems to involve place name aetiologies (one is reminded of the roughly-contemporary Irish *Dindshenchas* ‘lore of famous places’,<sup>76</sup> but though the genre is the same, the models are not close). More than 85 Irish personal names occur in the sagas—far more than the Old-Norse names borrowed by the Irish or occurring in Irish sources.<sup>77</sup> In fact, one can argue for a Hiberno-Norse world of cultural

72. Jakob Benediktsson (ed.), *Íslendingabók. Landnámabók*, Íslenzk Fornrit **1** (Reykjavík, 1968), p. 352 (hereafter cited as *Íslendingabók* and *Landnámabók*).

73. *ibid.*, pp. 326–27.

74. W. A. Craigie, ‘Gaelic words and names in the Icelandic sagas’, *Z. Celt. Philol.*, **1** (1897), pp. 439–54; *idem*, ‘The Gaels in Iceland’, pp. 247–48, 260–61, 264.

75. Bugge, *Vesterlandenes inflydelse*, pp. 359–65.

76. Edward Gwynn (ed. and transl.), *The metrical dindshenchas*, 5 vols (Dublin, 1903–35, repr. Dublin, 1991); Whitley Stokes (ed. and transl.), ‘The prose tales from the Rennes Dindshenchas’, *Revue Celtique*, **15** (1894), pp. 272–336, 418–84; **16** (1895), pp. 31–83, 135–67, 269–312; Whitley Stokes (ed. and transl.), ‘The Bodleian Dindshenchas’, *Folk-Lore*, **3** (1892), pp. 467–516; Whitley Stokes (ed. and transl.), ‘The Edinburgh dinnshenchas’, *Folk-Life*, **4** (1893), pp. 471–97.

77. Craigie, ‘Gaelic words and names in the Icelandic sagas’, pp. 444–50.

interplay—Ireland, Britain, Norway, the Faroes and Iceland—and the evidence for this is best preserved in the two most active literary centres, Ireland and Iceland.

Learned Icelanders in the eleventh and twelfth centuries were well aware of the christian practice of important families of Irish and Hiberno-Viking descent, and of significant details of that practice, and scholars are prepared to admit that ‘a larger number of people in Iceland professed christianity, and that means Irish christianity in the age of settlement (870–930) than many people realize’.<sup>78</sup> According to *Kjalnesinga saga* Órlygr inn gamli, who was a christian, was advised by his foster-father, bishop Patrick, to bring with him to Iceland consecrated earth, a plenarium and a church bell. He built a church at his settlement in Esjuberg and dedicated it to Columba. According to the saga (and here we seem to have the origin legend of a church), the church was still standing and the bell and the missal survived until the rule of Árni Þorlákson as bishop of Skálholt (1269–98).<sup>79</sup> *Landnámabók* tells of Ásolfr alskik Konálson who came to Iceland from Ireland and lived apart from his non-christian neighbours. A church was built on the site of his cell in the eleventh century and dedicated to Columba, and miraculous happenings are reported at the site of his grave.<sup>80</sup> Another notable christian, mentioned in *Landnámabók*, was Jörundr enn kristni ‘who held firmly to christianity until his dying day and who was a hermit in his old age’.<sup>81</sup> The declaration at the end of *Landnámabók* to the effect that most of the descendants of the christians apostasised ‘and the land was entirely pagan for nearly a hundred years’<sup>82</sup> is hardly to be taken literally. Bugge may overstate the case somewhat when he says that ‘the oldest Icelandic christianity—and we must not forget it—was neither Frankish nor Anglo-Saxon, but Celtic, the last bloom of the widely ramified and powerful missionary activity that issued from, and had its centre in, Columba’s holy island of Iona’,<sup>83</sup> but he nonetheless makes an important point. The Icelandic sources convey what was believed in christian Iceland of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. This will have been shaped by contemporary needs but at the very minimum we can take it as evidence for a long-standing Irish christian influence, and one that will have been reinforced by constant contact with Ireland, for Iceland was not at all isolated. When inventories of late medieval Icelandic religious houses list Irish service books<sup>84</sup> it is hardly surprising that *Íslendingabók* should have references

78. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ‘Celtic elements in Icelandic tradition’, p. 6.

79. Craigie, ‘The Gaels in Iceland’, p. 252; Ian McDougall, ‘Foreigners and foreign languages in medieval Iceland’, *Saga-Book*, 22/3–4 (1987–88), pp. 180–223, at p. 181.

80. *Landnámabók*, pp. 61–65; Craigie, ‘Gaels in Iceland’, pp. 252–53; Bugge, *Vesterlandenes inflydelse*, p. 367; McDougall, ‘Foreigners’, p. 182.

81. Bugge, *Vesterlandenes inflydelse*, p. 370.

82. *Landnámabók*, p. 396.

83. op. cit., p. 374.

84. McDougall, op. cit., pp. 181–82.

to Irish books, bells and croziers.<sup>85</sup> The first settlers whether pagans from west Norway or Hiberno-Viking settlers from Ireland or Britain would have identified these items quickly enough, but it is perhaps best to take this statement of Ári Þorgilsson (c.1067–1148) in *Íslendingabók* as a learned reconstruction of the past from the vantage point of a christian Iceland familiar with Irish christianity rather than a memory of the early settlers transmitted by oral tradition.

Within this context of continuous contact other things find a convenient place—literary influence in genre and form, metrics (a much discussed problem of metrics in Old Irish and Old Norse)<sup>86</sup> and the cultivation of literary prose narrative in both languages. Naturally, one looks to literate Ireland and Britain as the likely first place of the writing of Old Norse. Palaeographers point out that the Icelandic writing system in eleventh-century English<sup>87</sup> but all the Icelandic manuscripts are late and will not necessarily represent the first writing style adopted by the Icelanders.

There is evidence that some sagas were known in one form or another in the Britain and Ireland in the eleventh century, long before the surviving literary texts were redacted, and thus long before there is any evidence for them in Iceland. Elizabeth M. C. Houts has concluded that William of Jumièges c.1070–71 knew *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*.<sup>88</sup> The evidence points to a common Anglo-Scandinavian source and to a familiarity with *Ragnars saga* from at least the early eleventh century onwards. It was also known in Ireland and what appears to be a eleventh Irish derivative of it occurs in the *Fragmentary annals*, the text that preserves (as we have seen) the eleventh-century re-writing of the deeds of Cerball of Osraige.<sup>89</sup>

Jónas Kristjánsson agrees with Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Jón Jóhannsen who see behind *Njáls saga* and *Þorsteins saga Síðu-Hallsonar* a lost saga that survives only in part and that can conveniently be called *Brijáns saga*.<sup>90</sup> The date of the surviving sagas

85. *Íslendingabók*, p. 5; cf. *Landnámabók*, pp. 31–32; Bugge, *Vesterlandenes inflydelse*, p.366; McDougall, op. cit., pp. 180–81.

86. G. Turville-Petre, 'On the poetry of the scalds and of the filid', *Ériu*, **22** (1971), pp. 1–23 (first published in Icelandic in 1954, repr. idem, *Nine Norse studies* (Oxford, 1972), pp. 144–80); idem, *Origins of Icelandic literature* (Oxford, 1967), pp. 34–38; idem, *Scaldic poetry* (Oxford, 1976), pp. xi–lxxx; Einar Ól. Sveinsson, 'An Old-Irish verse form wandering in the north', in David Greene and Bo Almqvist (ed.), *Proceedings of the seventh Viking congress* (Dublin, 1976), pp. 141–52; Stephen N. Tranter, 'Divided and scattered, trussed and supported: stanzaic form in Irish and Old Norse tracts', in Hildegard L. C. Tristram (ed.), *Metrik und Medienwechsel/ Metrics and media* (Tübingen, 1991), pp. 245–72; idem, 'Clavis metrica: Háttalykill und die mittelirische Verslehren', Martin Rockel and Stefan Zimmer (ed.), *Akten des ersten Symposiums deutschsprachiger Keltologen* (Tübingen, 1993), pp. 317–18.

87. Turville-Petre, *Origins of Icelandic literature*, pp. 76–77.

88. 'Scandinavian influence in Norman literature in the eleventh century', *Anglo-Norman Stud.*, **6** (Woodbridge, 1983), pp. 107–21.

89. Radner, op. cit., 118–20 (§330).

90. Above, pp. 00–00. So too Sophus Bugge, *Norsk sagafortælling og sagaskrivning i Irland* (Kristiania [Oslo], 1901–08), p. 55; Lars Lönnroth, *Njalssaga: a critical introduction* (Berkeley,

is much debated: that of *Þorsteins saga*<sup>91</sup> is uncertain (all the manuscripts are seventeenth-century) but it is clear from internal evidence that it belongs to a time when *Njáls saga* was well known. For Finnur Jónsson *Njáls saga* in its present form must date from between 1250 and 1280 and *Þorsteins saga* belongs to the second half of the thirteenth century. A reference preserved in *þorsteins saga* allows us to reconstruct the name *Brjáns saga*—evidence, at the least, that the saga was known as an individual text to thirteenth-century Icelanders.<sup>92</sup> In a brilliant, erratic, and much neglected study, Sophus Bugge demonstrated that *Brjáns saga* was not written in Iceland amongst people who understood little Irish but in an environment where Irish was spoken and written and by someone who understood it well.<sup>93</sup>

First, the rendering of the Irish names into Old Norse is very accurate: Brian (*Brján*), Donnchad (*Dungaðr*), Murchad (*Margaðr*), Tadc (*Taðkr*), Gormflaith (*Kormlqð*), Forblaith (*Hvarflqð*) are satisfactory and consistent forms of personal names.<sup>94</sup> The last name deserves some comment. Sigurd's sister and wife of Earl Gilli is called *Hvarflqð*.<sup>95</sup> This is in fact the very rare Irish female name Forbfhlaith, attested elsewhere, to my knowledge, only once, in the Annals of Ulster (and in texts derived from it) for 780.<sup>96</sup> This name and its skilful and accurate rendering into Old-Norse form must point to an author who was Irish-speaking. Two significant errors occur in the forms of Irish proper names. The personal name Tairdelbach is mistakenly rendered *Kerþjálfaðr*, where one would expect *\*Terþjálfaðr*. Brian's fortress, Cenn Corad is represented as *Kantaraborg* in the best manuscripts.<sup>97</sup> *Borg* is the normal Old Norse for a fortress; it is used for the *dún* or fortress of Dublin in *Brjáns saga*.<sup>98</sup> However, *Kantara-* is a scribal error for *\*Kankara-* (<Cenn Corad). These two errors can only have occurred when a scribe, copying from a manuscript written in Insular hand

1970).

91. Jón Jóhannesson (ed.), *Þorsteins saga Síðu-Hallsonar*, Íslenzk Fornrit **11** (Reyjavík, 1950), pp. 299–320.

92. *þeir fóru síðan til Írlands ok bqrðusk við Brján konung, ok urðu mqrq tiðendi senn, sem segir i sqgu hans* 'Then they [earl Sigurðr and Þorstein] went to Ireland and fought against king Brján and there many remarkable things happened afterwards, as is said in his saga' (Jóhannesson, *Þorsteins saga Síðu-Hallsonar*, p. 301); Lönnroth, *Njalssaga*, p. 226.

93. op. cit., pp. 59–66.

94. Einar Ól. Sveinsson (ed.), *Brennu-Njáls saga*, Íslenzk Fornrit **12** (Reykjavík 1954), pp. 440–41 (cap. 154).

95. The best MS reads *Hvarflqð*; others read *Hvarflaugu*, *Svanlaugu* and, in a another MS tradition, *Kormlqð* (ibid., p. 440, note 5).

96. Forbfhlaith ingen Connlai, dominatrix Cluana Bronaigh [nr Granard co Longford] moritur.

97. *Brennu-Njáls saga*, p. 448; other and less accurate readings are *Kunjátta*, *Kanokta* which represent a mistaken attempt to correct the name to Irish *Connachta*.

98. *Brjánn konungr var kominn með allan her sinn til borgarinnar. Fqstudaginn fór út herrinn af borginni, ok var fylkt liðinu hváru tveggja* 'King Brian had already come to the fortress [of Dublin] with all his forces. On Good Friday the troops [of Dublin] marched out of the fortress and both sides drew up in battle array' (ibid., pp. 449–50).

misread *c* (which represented Old Norse *k*) as *t*. Therefore, all surviving texts of *Brjáns saga* derive from an archetype of Irish provenance in which Old Norse was written in an Insular script. The author of the Icelandic *First grammatical treatise*, which is dated 1125×1175, notes that the Irish pronounce Latin *c* as *k* in all positions. The editor of that text and others have doubted whether he had first-hand knowledge of what he was talking about.<sup>99</sup> The chances are that he had, and that he also knew that *c* was written for *k* in Old Norse texts with Irish connections. The evidence is that *Brjáns saga* was written in Ireland and transmitted in written form, directly or indirectly, to Iceland where it survived (at least in part) within the careful manuscript tradition of the Icelanders.

When was it written? Sophus Bugge held that it was written in Dublin in the early years of the eleventh century, and few have believed him.<sup>100</sup> I think he is wrong about the date and right about the place. It was probably written in Dublin in the reign of Muirchertach Ua Briain (1086–1119), king of Ireland and suzerain of Dublin. The likely date is within a year to two of 1100. It may be a reply by the Dubliners to *Cogad Gáedel re Gallaib*, and that in turn may have been inspired by the adventuring of Magnus Barelegs, king of Norway, in the west. Magnus came west in 1098 and while it is difficult to be certain about what he achieved, he appears to have established his authority over the Orkneys, the Hebrides and Man, perhaps Galloway, and even Gwynedd. For Ua Briain this was an alarming development and Magnus's actions, which threatened Ireland, would in any case lead to conflict with Ua Briain who was already in effective control of Man and the Hebrides. Magnus came back in 1102, and the Irish annals report that he had come to capture Ireland, and here they agree with such later sources as Ordericus Vitalis and the Norse sagas. He occupied Man. The Annals of the Four Masters report that 'the men of Ireland made a hosting to Dublin against Magnus' and after that a truce was agreed between them and Magnus. 'Men of Ireland' can only refer to Ua Briain and his supporters, and the context suggests that Ua Briain felt under serious threat (he was already bogged down in a struggle with Mac Lochlainn, king of the North, in which the fleet of Dublin played a vital supporting role in his effort to reduce the North), and the peace with Magnus looks very much like a holding operation.<sup>101</sup> In this serious but short-lived situation, it was

99. McDougal, 'Foreigners and foreign languages in medieval Iceland', p. 185.

100. Bugge, *Norsk sagafortælling*, pp. 52–76; A. J. Goedheer, *Irish and Norse traditions about the battle of Clontarf* (Haarlem, 1938), pp. 87–102, at p. 98; Lönnroth, *Njáls saga*, pp. 230–31; William Sayers, 'Clontarf, and the Irish destinies of Sigurðr digri, earl of Orkney, and Þorsteinn Síðu-Hallsson', *Scandinavian Studies*, **63/3** (1991), pp. 164–86, at p. 183.

101. Rosemary Power, 'Magnus Barelegs' expedition to the west', *Scott Hist Rev*, **65** (1986), pp. 107–32; Anthony Candon, 'Muirchertach Ua Briain: politics and naval activity in the Irish Sea, 1075 to 1119', in G. Mac Niocaill & P. F. Wallace (ed.), *Keimelia: studies in medieval archaeology and history in memory of Tom Delaney* (Galway, 1988), pp. 397–415, at pp. 405–07; Seán Duffy, 'Irishmen and Islesmen in the kingdoms of Dublin and Man, 1052–1171', *Ériu*, **43** (1992), pp. 93–133, at pp. 110–13.

essential to keep control of Dublin, which might be tempted to side with Magnus in a bid to recover its former independence under the loose suzerainty of a distant Norwegian king. *Cogad Gáedel re Gallaib* can be read as a blustering historicist assertion of Ua Briain power at a time of crisis addressed especially to the Dubliners but also to other political opponents, including Mac Lochlainn; *Brjáns saga* can be taken as a skilful reply and a diplomatic expression of loyalty within similar historical conventions.<sup>102</sup>

*Brjáns saga* is a finely nuanced reaction to Ua Briain dynastic politics. It states, for example, that Gormlaith is not the mother of any of Brian's children. Historically, this is false: she was the mother of his son, Donnchad, king of Munster (abdicated 1063; †1065). But Donnchad's line was an excluded segment, bitterly hostile to the present king and his family, and the text appears to disinherit his descendants by suggesting that they may not have been Uí Briain at all. Muirchertach was the grandson of Tadc, the beneficiary in *Brjáns saga* of the first miracle of the saintly and martyred king, and thus the divinely chosen ancestor of the legitimate line. All the rest of Brian's children Murchad (and his son Tairdelbach), Conchobar and Fland left no offspring (see table 2). In current dynastic terms, Tadc alone is significant and he has his proper place of honour in *Brjáns saga*. Gormlaith and her son Sitric (by Amlaíb Cuarán, king of Dublin) can be painted as black as one likes because their descendants are no longer important in the Uí Briain kingdom or in its dependent city of Dublin (see table 3), and they are blamed for creating the foreign alliance that led to Clontarf. That battle and the martyrdom of Brian are represented as the work of pagans, apostates and traitors, mostly outsiders from the Hebrides and Orkneys, and the christian burghers of Dublin are carefully exculpated. The Leinstermen, the neighbours of the kingdom of Dublin, are given no role in the events though they had played a major part historically in the actual battle. This is for good diplomatic reasons: Dublin-Leinster relations were important to the city and its interests, and there was no point in reminding the rulers of Leinster of an inconvenient past. No Iclander distant in time and space from the Dublin of c.1100 could have written a text so sensitive to the political circumstances of the period nor could the saga have been seriously re-written in Iceland without interfering with its historical integrity. Therefore, the text (so far as it is preserved) is likely to be a faithful copy of the original as it was written in Dublin.

The hagiographical element in the narrative of the death of Brian is also more at home, culturally and politically, in Ireland. The same may be true of the account of Broðir, the regicide, represented as an apostate deacon and sorcerer, and disembowelled by Brian's followers. For Sophus Bugge, Broðir's death is modelled on that of Judas in Acts 1:18, and it is very likely that this context was present to the mind of the writer though, as Bugge says, 'elaborated with refined gruesomeness'.<sup>103</sup>

102. This dating hardly conflicts with that of Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, '*Cogad Gáedel re Gallaib*: some dating consideration', *Peritia*, 9 (1995), pp. 354–77.

103. op. cit., p. 54.

Thomas D. Hill points to the widespread hagiographical commonplace of the death of evil men and heretics in this manner—Arius is an example in Rufinus’s free translation of Eusebius, and Bede associates the death of Judas and Arius. This kind of motif would be available to any Icelander interested in christian literature.<sup>104</sup> It would equally be available to an early twelfth-century trilingual writer working in Dublin.

Irish influence has been discerned in other texts. Wagner argues that there are some borrowings from Irish in the Edda.<sup>105</sup> Three *fornaldarsögur* told of king Háldan and of Sörli, son of the king of Norway, medieval tales of mythology, magic and adventure the earliest of which appear to date from c. 1300, appear to be based on a text of portion of *Fragmentary Irish annals*, which in its present shape is hardly later than the twelfth century.<sup>106</sup> All three make their own selection of the material, events are relocated, there is adventuring in exotic places, and cannibal giants and trolls, magic and dragon-ships play their part, but there is a common core that derives from Irish sources. Perhaps Jónas Kristjánsson is a little too pessimistic when he suggests that these tales ‘have nothing to tell us of Irish-Icelandic relations’.<sup>107</sup> Ireland and Iceland had close cultural relations, mediated by Dublin and its Irish-Sea kingdom, in the eleventh and twelfth centuries—the formative period in the creation of Icelandic literature—and these will have ended only when Dublin fell to the Anglo-Normans in 1170.

104. Thomas D. Hill, ‘The evisceration of Bróðir in Brennu-Njáls saga’, *Traditio*, **37** (1981), pp. 437–44.

105. Heinrich Wagner, ‘Irisches in der Edda’, *Ériu* **20** (1966), pp. 178–82.

106. Niels Lukman, ‘An Irish source and some Icelandic fornaldarsögur’, *Mediaeval Scandinavia*, **10** (1976 [1979]), pp. 41–57.

107. Above, pp. 00–00.