

**The Conversion of the Vikings in Ireland from a Comparative Perspective**

**by**

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**A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy**

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## **Abstract**

### **The Conversion of the Vikings in Ireland and the Early History of the Diocese of Dublin**

**Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Centre for Medieval Studies, University of Toronto, 2011**

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The history of the Viking invasions in England and what is now France in the ninth and tenth centuries is fairly well documented by medieval chroniclers. The process by which these people adopted Christianity, however, is not. The written and archaeological evidence that we can cobble together indicates that the Scandinavians who settled in England and Normandy converted very quickly. Their conversion was clearly closely associated with settlement on the land. Though Scandinavians in both countries expressed no interest in Christianity as long as they engaged in a Viking lifestyle, characterized by rootless plundering, they almost always accepted Christianity within one or two generations of becoming peasants, even when they lived in heavily Scandinavian, Norse-speaking communities.

While the early history of the Vikings in Ireland was similar to that of the Vikings elsewhere, it soon took a different course. While English and French leaders were able to set aside land on which they encouraged the Scandinavians to settle, none of the many petty Irish kings had the wealth or power to do this. The Vikings in Ireland were therefore forced to maintain a lifestyle based on plunder and trade. Over time, they became concentrated into a few port towns from which they travelled inland to conduct raids and then exported what they had stolen from other parts of the Scandinavian diaspora. Having congregated at a few small sites, most prominently Dublin, they remained distinct from the rest of Ireland for centuries. The evidence suggests that they took about four generations to convert. Their conversion differed

from that of Scandinavians elsewhere not only in that it was so delayed, but also in that, unlike in England and Normandy, it was not associated with the re-establishment of an ecclesiastical hierarchy. Rather, when the Scandinavians in Ireland did convert, they did so because they were evangelized by monastic communities, in particular the *familia* of Colum Cille, who had not fled from foundations close to the Viking ports. These communities were probably driven by political concerns to take an interest in the rising Scandinavian towns.

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## List of Abbreviations

*ASC*

*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*

**ÍF**

**Íslensk Fornrit**

**MGH**

**Monumenta Germanica  
Historiae**

**PL**

**Patrologia Latina**

## Introduction

The primary goal of this study is to try to determine when, how, and by whom the Vikings who settled in Ireland were converted to Christianity. Although both the effect of the Vikings upon the Church in Western Europe and the conversion of Scandinavia have received a fair amount of scholarly attention, very little work has been done on how the Scandinavians who settled in lands that had long been Christian – England, the Hebrides, Ireland, and parts of the Carolingian Empire, for instance – became Christian. This lack is particularly striking in the field of medieval Irish history. Indeed, I can find only one article that focuses exclusively on the examination of the evidence for the conversion of Scandinavians in Ireland.<sup>1</sup> There are, perhaps, a number of reasons why scholars have hesitated to address this topic. The first is that for centuries, all the way until the mid-twentieth century, the tone for the study of the Vikings in Ireland was set by the twelfth-century *Cogadh Gaedhil re Gallaib*, a work whose description of the righteous, Christian Irish gradually taking their country back from the wicked, heathen Vikings greatly shaped Irish nationalism. Under the influence of this narrative, much of the Irish scholarship on the Vikings has focused on the damage that the Vikings did to Irish society, rather than on the assimilation of the Vikings into the Irish population.<sup>2</sup> Another reason that so little work has been done on this topic might be that, unlike in England, there is little in the Irish landscape to testify to the Scandinavians' religious shift. In England, such monuments as the Gosforth Cross, with its depiction of scenes from Norse mythology, and the hogback tombstones of northern England and southern Scotland, attract historians' attention to the issue of religious transition during the Viking Age. Ireland, by contrast, has very few runic inscriptions that appear in religious settings and only one hogback tombstone. Furthermore, the Scandinavian

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<sup>1</sup> Lesley Abrams, "The Conversion of the Scandinavians of Dublin," *Anglo-Norman Studies* 20 (1997): 1-29.

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, Daniel A. Binchy, "The Passing of the Old Order," in *Proceedings of the International Congress of Celtic Studies: The Impact of the Scandinavian Invasions on the Celtic-Speaking Peoples – 800-1100*, ed. Brian Ó Cuív (Dublin: Institute for Advanced Studies, 1975), 119–32.

influence on Irish art does not become apparent until the eleventh century and even when it does so, it is more stylistic than iconographical. We do not find standing crucifixes in Ireland with scenes of Scandinavian mythology. For whatever reason, the question of how the Scandinavians in Ireland became Christian has not been studied much and it is this lack that I mean to address.

For many years, historians dated the beginning of the Viking Age to when Scandinavians started to make raids on the British Isles. The appearance of Scandinavian pirates in Dorset in 787, on Lindisfarne in 793, and on Rechru in 795, have all served as convenient points from which to date the opening of the Viking Age. Recently, archaeological evidence, which has shown that Scandinavian material did not change dramatically at the beginning of the ninth century, has caused some researchers to argue that the Viking Age should be considered to have started no later than the mid-eighth century.<sup>3</sup> The researchers who make this argument bolster their case with the fact that archaeological finds on the Faeroes, Shetlands, and Orkneys show that Scandinavians began to spread out across the islands of the northern Atlantic earlier than once thought.<sup>4</sup> Although the question of when the Viking Age really started is surely fascinating, it is irrelevant to a study of how the Vikings who settled amongst the Christian peoples of Europe were converted. Obviously, Scandinavians floating around the Faeroes and the Shetlands would not come into contact with large Christian populations. For the purpose of this study, therefore, the Viking Age begins with the first written record of the arrival of Vikings amongst European Christians. This record occurs in the “E” and “F” manuscripts of the *Anglo-*

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<sup>3</sup> Bjørn Myhre, “The Archaeology of the Early Viking Age in Norway,” in *Ireland and Scandinavia in the Early Viking Age*, ed. H. B. Clarke, M. Ní Mhaonaigh, and R. Ó Floinn (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1998), 5.

<sup>4</sup> Myhre, 8.



*Saxon Chronicle*, according to which in 787 there “came for the first time three ships of Norwegians from *Hereðalande*,” apparently Hordaland.<sup>5</sup>

Not only the dating of the Viking Age, but even the meaning of such words as “Viking”, “Norse”, “Norwegian”, and “Danish” can be debated. The word “Viking” does not appear in records that were written during the Viking Age. The word *wicing* existed in Old English, but it can be found before the eighth century, and therefore could not have been a borrowing from Old Norse.<sup>6</sup> Even when the Vikings began to arrive in England, the English applied the word *wicing* to them in only four instances.<sup>7</sup> The modern English word “Viking” derives from the Old Norse *víkingr*, which is generally translated as “sea-rover” or “pirate”.<sup>8</sup> Old Norse sources use *víkingr* not as an ethnic term, but to refer specifically to men who travelled by ship away from their homes in order to engage in acts of piracy – plundering followed, perhaps, by trade. The Old Norse texts do not refer to such men as Vikings as long as they were at home and engaged in activities other than raiding; thus, a man could go through periods of being a *víkingr* and of not being a *víkingr*. In *Landnámabók* we read, “There was a man named Flóki Vilgerðarson; he was

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<sup>5</sup> Susan Irvine, ed., *MS E*, vol. 7 in *ASC*, ed. David Dumville and Simon Keynes (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004), 787; Peter Baker, ed., *MS F*, vol. 8 in *ASC*, ed. David Dumville and Simon Keynes (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2000), 787. From this point forward, each version of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle will receive a full reference once. It will then be referred to as *ASC*, followed by a letter to indicate which version it is.

<sup>6</sup> Christine Fell, “The Old English *Wicing*: A Question of Semantics,” *Proceedings of the British Academy* 72 (1986): 297-98.

<sup>7</sup> Janet M. Batley, ed. *MS A*, vol. 3 in *ASC*, ed. David Dumville and Simon Keynes (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1986), 879: “& þy geare gegadrode on hlop wicinga;” G. P. Cubbin, ed. *MS D*, vol. 6 in *ASC*, ed. David Dumville and Simon Keynes (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1996), 879: “þi geare gegaderodon an hloð wicinga;” *ASC E*, 789: “þy geare gegaderodon an hloð wicinga;” K. O’Brien O’Keefe, ed. *MS C*, vol. 5 in *ASC*, ed. David Dumville and Simon Keynes (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2001), 880: “& ðy ilcan gere gegaderodon an hloð wicinga;” *ASC D*, 885: “þa gemetton hi mycelne sciphære wicinga;” *ASC E*, 885: “þa gemætton hi XVI scipa wicinga; þa gemetton hi mycelne sciphære wicinga;” *ASC C*, 886: “sona swa hi comon on Stufe mupan ða gemetten hie XVI scipu wicinga; Ða hie hamweard wendon mid þare herehyðe þa metton hie micelne scyphære wicinga;” *ASC A*, 917: “þa æfter þam þa giet þæs ilcan hærfestes gegadorode micel here hine of Eastenglum ægþer ge þæs landheres ge þara wicinga þe hie him to fultume aspanen hæfdon;” *ASC C*, 982: “Her on þys geare comon upp on Dorsætum III scyphu wicinga.”

<sup>8</sup> Byock, Jesse, *Viking Age Iceland*, London: Penguin Books, Ltd., 2001, 12.

a great Viking. He went off in search of Garðar's Isle.”<sup>9</sup> The fact that the tale of his journey follows immediately after the statement that he was a great Viking implies that the Scandinavians viewed sea-voyages as a requirement for being a Viking. A sentence in the thirteenth-century *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar* suggests the same view. We read, “Björn was a great traveler, sometimes as a Viking and sometimes as a merchant.”<sup>10</sup> This is an interesting statement for, though it does not say what Norse-speakers considered Vikings to be, it does indicate that Vikings were not traders. The idea that Vikings were not just travelers, but violent travelers, is suggested by a passage in the fourteenth-century *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*. This passage describes preparations for a battle in Norway, saying, “Forces came from all over the land and many came from abroad and there were many Vikings.”<sup>11</sup> Here, Vikings seem to be associated with both travel to other countries and a willingness to engage in battle. Whether they went into battle as mercenaries or for their own, direct gain is not specified; the possibility is left open that they did both. Hence, *víkingr*, as Old Norse-speakers used it, was not an ethnic term and technically could refer only to individuals – presumably young men – who at the moment were engaged in travel across the sea with the intention of committing acts of violence.

As it is not an ethnic term, “Viking” should in theory not be capitalized.<sup>12</sup> It has long been customary to capitalize it, however, and not wishing to break with tradition, I do so as well. As Simon Keynes notes, “Viking” has become “a term of convenience applied indiscriminately by modern scholarship to the inhabitants of the Scandinavian countries...and to the men, women,

<sup>9</sup> “Landnámabók” in *Íslendingabók, Landnámabók*, ed., Jakob Benediktsson, vol. 1 in ÍF (Reykjavík: Íslenska Fornritafélag, 1968), 37: “Flóki Vilgerðarson hét maðr; hann var víkingr mikill; hann fór at leita Garðarshólms.”

<sup>10</sup> *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*, ed. Sigurður Nordal, vol. 2 in ÍF (Reykjavík: Íslenska Fornritafélag, 1933), 83: “Björn var farmaðr mikill, var stundum í víking, en studum í kaupferðum.”

<sup>11</sup> “Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar,” in *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar, Bandamanna saga, Odds þátrr Ófeigssonar*, ed., Guðni Jónsson, vol. 7 in ÍF (Reykjavík: Íslenska Fornritafélag, 1936), 5: “Kom þar ok lið um allt landit ok mart ór qðrum lqndum ok fjqlði víkinga.”

<sup>12</sup> Christine Fell does not capitalize “Viking.” See Fell, “The Old English *Wicing*: A Question of Semantics,” 295-316.

and children of Scandinavian extraction who at various times left their homelands in search of a better or more exciting life overseas (whether the Baltic, the north Sea, or the Atlantic Ocean).”<sup>13</sup> Niels Lund writes, “The word ‘Viking’ has come to be used in a general sense to describe the Scandinavian world and peoples in the period 800-1100. Contemporaries, however, used it to describe raiders and their activity.”<sup>14</sup> In this work, the word “Viking” is used to refer to Scandinavians abroad, even when they were not engaged in harrying. There is considerable ambiguity about how long Scandinavians who settled and adopted an agrarian lifestyle amongst non-Scandinavian peoples – the English and Franks, for instance – can continue to be called Vikings. Members of the immigrant generation must (by definition) have started life in Scandinavia and therefore could always qualify as Scandinavians abroad. For this reason, I often refer to them as Vikings, even after they had settled. Their children, however, I would not consider Vikings, unless, as was the case in Ireland, they continued to engage in a lifestyle marked by a heavy reliance on plunder followed by trade, extensive contact with other parts of the Scandinavian diaspora, and the maintenance of an identity distinct from that of the surrounding native population.

The word “Norse” is also confusing. Originally meaning “northern”, it occurred for the first time in English in 1598 and was used to refer to a language, not to a people or a culture.<sup>15</sup> It was not until Sir Walter Scott invented the word “Norseman” in 1817 that “Norse” became an ethnic term.<sup>16</sup> Though it is now well accepted as an ethnic term, there is disagreement over whether it refers to all Scandinavians or just to Norwegians and to those groups – Icelanders,

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<sup>13</sup> Simon Keynes, “Vikings,” in *The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. Michael Lapidge, John Blair, Simon Keynes, and Donald Scragg (Malden: Blackwell, 1999), 460.

<sup>14</sup> Niels Lund, “Viking Age,” in *Medieval Scandinavia*, ed. Phillip Pulsiano (New York: Garland Publishing, 1993), 693.

<sup>15</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., s.v. “Norse”.

<sup>16</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., s.v. “Norse”.

Faeroese – who were descended from Norwegians. In this study, the words “Norse” and “Scandinavian” are used interchangeably. The labeling of people as Danes, Norwegians, or Swedes is not always problematic, since linguistic, archaeological, and occasionally written evidence frequently allows us to determine where a particular group of Vikings came from. What is problematic, however, is what we are to make of medieval writers’ use of the Latin words *Nordmannus* and *Danus* or of similar Old English and Old Irish words. Although these words correspond with our terms “Norwegian” and “Dane”, it is clear that medieval writers using Latin used these two words without distinction.<sup>17</sup> Whether the Old English *Norðmann* and *Dene* were equally interchangeable is unclear. In Old Irish, the word *Nordmannir* first appeared in 856, while the word *Danair* did not appear until 986.<sup>18</sup> Both these words are Irish spellings of Old Norse words, but the fact that there was more than a century between when they entered the Irish tongue indicates that they could not have been meant as contrasting terms. All we can conclude from a medieval Irish writer’s use of *Nordmannir* or *Danair* is that he was referring to Scandinavians; we cannot assume that such a writer would even know where specifically any particular group of Vikings originated. Despite the confusion surrounding medieval writers’ use of these terms, “Dane” and “Norwegian” are used in this study, but only when there is a linguistic or archaeological reason for thinking that we can identify where the Scandinavians in question originated.

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<sup>17</sup> Clare Downham, “‘Hiberno-Norwegians’ and ‘Anglo-Danes’: Anachronistic Ethnicities in Viking-Age England”, *Medieval Scandinavia* 19 (2009), 139-69, 141.

<sup>18</sup> *The Annals of Ulster*, ed. and trans. Seán mac Airt and Gearóid mac Niocaill, Dublin: Institute for Advanced Studies, 1983, 856, 986.

Another source of potential confusion concerns the nature of religious conversion. In Old Norse, the word for conversion is *siðaskipti*, which literally means change in custom.<sup>19</sup> In any Christian writing, however, conversion is presented as anything but just a change in societies' customs. It is a complete transformation of each individual's goals, behavior, and feelings. A secular version of this idea often appears in attempts to examine the history of a people's adoption of Christianity. In her introduction to a study of how Scandinavians and eastern Europeans adopted Christianity, Nora Berend emphasizes that while the word "conversion" is often used to refer merely to the baptism of one individual, "Christianization" refers to "the process of the penetration of Christianity into society and accompanying societal change".<sup>20</sup> This work does not address concerns about the difference between "conversion" and "Christianization". While it is true that baptism might not have resulted in any immediate, noticeable changes in the Vikings' behavior, the lengthier process of "Christianization" could not take place without it. This work's focus is the official adoption of Christianity – as seen in the acceptance of baptism, the building of churches, and the establishment of dioceses – by Scandinavians who settled in the already Christian societies of Western Europe. The word "conversion" is used throughout this work for this initial, perhaps superficial, adoption of Christianity.

Although this study's goal is to examine how, when, and by whom the Vikings who settled in Ireland were converted, it begins not with Ireland, but with a look at the conversion of Scandinavians in England and Normandy. This beginning serves a couple of purposes. The first is to place the Irish Vikings' history in a wider Western European context. More importantly,

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<sup>19</sup> Johan Fritzner, *Ordbog over det gamle norske sprog*, (Oslo: Den Norske Forlagsforening, 1986), s.v. "síða," "siðaskipti".

<sup>20</sup> Nora Berend, introduction to *Christianization and the Rise of Christian Monarchy*, ed. Nora Berend (Cambridge: University Press, 2007), 2.

however, the examination of the religious history of Norsemen in other parts of Western Europe might prove helpful in determining how the Irish Norsemen were converted, as it will allow us to see what features repeatedly characterized the Vikings' religious thinking. This study therefore begins with a history of the Vikings in England and an examination of how they adopted Christianity. It continues with a similar history of Normandy and examination of how the Normans converted, followed by a discussion of the features common to the religious histories of these two groups of settled Vikings. This is followed by an overview, with no particular religious focus, of the history of the Vikings in Ireland and finally an investigation of all the evidence surrounding the conversion of these Vikings. Despite the fact that the Vikings in England and Normandy followed a similar course, assimilating and converting soon after becoming permanently settled on the land, the peculiar social and political conditions in Ireland did not promote the assimilation of the Vikings into the existing culture. As a consequence, a distinctly Scandinavian community survived and remained unconverted much longer in Ireland than elsewhere.

## Chapter 1

### The Conversion of the Vikings in England

Despite the fact that the “E” and “F” manuscripts of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* identify the first three Viking ships that landed in England as hailing from *Hereðalande*, that is, presumably, Hordaland, on the western coast of Norway, historians of the Viking Age in England routinely refer to the Scandinavians who settled along the eastern seaboard of England as “Danes”.<sup>1</sup> This is perhaps because the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* uses the words *Dene* and *Denisc* much more often than it uses the word *Norðmenn*, although this might be simply the result of the fact that an adjectival form of *Norðmenn* did not exist in English before the eleventh century.<sup>2</sup> Thus, if English writers wanted to describe something as “Scandinavian”, the only word available was *Denisc*, which modern readers unconsciously read as being equivalent to today’s “Danish”. There is no reason, however, to think that the words *Dene* and *Norðmann* were good indicators of any particular Viking’s origin; a medieval chronicler’s use of one of these words and not the other might simply reflect linguistic fashion. A glance at a map *does* make it seem likely that the Vikings who formed the largest Scandinavian settlements in England, that is, in East Anglia, Northumbria, and Mercia, came from Denmark. Nevertheless, the archaeological and linguistic evidence for this conclusion is debated.<sup>3</sup> While attempts to classify the Vikings in England along ethnic lines are questionable, we must nonetheless be careful to distinguish two separate waves of Scandinavian invasion and settlement. The first and larger one occurred in the ninth century and resulted in the creation of the “Danelaw” in eastern England. The second took place in the tenth century and led to a smaller number of settlements in the northwest. This chapter is concerned with the first wave and the conversion of the Scandinavians in the Danelaw.

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<sup>1</sup> ASC E, F, 787. It should be noted that none of the other versions of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* specify where the Vikings came from.

<sup>2</sup> Clare Downham, “‘Hiberno-Norwegians’ and ‘Anglo-Danes’: Anachronistic Identities and Viking-Age England,” *Mediaeval Scandinavia* 19 (2009): 143.

<sup>3</sup> See Downham, “‘Hiberno-Norwegians’ and ‘Anglo-Danes’”, 157-63, for an overview of some of this evidence.

The basic history of the Vikings in England can be found in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, though this work records little but the most important turning points.<sup>4</sup> In 787, the chronicler records the beginning of the Viking attacks on England, saying, “three ships came for the first time. The reeve rode over to them and wanted to force them to go to the king’s residence, because he did not know what they were. He was killed. Those were the first ships of Scandinavian men that came to the land of the English.”<sup>5</sup> By 793 the *Chronicle* refers to the Scandinavians in conjunction with a number of ill-boding heavenly portents, saying that the “harrying of the heathen miserably destroyed God’s church in Lindisfarne”.<sup>6</sup> By 794 the ambiguity and confusion evident in the *Chronicle*’s entry from 789 is gone: the English writer is quite clear that the Vikings are interested in plunder, not trade, and that the monasteries are their particular target. He writes, “Northumbria was ravaged by the heathen, and Ecgfrith’s monastery

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<sup>4</sup> The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* is itself a collection of seven surviving manuscripts whose relationship remains controversial. It is generally thought that MS G is a copy of MS A, that the Old English entries in the bilingual MS F were drawn from a no longer existing predecessor to MS E, that MSS B and C are closely related in some way, and that MSS D and E contain revisions and continuations of MSS A, B, and C (Janet Bately, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: Texts and Textual Relationships* (Reading: University Press, 1991), 1). Certain entries of local interest found in only one or two versions of the *Chronicle* allow us to speculate about each version’s provenance. Alfred Smyth, for instance, argues that MS A must have been in Winchester in the late tenth century, though he admits that it is difficult to prove whether it was there earlier (Alfred Smyth, *King Alfred the Great* (Oxford: University Press, 1995), 456). The arguments for origin of MSS B and C are quite complicated, with Worcester, Ramsey, Abingdon, and Gloucester all being proposed as locations where these texts were at least partially written. (For more information, see: Smyth, *King Alfred the Great*, 456; Janet Bately, “Compilation of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 60 BC to AD 890,” *Proceedings of the British Academy* 64 (1980), 97; C. Hart, “The B Text of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*,” *Journal of Medieval History* 9 (1982), 278, 280-82, 290-91). There is a great deal of northern material in MSS D and E, but this might prove only that other works of northern origin were drawn upon in compiling D and E (Smyth, *King Alfred the Great* 460). Hart argued that they could have been written at Ramsey based on material brought south during Byrhtferth’s lifetime (that is, during the late tenth or early eleventh centuries) (Hart, 279). Version F is a compilation in both Latin and Old English of material found in both A and E, while G is a copy of A that was mostly destroyed by fire in 1731 (Smyth, *King Alfred the Great*, 460). All versions of the *Chronicle* seem to derive from the same core text until 891 and even until c. 1042 they give much of the same information, though with large omissions and additions.

<sup>5</sup> ASC A, C, D, E, F 789 (A): “& on his dagum cuomon ærest III scipu, & þa se gerefa þærto rad & hie wolde drifan to þæs cyninges tune þy he nyste hwæt hie wæron, & hiene mon ofslog. Þæt wæron þa ærestan scipu deniscra monna þe Angelcynnes lond gesohton.”

<sup>6</sup> ASC E, F, 793 (E): “earmlice heðenra manna hergung adiligode Godes cyrican in Lindisfarena ee þurh reaflic & mansleht.”



at *Donemup* [Jarrow] looted”.<sup>7</sup> After this burst of violence in the 790’s, the Vikings seem to have taken a considerable rest, for the *Chronicle* records no more major raids for the next forty years. Their activities in England, however, had only just begun.

In 835 the Norse laid waste to the Isle of Sheppey in Kent.<sup>8</sup> From here on out, the entries in the *Chronicle* become a litany of Viking attacks. We read of a number of attacks on coastal trading towns, especially in the south of England. For about fifteen years, the Vikings seem to have engaged in a strategy of hit-and-run attacks, in which the goal was clearly to seize as much as possible as quickly as possible and take it back home. The number of Vikings attacking English towns had increased considerably; while we read of three ships in 789, we read of “four hundred less fifty” that attacked Canterbury and London in 851.<sup>9</sup> Even if this number is an exaggeration (and it might not be), it is still clear that during the early ninth century, the urge to plunder England constituted nothing less than a social movement amongst the Scandinavians. It is also clear that as so many ships do not just happen to come together, the Vikings must have been increasingly well-organized. Indeed, the coordination of their attacks indicates that they should be considered as more of an army than as random pirates.

The winter of 850-51, when a Viking army passed the season on Thanet, in Kent, marked a turning point in the Viking attacks on England. Another army overwintered on Sheppey in 855.<sup>10</sup> No longer were the Vikings returning at the end of the summer to their homes. Their establishment of semi-permanent camps suggests a developing intention to engage in

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<sup>7</sup> ASC D, E, 794 (E): “& þa hæðenan on Norðhymbrum hergodon & Ecgferðes mynster æt Donemupe berefodon.”

<sup>8</sup> ASC A, C, D, E, F, 835.

<sup>9</sup> ASC A, D, E, F, 851 (A): “& þy ilcan geare cuom feorðe healfhund scipa on Temese muþan & bręcon Contwaraburg & Lundenburg.” Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge admit that the Viking forces of the 850’s must have been much larger than those that preceded them, but then go on to say, “we cannot take literally the chronicler’s statement that ‘350’ ships stormed Canterbury and London in 851” (Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge, introduction to *Alfred the Great: Asser’s Life of King Alfred*, ed. and trans. Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge (New York: Penguin Books, 1983), 13.) They offer no explanation whatsoever as to why 350 ships were too many.

<sup>10</sup> ASC A, D, E, 855.

coordinated attacks in the hopes of winning actual territory. In 865 a so-called *heþen here*, or “heathen army,” pitched their tents in East Anglia.<sup>11</sup> So frightened were the local people, that they agreed to give the Viking army horses in exchange for peace, thereby making the Norse as mobile on land as at sea.<sup>12</sup> In 866, the *Chronicle* begins to refer to these Vikings simply as the *micel here*, “the big army” or *mycel hæðen here*, “the big heathen army.”<sup>13</sup> By 867 we read simply of *se here*, “the army.” In 867 the army stormed the city of York and took control of both it and the kingdom of Northumbria, killing the Northumbrian kings, Ælla and Osberht.<sup>14</sup> Alfred Smyth points out that the *Chronicle* cleverly makes it sound as if York were captured for the first time in 867, whereas we know from the twelfth-century *L’Estoire des Engleis*, written by the Anglo-Norman Geoffrey Gaimar, that it had already suffered defeat at the Vikings’ hands in 866.<sup>15</sup> The Vikings set up an Englishman, Egbert, to rule in their stead, and moved on to new territory. Within four years, they managed to wreak havoc on the English political system.<sup>16</sup> In 870, “holy King Edmund fought with them and the Scandinavians took the victory, killed the

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<sup>11</sup> ASC A, D, E, 865.

<sup>12</sup> ASC A, D, E, 866.

<sup>13</sup> ASC A, 866: “micel here”; ASC D, E, 866: “mycel hæðen here”.

<sup>14</sup> ASC A, D, E, 867 (D): “Her for se here of Eastænglum ofer Humbre muðan to Eoforwicceastre on Norðanhymbre, & þær wæs mycel ungeþwærnys þære þeode betwux him sylfum, & hi hæfdon heora cyning aworpenne Osbryht & ungecyndne cyning underfengon Ællan & hi late on geare to þan gecyrdon þæt hi wið þone here winnende wæron, & hi þeah mycle fyrd gegadredon, & þone here sohton æt Eoforwicceastre & þa ceastre bræcon, & hi sume inne wurdon, & þær wæs ungemetlic wæl geslægen Norðanhymbra, sume binnan, sume butan, & þa cyningas begen ofslægene, & seo laf wið þone here frið nam.”

<sup>15</sup> Alfred Smyth, *Scandinavian Kings in the British Isles, 850-880* (Oxford: University Press, 1977), 178-81.

<sup>16</sup> For an awesomely detailed study of this period, see Alfred Smyth, *King Alfred the Great* (Oxford: University Press, 1995), 51-98. Note that the primary argument that Smyth advances in this book – that Asser’s *Life of King Alfred* is a forgery – was harshly criticized (Simon Keynes, “Review: On the Authenticity of Asser’s *Life of King Alfred*,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 47 (1996): 529-51.) On the other hand, Tom Shippey’s review of Smyth’s work is full of cautious admiration. He writes that it “may be contentious, but it is a formidable work” (Tom Shippey, “The Best: *Alfred the Great* and *King Alfred the Great*,” *London Review of Books* 18:4 (1996): 21.) For a less controversial overview of the period, see F. M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England* 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 237-73.

king, overran the whole land, and destroyed all the monasteries that they came to.”<sup>17</sup> Throughout 871 Alfred, brother to King Æthered of Wessex, lost numerous battles to the Vikings.<sup>18</sup> King Æthered died that year, though we do not read that he did so in battle. In any event, Alfred then “succeeded to the kingdom of the West Saxons”.<sup>19</sup> During the following years, the Viking army moved amongst a number of camps, most notably Reading, Lindsey, and Repton.<sup>20</sup> In 874 it conquered Mercia, expelled Burgred, its king, and put in place an English puppet ruler named Ceolwulf, “a foolish king’s thegn,” who “swore oaths to them and gave them hostages.”<sup>21</sup>

The Vikings might have gone on to conquer even more of England, but in 878, Alfred, having gained the kingdom of Wessex after Æthered’s death in 871 and having engaged in a continuous series of battles with the Vikings, “went to Eddington and there fought with the whole [Viking] army and put them to flight and rode after them up to the fortress and sat there fourteen nights. Then the army gave him hostages and many oaths, that they would leave his kingdom”.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, they promised “that their king would receive baptism”.<sup>23</sup> Three weeks later, the Viking king Guthrum and thirty of his men were baptized and a truce was established with the Treaty of Wedmore. According to this treaty, England was divided along a line extending roughly from London to Chester. To the north and east lay the Danelaw, to the

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<sup>17</sup> ASC E, 870: “Sancte Ædmund cining him wið gefeaht, & þa Deniscan sige naman & þone cining ofslogon & þet land eall geeodon & fordiden ealle þa mynstre þa hi to comen.” The same information is found in ASC A, D, 870; ASC C, 871 [=870].

<sup>18</sup> ASC A, D, E, F, 871. Alfred Smyth argues that the inordinate amount of attention that the *Chronicle* pays to the battles fought by Alfred, compared with the little attention it pays to battles fought by his brothers, was part of a deliberate program of propaganda on behalf of Alfred (Smyth, *King Alfred the Great*, 470-71).

<sup>19</sup> ASC A, D, E, F, 871; ASC C, 872 [=871] (A): “þa feng Ælfred Æpelwulfing his broþur to Wesseaxna rice.”

<sup>20</sup> ASC D, E, 972; ASC C, 873 [=872]; ASC E, 873; ASC A, D, 874.

<sup>21</sup> ASC A, D, E, F, 874 (D, E): “& þy ilcan geare hi sealdon Ceolwulfe anum unwisum cyninges þegne Myrcna rice to healdenne & he him apæs swor & gislas sealed.”

<sup>22</sup> ASC A, 878: “to Ebandune & þær gefeaht wiþ alne þone here & hiene gefliemde, & him æfter rad op þæt geweorc & þær sæt XIII niht; & þa salde se here him foregislas & micle apas, þæt hie of his rice uuoldon”.

<sup>23</sup> ASC A, 878: “hiera kyning fulwihte onfon wolde”.

south and west lay Wessex and English Mercia.<sup>24</sup> In 892 two new fleets of Viking ships arrived, the larger from the continent and the smaller from an unknown location.<sup>25</sup> In 893, Alfred managed to capture the wife and sons of the latter fleet's leader, Hæsten. Unfortunately, this did not prevent Hæsten from harrying the countryside, but Alfred pursued him so persistently that he eventually left England.<sup>26</sup> By the time Alfred died in 899, he had not managed to win back the land taken by the Norse, but he had organized the rest of England into a single kingdom capable of resisting Viking onslaughts, as is reflected in the *Chronicle*'s epitaph for him: "he was king over all the English people except that part which was under the power of the Scandinavians. He had ruled the kingdom for one and a half years short of thirty".<sup>27</sup>

The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* clearly gives us less information than we would like about either the Treaty of Wedmore or the establishment of the Danelaw. It should be noted that we have no record of the term "Danelaw" in 878; we see it for the first time about 130 years later, in two legal compilations made by Archbishop Wulfstan (died 1023) of York during the early

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<sup>24</sup> ASC A, C, D, E, F, 878 (A): "þa on þære sefoðan wiecan ofer Eastron he Gerard to Ecgbryhtes stane be eastan Sealwyda, & him to <coman> þær ongen Sumorsæte alle & Wilsætan & Hamtunscir se dēl se hīere behīnon sē was & his gefægene wærun, & he for ymb ane niht of þam wicum to Iglea & þæs ymb ane to Ebandune & þær gefeagt wip alne þone here & hiene gefliemde, & him æfter rad oþ þæt geweorc & þær sæt XIII niht; & þa salde se here him foregislas & micle apas, þæt hie of his rice uuoldon & him eac geheton þæt hīera kyning fulwhte onfon wolde, & hie þæt gelæston swa, & þæs ymb III wiecan com se cyning to him Godrum þritiga sum þara monna þe in þam here weorpuste wæron æt Alre, & þæt is wip Eþelinggaeige, & his se cyning þær onfeng æt fulwhte, & his crismlicing was æt Wepmor, & he was XII niht mid þam cyninge, & he hine miclum & his geferan mid feo weorðude." This reads, "Then, in the seventh week after Easter, he rode to Ecgbryhtesstan, east of Selwood, and all the people of Somerset, Wiltshire, and the part of Hampshire that was on this side of the sea, came to meet him there...and after one night he went from those camps to Iley and after another day to Edington; and there he fought against the whole army and caused it to flee and rode after it up to the fort and sat there fourteen nights. And then the army gave him preliminary hostages and great oaths that they would leave his kingdom and also promised him that their king, Guthrum, would receive baptism...And after three weeks the king, Guthrum, came to him...at Aller, which is near Athelney, where the king stood sponsor at the baptism. And his confirmation was at Wedmore and he was with the king for twelve days, who greatly honored him and his companions with wealth."

<sup>25</sup> ASC A, 878; ASC E, F, 892.

<sup>26</sup> ASC A, 893.

<sup>27</sup> ASC A, 900 [=899]: "Her gefor Ælfred Apulfing...se wæs cyning ofer eall Ongelcyn butan ðæm dæle þe under Dena onwalde wæs, & he heold þæt rice oþrum healfum læs þe .xxx. wintra." ASC B, C, D, E, F, 901 [=899].

eleventh century.<sup>28</sup> As Katherine Holman points out, a precise geographical definition of the Danelaw is very difficult; the *Chronicle* devotes only a few sentences to the Scandinavian conquest and settlement of East Anglia, Northumbria, and Mercia, while archaeological and place-name evidence make it clear that the Scandinavian influence throughout these regions was uneven.<sup>29</sup> Both R. H. C. Davis and F. M. Stenton notice that the *Chronicle* records Alfred still recovering areas that Archbishop Wulfstan's legal compilations indicate had been assigned to the English by the treaty. They therefore argue that the Treaty of Wedmore was not actually made in 878; rather, it dates to between 886 and 890.<sup>30</sup> David Dumville disagrees with them and holds that the Scandinavians clearly managed to breach the boundary established by the treaty on numerous occasions that are only hinted at in the *Chronicle*. As a result, Alfred might have been forced to recapture the same places multiple times.<sup>31</sup> The debate about exactly when the Treaty of Wedmore took place and which areas it placed under Scandinavian rule shows that we must bear in mind that the border between the two halves of England was porous and shifting. Furthermore, many of the areas ceded to Norse rule might not have actually had a large Norse population.

Paul Cavill argues that the granting of territory to the Scandinavians was in the long run an excellent strategy on Alfred's part, for it gave the Norse a specific area of land in which they now had a stake.<sup>32</sup> They were better off occupying themselves with the cultivation of this land than with the plundering of others. At about the time of the treaty, the Vikings seem to have been ready to decrease their dependence on plundering in favor of investing in the more peaceful

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<sup>28</sup> Katherine Holman, "Defining the Danelaw," in *Vikings and the Danelaw*, ed. James Graham-Campbell, Richard Hall, Judith Jesch, and David N. Parsons (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2001), 2.

<sup>29</sup> Holman, 4-5.

<sup>30</sup> R. H. C. Davis, "Alfred and Guthrum's Frontier," *English Historical Review* 97 (1982), 805-6; Stenton, 260-61.

<sup>31</sup> David Dumville, *Wessex and England from Alfred to Edgar* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1992), 15.

<sup>32</sup> Paul Cavill, *Vikings: Fear and Faith in Anglo-Saxon England* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2001), 222-23.

and durable livelihood of land occupation. In 876 the *Chronicle* records, “Halfdan shared out the lands of Northumbria, and they were engaged in ploughing and in making a living for themselves.”<sup>33</sup> In 877 and 880, we read of the Norse “sharing out” the land of Mercia and East Anglia respectively.<sup>34</sup> The *Chronicle* tells us little of the Danelaw’s society, although it is clear from place-names, Scandinavian borrowings into English, and material evidence that a mixed culture must have evolved.<sup>35</sup> Though Norse borrowings usually appear in Old English texts only in connection with Danelaw concepts, by the middle of the twelfth century, texts from the north and east use a substantial number of Scandinavian words that were previously unattested in English.<sup>36</sup> Evidence for the Scandinavians’ impact on society in northern and eastern England can be found in the fact that the *Domesday Book* records many families whose members had a mixture of English and Norse names.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, in their study of Viking artifacts found in Lincolnshire, Kevin Leahy and Caroline Paterson write that since 1990, due to the popularity of metal detecting, “many hundreds of new finds” of Scandinavian and Anglo-Scandinavian metalwork have been recorded.<sup>38</sup> Alfred’s son Edward gradually managed to win submission from many Danish rulers along the border of the Danelaw, so that parts of the Danelaw came to recognize an English overlord. The *Chronicle* records that in 917, “the whole people of eastern England who before were under Scandinavian dominion submitted to [Edward], and the army in

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<sup>33</sup> Batley, ed., *MS A*, 876: “Healfdene Norpanhymbra lond gedelde & ergende wæron & hiera tilgende”; O’Brien O’Keefe, ed., *MS C*, 877 [=876]; Cubbin, ed., *MS D*, 876; Irvine, ed., *MS E*, 876.

<sup>34</sup> *ASC A, E*, 877, 880; *ASC D*, 880.

<sup>35</sup> Cavill, *Vikings: Fear and Faith*, 18.

<sup>36</sup> John Geipel, *The Viking Legacy: The Scandinavian Influence on the English and Gaelic Languages* (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1971), 62-3.

<sup>37</sup> Olof Von Feilitzen, *The Pre-Conquest Personal Names of Domesday Book* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells Boktryckeri, 1937), 18-26.

<sup>38</sup> Kevin Leahy and Caroline Paterson, “New Light on the Viking Presence in Lincolnshire: The Artefactual Evidence,” in *Vikings and the Danelaw*, ed. James Graham-Campbell, Richard Hall, Judith Jesch, and David N. Parsons (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2001), 191.

East Anglia swore with him an agreement that they all wished what he wished and that they wished that peace which he wished, both on sea and on land”.<sup>39</sup>

Æthelstan, Edward’s son, extended English overlordship into Northumbria, eventually winning a famous victory at the battle of Brunanburh in 937.<sup>40</sup> The Battle of Brunanburh must be seen within the context of a three-way power-struggle between the kings of Wessex, the Scandinavian kings, and the Northumbrians, who wished to remain as independent as possible from Wessex.<sup>41</sup> It was probably partially due to the Northumbrians’ ambivalent attitude towards rule by either Scandinavians or Wessex that Northumbria’s political status during the first half of the tenth century was so unsettled. Rule over northern England passed back and forth between English and Scandinavian rulers until 954, when King Eadred finally expelled the Norwegian Erik Bloodaxe from York.<sup>42</sup> By this time, the West Saxon kings’ adversaries were probably not the descendents of Vikings who had to come to eastern England in the ninth century, but the descendants of Norwegian settlers in Ireland. It is generally accepted that waves of Vikings who arrived in northwestern England in the early tenth century did so because the Irish had temporarily managed to expel the Norwegians from Dublin in 902.<sup>43</sup> These Vikings and their

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<sup>39</sup> ASC A, 917: “him cirde micel folc to ægþer ge on Eastenglum ge on Eastseaxum þe ær under Dena anwalde wæs, & eal se here on Eastenglum him swor annesse þæt hie eal þæt woldon þæt he wolde, & eall þæt friþian woldon þæt se cyng friþian wolde, ægþer ge on sæ ge on lande”.

<sup>40</sup> ASC A, 937.

<sup>41</sup> Alfred Smyth, *Scandinavian York and Dublin* (Dublin: Templekieran Press, 1979), 2:36.

<sup>42</sup> Peter Sawyer, “The Last Scandinavian Kings of York,” *Northern History* 31 (1995): 39-44. A. Campbell discusses the complicated chronology of Northumbrian history in the first half of the tenth century (A. Campbell, “Two Notes on the Norse Kingdoms of Northumbria,” *English Historical Review* 57:225 (1942): 85-91.) Clare Downham also provides a good examination of the sequence of events leading up to the Battle of Brunanburh (Clare Downham, *Viking Kings of Britain and Ireland* (Edinburgh: Dunedin Academic Press, 2007), 85-105.)

<sup>43</sup> James Graham-Campbell, “The Early Viking Age in the Irish Sea Area,” in *Ireland and Scandinavia in the Early Viking Age*, ed. Howard B. Clarke, Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, and Ragnall Ó Floinn (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1998), 107; N. J. Higham, “The Scandinavians in North Cumbria: Raids and Settlement in the Later Ninth to Mid-Tenth Centuries,” in *The Scandinavians in Cumbria*, ed. John R. Baldwin and Ian D. Whyte (Edinburgh: Scottish Society for Northern Studies, 1985), 37-51; N. J. Higham, “Northumbria, Mercia, and the Irish Sea Norse, 893-926,” in *Viking Treasure from the North-West: the Cuerdale Hoard in its Context*, ed. James Graham-Campbell (Liverpool: National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside, 1992), 21-30; Smyth, *Scandinavian York and Dublin*, 1: 79. Smyth and, following him, Clare Downham, emphasize that we must not assume that all of the Scandinavian settlers west of

history must be carefully distinguished from that of the preceding ones. This can be difficult, especially in parts of Northumbria, where, over the course of the ninth and tenth centuries, local rule shifted between Englishmen, Scandinavians whose families had arrived in the ninth century, Norwegians from Dublin (such as Amlaíb Cúarán), and, in the case of Eric Bloodaxe, Norwegians from Norway.<sup>44</sup> Nevertheless, we must bear in mind that the Scandinavians were not a monolithic group; Danes and Norwegians who had been in England for a couple generations and had married into English families would have had different interests and views from newly arrived Norwegians from Ireland.

By the mid-tenth century, Viking attacks had almost ceased.<sup>45</sup> The English kings ultimately ruled both the English and the Norse.<sup>46</sup> Matthew Innes argues that the tenth-century legislation enacted by the Wessex kings was designed to bridge any sense of division between the Norsemen and the English.<sup>47</sup> But the peaceful reign of Edgar proved to be just a brief interlude. Towards the end of the tenth century, Viking attacks resumed, although these probably had little to do with the already established Scandinavian population in England. These attacks were led by the future king of Norway, Olaf Tryggvason, the nominally Christian king of Denmark, Swein Forkbeard, and his son Cnut. While these attacks had important consequences, the only point of intersection between the history of these new Vikings and that of the

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the Pennines came from Dublin. Many might have come from Gaelic-speaking areas of Scotland. See Smyth, *Scandinavian York and Dublin*, 1: 75-92 and Downham, *Viking Kings of Britain and Ireland*, 85.

<sup>44</sup> The expulsion of the Viking leadership from Dublin and their move to northern England is discussed in chapter 4, pages 130-31.

<sup>45</sup> Clare Downham argues that the unification of England probably forced Viking leaders to leave the country (Downham, *Viking Kings of Britain and Ireland*, 121.)

<sup>46</sup> As David Dumville puts it, "in the reign of Edgar, it must have been apparent that the days of Northumbrian independence were effectively over" (Dumville, *Wessex and England from Alfred to Edgar*, 143.)

<sup>47</sup> Matthew Innes, "Danelaw Identities," *Cultures in Contact: Scandinavian Settlement in England in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries*, ed. Dawn M. Hadley and Julian D. Richards (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), 73. Hadley concurs with Innes' view (Hadley, *The Vikings in England*, 67-9.)



Scandinavians in England is the unfortunate massacre of St. Brice's Day in 1002.<sup>48</sup> From this point on, the history of the Danelaw becomes one with that of the rest of England.

In recent decades there has been a tendency to downplay the harm that the Viking invaders did to the Church in England, or for that matter, the harm that the Vikings did to the Church anywhere. Many scholars have re-imagined the Vikings not as committed heathens attacking churches with a vengeance, but as settlers and merchants whose violent activities were indistinguishable from those committed by Christian rulers. As Simon Keynes writes, "If there was once a tendency to romanticize the exploits of the Vikings overseas, it is now more fashionable to regard them as the maligned and misunderstood victims of a Christian press, or as creatures of their time whose behaviour was merely an extension of normal Dark Age activity, or indeed as cultivated men with elevated thoughts and honourable intentions."<sup>49</sup> Peter Sawyer exemplifies this tendency to view the Vikings as victims of a hostile press. In the introduction to his study of the Vikings he writes, "most contemporary writers were extremely hostile to the Vikings, and they concentrated almost exclusively on the violent aspects of Scandinavian activity...the bias is often obvious and the exaggerations blatant."<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, it is "unfortunate that this bias and these exaggerations should have so thoroughly infected historical writing about the Viking period as a whole". Sawyer's *Age of the Vikings* was first published in 1962. In a study of the Vikings in Ireland published in 1967, A. T. Lucas took a similar approach to Sawyer's towards the Vikings. Lucas writes, "an illusion of Norse preoccupation with such raids [on churches and monasteries]...is the result of an unpremeditated distortion of proportion by the chroniclers and of an inadvertent acceptance of the distortion by their readers."

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<sup>48</sup> ASC C, D, E, F, 1002.

<sup>49</sup> Simon Keynes, "The Vikings in England, c. 790-1016" in *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Vikings*, ed. Peter Sawyer (Oxford: University Press, 1997), 49.

<sup>50</sup> P. H. Sawyer, *The Age of the Vikings* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1971), 9.

The Irish annalists, interested only in things clerical, created “a picture overloaded with particulars about raids on monasteries greatly out of proportion to the sum of Norse activity as it affected the population in general”.<sup>51</sup> R. I. Page is less fulsome in his assessment of the Vikings than Peter Sawyer, though he emphasizes the fact that Old Norse sources show that the Vikings did not judge themselves to be nearly as unpleasant as the English did.<sup>52</sup> Like Sawyer, he for some reason looks for possible excuses for the Vikings’ activities and then, assuming that the excuses are justified, implies that the Englishmen’s view of these activities was too harsh. For instance, in discussing Æthelweard’s description of the Vikings’ killing of the reeve who rode out to meet them in 787, Page writes, “Æthelweard’s interpretation [of the killing] is clear enough, though not necessarily the truer for all that...perhaps [the reeve] offended the Northmen by his imperious attitude; perhaps there were language difficulties, the Northmen misunderstood his intent and panicked.”<sup>53</sup>

This tendency to minimize the harm done by the Vikings has not gone entirely unopposed. In an article published in 1999, Alfred P. Smyth wrote, “assessments of the effects of Scandinavian raiders in the ninth and tenth centuries have focused for over three decades on an agenda set by revisionist historians.” The approach that these historians have developed, “driven by a desire to show that the Scandinavian raiders were not numerous and that they were no more destructive to Church property or personnel than were native Christian opposition, has too often led to conclusions which fly in the face of historical evidence and common sense.”<sup>54</sup> The general thrust of revisionist arguments is that the image of the Vikings as being especially

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<sup>51</sup> A. T. Lucas, “The Plundering and Burning of Churches in Ireland, 7<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> Century”, *North Munster Studies*, ed. Etienne Rynne (Limerick: The Thomond Archaeological Society, 1967), 211.

<sup>52</sup> R. I. Page, “‘A Most Vile People’: Early English Historians on the Vikings” (London: University College, 1987), 4-5.

<sup>53</sup> Page, 22-3.

<sup>54</sup> Alfred P. Smyth, “The Effect of Scandinavian Raiders on English and Irish Churches: a Preliminary Reassessment,” in *Britain and Ireland: 900-1300*, ed. Brendan Smith (Cambridge: University Press, 1999), 1.

harmful to the Church is the result of the biases of the whining monks who wrote the histories, mixed with later medieval historians' ascription of every misfortune from the ninth or tenth century to Viking harrying. For example, David Dumville points out that just as church lands in Northumbria and eastern Mercia came into lay hands (presumably Norsemen's hands), minsters in Greater Wessex, which was never under Viking control, were put out of action when their lands became secularized.<sup>55</sup> The implication is that the Vikings were not the only ones who did harm to the Church; native, Christian rulers sometimes harmed Church interests. In a similar vein, D. M. Hadley contends that the Danes merely accelerated a decline in the Church that had already begun by the time of their arrival.<sup>56</sup> It is also likely that the Vikings attacked churches simply because they knew that such buildings held valuables, not because of any particular antipathy towards Christianity. Nevertheless, the accumulated mass of evidence makes it clear that the Danes caused significant disruption in the ecclesiastical life of ninth-century England.

It is not easy to find contemporary records of the complete destruction of English ecclesiastical establishments at the hands of Vikings. The *Chronicle* records only the Vikings' devastation, in 870, of one of the more important religious sites in the kingdom of Mercia, the monastery at Medeshamstede, that is, Peterborough in modern Cambridgeshire.<sup>57</sup> Even this lone admission of a monastery's destruction is found only in the E manuscript of the *Chronicle*. As a fire at the monastery at Peterborough destroyed the E manuscript, the version we have today is a later copy based on a manuscript kept at Winchester Cathedral. It is therefore possible that the admission that Peterborough had been destroyed was not made when it occurred, but was added

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<sup>55</sup> David N. Dumville, *Wessex and England from Alfred to Edgar*, 53.

<sup>56</sup> D. M. Hadley, "The Vikings' Relationship with Christianity Reconsidered," in *Church and People in Britain and Scandinavia*, ed. Ingmar Brohed (Lund: University Press, 1996), 59-76.

<sup>57</sup> ASC E, 870.

more than two hundred years later.<sup>58</sup> The collapse of several episcopal successions (as we find recorded in tenth century episcopal lists) is, however, inexplicable without considering the Norsemen's impact. In Northumbria, episcopal succession appears to have collapsed in every see except those of Lindisfarne and York.<sup>59</sup> According to the *History of Saint Cuthbert*, although the episcopal succession of Lindisfarne continued, the monastic community on the island was forced to flee to Norham after the death of Bishop Ecgrid in 845.<sup>60</sup> The bishopric of Leicester was vacant between 869 and 888, while the last known bishop of Hexham died in 821. Hexham's demise occurred during the forty-year hiatus in Viking attacks, so it is not clear why exactly it declined. It is possible, even probable, that the church of Hexham was heavily damaged by the Vikings in 794, for Hexham lies quite close to the monastery of Jarrow which, as the *Chronicle* tells us, the Danes raided in that year.<sup>61</sup> In East Anglia, the see of Elmham's last bishop during the Viking period was Hunberht, who, according to a twelfth-century tradition from Durham, was killed in 869 by Danes who refused to allow a successor.<sup>62</sup> This tradition is in doubt, however, since Malmesbury, who tells us that Hunberht was bishop of Elmham in the time of Ludecan king of Mercia, seems to know nothing of the bishop's martyrdom along with King Edmund.<sup>63</sup> However the bishop of Elmham met his end, his see remained empty between about 869 and 955.<sup>64</sup> The last bishop of *Dummoc*<sup>65</sup> was Æthelwald, who must have been

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<sup>58</sup> G. N. Garmonsway, introduction to *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, ed. and trans. G. N. Garmonsway (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1953), xxxix-xl.

<sup>59</sup> David N. Dumville, *Wessex and England from Alfred to Edgar*, (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1992), 31.

<sup>60</sup> Ted Johnson South, ed., *Historia de Sancto Cuthberto*, (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2002), 48.

<sup>61</sup> *ASC D, E*, 794.

<sup>62</sup> *Symeonis Monachi Opera Omnia*, ed. Thomas Arnold, (1882; repr. Kraus Reprint, 1965), 1: 55: "Inguar, orientales Anglos invadit, sanctissimumque regem Eadmundum diversis pœnis laceratum cum suo pontifice Hunberto peremit."

<sup>63</sup> *Symeonis Monachi Opera Omnia*, 1: 55n.

<sup>64</sup> Maurice Powicke, and E. B. Fryde, eds., *Handbook of British Chronology*, (London: Offices of the Royal Historical Society, 1986), 216.

<sup>65</sup> The name *Dummoc* probably refers to modern day Dunwich.

consecrated sometime between 845 and 869.<sup>66</sup> In Mercia, all the sees of the East Midlands appear to have collapsed.<sup>67</sup> In Lincolnshire, the bishopric of Lindsey lay vacant from some time in the 860's until 953. Even the bishopric of London finds no historical attestation between about 867 and 897.<sup>68</sup> Perhaps the most curious case of a bishopric's disappearance from the historical record is that of Whithorn, in Dumfries, in the far southwest of Scotland. When they were founded in the eighth century, the monastery and diocese of Whithorn were part of the kingdom of Northumbria. The bishopric vanishes from the record in the 830's and does not reappear until it was re-founded in about 1129, this time as the center of the revived see of Galloway, and under the patronage of the lord of Galloway. Given that the Vikings were busy ravaging and settling the eastern seaboard, it is unlikely that they harmed a church or monastery lying on the western coast of Britain. What is far more reasonable is that our last record of this church's existence as part of Northumbria happened to occur in the 830's. By the mid-ninth century, the Norsemen were attacking northern and eastern England in full force. The Norse conquest of Northumbria must have cut off the diocese's source of political support, and as secular leaders were usually instrumental in finding and promoting new candidates for episcopal office, the loss of political support might have caused the bishopric to collapse upon the death of the last bishop appointed before the Scandinavian invasion. The disappearance of this far-flung diocese is thus testimony to the political and social disarray that accompanied the Viking conquest. Such a comment, however, could be made about the breaking of any episcopal line, for as Patrick Wormald writes, bishoprics “were among the most durable institutions of

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<sup>66</sup> Powicke and Fryde, eds., 216.

<sup>67</sup> Dumville, *Wessex and England from Alfred to Edgar*, 31.

<sup>68</sup> D. M. Hadley, *The Vikings in England: Settlement, Society, and Culture* (Manchester: University Press, 2006), 207.

medieval Europe; they were not lightly abandoned, even for a time, and were very resistant to change, even by ecclesiastical authority.’”<sup>69</sup>

The Vikings may not have been fully responsible for the long gaps that we observe in episcopal lists. Julia Barrow argues that the kings of Wessex, reluctant to see clerics serve the interests of Wessex’s Scandinavian foes, prevented episcopal consecration.<sup>70</sup> Such a suspicion is strengthened by a letter written by Pope Formosus to the English bishops some time between 891 and 896, in which he scolds them for allowing the growth of heathenism in their land, but notes that Archbishop Plegmund says that they are trying to evangelize. Tellingly, he orders that as soon as a bishop dies, the archbishop of Canterbury is to announce the death to his suffragans, and that a new bishop is to be canonically elected and consecrated as quickly as possible.<sup>71</sup> In any event, it seems unlikely that the Wessex kings were somehow to blame for the initial ninth-century collapse of episcopal succession that occurred at some, but not all, of the sees in those parts of England most affected by the Danes. We must conclude that Danish attacks on ecclesiastical establishments, even if made only for the purpose of gathering loot, were severe enough that they resulted in death or flight for many bishops and priests.

In addition to the breakdown of episcopal succession in much many sees, other bits of negative evidence indicate that there was severe disruption in the religious life of northern and eastern England during the ninth century. For instance, although the seventh and eighth centuries are well documented at many English churches, stone sculpture often forms the only

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<sup>69</sup> Patrick Wormald, “Viking Studies: Whence and Whither?” in *The Vikings*, ed. R. T. Farrell (London: Phillimore, 1982), 138.

<sup>70</sup> Julia Barrow, “English Cathedral Communities and Reform in the Late Tenth and the Eleventh Centuries,” in *Anglo-Norman Durham 1093-1193*, ed., David Rollason, Margaret Harvey, and Michael Prestwich, (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1994), 28.

<sup>71</sup> Dorothy Whitelock, M. Brett, and C. N. L. Brooke, eds., *Councils and Synods with Other Documents Relating to the English Church* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 1:36-7.

sign of their continuing existence during the ninth and tenth centuries.<sup>72</sup> Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the *Domesday Book* shows that in the eleventh century, the ecclesiastical establishments of northern and eastern England held significantly less land than those of southern and western England.<sup>73</sup> In Wessex and western Mercia, for instance, between a fifth and a third of the land in each county was owned by religious establishments. In the east midlands west of the fens and in those parts of northern England that the *Domesday Book* covers, however, less than ten percent of the land belonged to churches.<sup>74</sup> There is disagreement among scholars as to how and to whom the Church lost land in these parts of the country. D. M. Hadley argues that in many cases, it may have been secular English rulers who took land from the church, not the Vikings. She points out that there is documentary evidence that during the ninth century kings and bishops struggled for control over churches and their lands and that churches often lost land. The *Historia de Sancto Cuthberto* accuses kings Osbert and Ælle of robbing the community of St. Cuthbert of land during the period just before the Danish settlement of Northumbria.<sup>75</sup> In any event, regardless of how the Church lost so much land, the fact that it did lose so much during the ninth and tenth centuries must have caused Christian religious practice to become haphazard and irregular in many regions and occasionally even to disappear.

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<sup>72</sup> Hadley, *The Vikings in England: Settlement, Society, and Culture*, 206.

<sup>73</sup> Robin Fleming discusses the evidence from the *Domesday Book* in "Monastic Lands and England's Defense in the Viking Age," *English Historical Review* 100 (1985): 249. David N. Dumville argues that Fleming is too ready to believe churches' claims that they had once owned various pieces of land. He also disagrees with her basic hypothesis that the members of the Wessex aristocracy were ultimately the main beneficiaries of the taking of land from churches (David N. Dumville in *Wessex and England from Alfred to Edgar* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1992), 49-49). James Campbell takes a skeptical view of the value of the *Domesday Book* for assessing the loss of ecclesiastical land. He writes that with only one exception, no property that appears in the *Domesday Book's* East Anglian entries can be proven to have belonged to an ecclesiastical institution before the Viking conquest (James Campbell, "The East Anglian Sees Before the Conquest," in *Norwich Cathedral: Church, City, and Diocese, 1096-1996*, ed. Ian Atherton, Eric Fernie, Christopher Harper-Bill, and Hassell Smith (London: Hambledon Press, 1996), 14). Hadley discusses this issue in her book *The Vikings in England: Settlement, Society, and Culture*, 209-10.

<sup>74</sup> Fleming, 249.

<sup>75</sup> South, *Historia de Sancto Cuthberto*, 50: "Post haec Osbertus rex abstulit sancto Cuthberto duas uillas, Werceworthe et Tyllemuth. Sed post spacium unius anni, eripuit Deus ab eo uitam et regnum. Cui successit rex Ælle, qui bene promisit sancto confessori sed male egit. Nam abstulit a beo Billingham, et Illeclif, et Wigeclif, et Creca."

The Church's diminished status and weakened condition in those areas of England that the Vikings invaded can be seen also in the western and southern churches' removal of various saints' relics from the northern and eastern churches to which they were traditionally attached. The Mercian register of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle reveals that the relics of St. Oswald, for example, were taken from Bardney in Lincolnshire to Mercia in 909.<sup>76</sup> The relics of St. Wilfrid and a copy of Stephen of Ripon's *Vita Wilfridi* were removed from Ripon to Canterbury, probably in 948, when Ripon was burnt during King Eadred's northward campaign.<sup>77</sup> During the reign of Cnut the relics of St. Wystan were taken from Repton in Derbyshire to Evesham Abbey in Worcestershire, suggesting that Repton had lost much of its former prestige.<sup>78</sup> In the early tenth century St. Ælmund's relics were removed from Northworthy in Derby. This confiscation is thought to have been the work of Æthelflaed, King Alfred's daughter, who is associated with the removal of many Mercian saints' relics.<sup>79</sup> It is possible that the loss of St. Ælmund's relics are not a sign of the Mercian churches' weakness, since Æthelflaed invaded Mercia in 917, and the removal may have taken place then. If this is the case, then St. Ælmund's remains were taken not so much because they belonged to a church that had lost prestige and might, but rather because they happened to be located in a place that fell victim to triumphant pillaging. In other words, it is possible that Mercia's loss of these relics had nothing to do with the Vikings. Even if the Mercian churches did not suffer at all under the Vikings, Æthelflaed still might have managed to take Ælmund's relics when she invaded the region. However Northworthy lost St. Ælmund's relics, we see a trend in the tenth century towards the usurpation of northern and

<sup>76</sup> Dorothy Whitelock, ed., *English Historical Documents* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 1:210.

<sup>77</sup> Whitelock, *English Historical Documents*, 1:223.

<sup>78</sup> William Dunn Macray, ed., *Chronicon Abbatiae de Evesham ad Annum 1418* (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, and Green, 1863), 83.

<sup>79</sup> Hadley, D. M., "'Hamlet and the Princes of Denmark': Lordship in the Danelaw, c. 860-954", in *Cultures in Contact: Scandinavian Settlement in England in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries*, ed. Dawn M. Hadley and Julian D. Richards, (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), 119. Also see Simon Taylor, ed., *MS B*, vol. 4 in *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition*, ed. David Dumville and Simon Keynes (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1983), MR 909.



eastern churches' saints by southern and western churches. The twelfth-century writer William Malmesbury confirms this observation, writing that Glastonbury acquired a number of northern saints' remains, including those of Hild of Whitby, in Yorkshire, Ceolfrith of Monkwearmouth-Jarrow, and Aidan of Lindisfarne.<sup>80</sup> Thus, along with land, the churches in Danish-controlled areas also seem to have lost standing and the ability to hang onto their own saints.

In addition, there is a certain amount of archaeological and artistic evidence that some historians argue indicates a disrupted or crumbling state of affairs in the English church of the ninth and tenth centuries. For example, an analysis of charters produced at Christ Church, Canterbury shows that by the 850's and 860's, there had been a significant decline in standards from the flawless calligraphy of the early ninth century. Nicholas Brooks suggests that after the Viking attack of 851, the community was forced to recruit less well-trained scribes. In his translation of Pope Gregory's *Pastoral Care*, King Alfred gives a preface in which he ascribes the decline in literacy to the Viking invasions.<sup>81</sup> The abandonment or at least uncertain fate of many churches can be inferred from the fact that, as D. M. Hadley notes, there are many church sites where we can see a lengthy tradition of stone sculpture that suddenly comes to a halt in the tenth century.<sup>82</sup> At other church sites, while their history during the seventh and eighth centuries is documented, stone sculpture forms the only sign of continuing ecclesiastical activity during

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<sup>80</sup> *Gesta pontificum Anglorum*, ed. and trans. M. Winterbottom (Oxford: University Press, 2007), 1: 311 (book 2, chapter 91.8-9): "Multos illuc rex Edmundus misit in expeditione aquilonali compertos et de terra levatos, inter quos: Hildam, abbatissam cenobii quod olim Streneshalh nunc Witebi nuncupatur...Celfrithum abbatem Wirensis cenobii...Partem ossuum Aidani Lindisfarnensis antistitis primi."

<sup>81</sup> Alfred the Great, *Alfred the Great: Asser's Life of King Alfred and Other Contemporary Sources*, ed. and trans. Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), 125.

<sup>82</sup> Hadley, *The Vikings in England*, 211.

the ninth and tenth centuries.<sup>83</sup> Furthermore, there is little evidence for the building of churches in the ninth century.<sup>84</sup>

One might argue that the cessation of church building, the collapse of episcopal succession, the removal of relics, and the apparent loss of church land in certain parts of England cannot be used as evidence of harm done by the Danes to the English church, since they are all negative forms of evidence, that is, they build a case upon what we cannot see, rather than what we do see. This is obviously true, and there is no way to prove that the disruption that seems to have occurred in the English church was not at least partly the result of other factors. Nevertheless, it is a strain on the imagination to suppose that so many and such dramatic examples of ecclesiastical degeneration just happened to coincide, both in time and place, with the Danish onslaught. If only dynamics unrelated to the Vikings were at work – such as the Carolingian reforms that led to the closing of many nunneries in the ninth century, or the decreasing use of nunneries as depositories of royal lands – we would expect to see gradual change occurring in the religious life of England as a whole. Instead, the changes that we see are often dramatic and always located in those parts of the country most affected by the Danes.

The negative evidence for the havoc wreaked by the Norsemen on the English church is corroborated by later medieval texts. Although we must be suspicious of claims made two or three centuries after the events in question, later accounts of Viking destruction often make sense in light of the archaeological evidence or the otherwise unaccountable disruption of the historical record. The twelfth-century *Liber Eliensis*, for example, suggests that the religious community at Ely was completely destroyed by Vikings, a view that is supported by the fact that no early

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<sup>83</sup> Hadley, *The Vikings in England*, 206.

<sup>84</sup> D. M. Hadley, *The Northern Danelaw: Its Social Structure, c. 800-1100* (London: Leicester University Press, 2000), 283.

records of this community can be found.<sup>85</sup> There were a number of twelfth-century traditions that allege that the religious community at Beverley in Yorkshire was destroyed by Vikings, but doubt has been thrown on these accounts because they emerged late and are not indicated in any mid- to late-eleventh century grants and confirmations. Archaeological evidence does suggest, however, that the community was abandoned between 851 and 930, though it seems burials took place there in the eleventh century, indicating the re-establishment of ecclesiastical activity.<sup>86</sup> In most cases, the Viking attacks and land confiscations described in later medieval histories are neither supported nor denied by other evidence. In any event, while the specific claims made by later writers may be doubted, the impression that they make as a group – that the Norsemen attacked many religious establishments in northern and eastern England, and that they caused great disruption in the life of the Church in these regions – is surely correct. It is worth noting that throughout the Viking period, the only cathedral to continue to operate as such was that of York. Furthermore, in contrast to western and southern England, the number of churches in eastern England skyrocketed after about 950.<sup>87</sup> Such a thing would have been possible, of course, only if the earlier network of churches had been largely eliminated.

There is no reason to doubt that the Danes were heathen upon their arrival in England, though many of them had probably been exposed to Christianity in Denmark. In the 840's, St. Ansgar had managed to establish a missionary church in Denmark, though it did not survive after his death. Whether or not they had any familiarity with Christian teachings, the Danes probably arrived in England understanding that churches were places of foreign worship from which

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<sup>85</sup> Janet Fairweather, ed. and trans., *Liber Eliensis: A History of the Isle of Ely from the Seventh Century to the Twelfth* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2005), 73-4; Hadley, *The Vikings in England: Settlement, Society, and Culture*, 199.

<sup>86</sup> Hadley, *The Vikings in England*, 202.

<sup>87</sup> Julia Barrow, "Survival and Mutation: Ecclesiastical Institutions in the Danelaw in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries," in *Cultures in Contact: Scandinavian Settlement in England in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries*, ed. Dawn M. Hadley and Julian D. Richards (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), 165.

treasure was to be sought. Such knowledge is indicated by the Danes' sack of Hamburg in 845, in which they destroyed and looted the churches.<sup>88</sup> The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* refers to the Danes as *hæþenan*, or heathens.<sup>89</sup> Pope Formosus' letter from the 890's, in which he discusses the sprouting anew of the abominable rites of the pagans and of the violation of the Christian faith, indicates that the Danes' practice of heathenism was strong enough for word of it to have reached Rome.<sup>90</sup>

Before addressing how the Scandinavians were Christianized, we must ask to what extent Christian practice survived throughout the Danelaw during the ninth and tenth centuries. The ninth century, during which church building in eastern England appears to have come to a halt, was evidently the hardest period for the Church. Though clergymen, monks, and nuns may have disappeared from certain areas, however, Paul Cavill argues that the place-name evidence indicates that there was virtually no displacement of the native population in the wake of Norse

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<sup>88</sup> This attack is described by Rimbert in his *Life of Anskar*. See *Vita Anskarii Auctore Rimberto*, ed. G. Waitz (1884; repr. Hannover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 1977), 37. Two editors of Rimbert's work, G. Waitz and Charles H. Robinson, considered it most likely that it took place in 845. For Robinson's notes on the subject, see his translation: *Anskar, the Apostle of the North*, ed. and trans. Charles H. Robinson (The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, 1921), 57n. Admittedly, we must be cautious in our use of the *Vita Anskarii*. It is, after all, a work of hagiography and it contains some stylized archetypes and incidents common to its genre. For instance, at one point in the *Vita Anskarii*, a Christian named Herigar engages in a contest of miracles with his heathen neighbors (*Vita Anskarii Auctore Rimberto*, 41.) Needless to say, Herigar wins. As Theodore Anderson notes, this incident is a good example of the highly stylized contests that appear in many works of hagiography, in which "Christian and heathen gods are matched against each other, the Christian god triumphs (by a real or mock miracle), and the leader of the Christian party draws the obvious conclusion for the benefit of the astonished pagans" (Theodore M. Anderson, "Heathens Sacrifice in *Beowulf* and Rimbert's *Life of Ansgar*," *Medievalia et Humanistica* 13 (1985): 71.) Furthermore, to a certain extent, the *Vita Anskarii* was a work of propaganda, designed to encourage missions to Scandinavia. James Palmer writes that perhaps the reason why Rimbert began to write the work when he started to have problems with his feet is that he wanted to do missionary work, but could no longer physically manage the necessary journeys himself (James T. Palmer, "Rimbert's *Vita Anskarii* and Scandinavian Mission in the Ninth Century," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 55:2 (2004): 238.) More specifically, Palmer argues that Rimbert wished to create a missionary model for the monks at Corbie, a monastery from which Rimbert hoped to receive support for evangelical work (see Palmer, 242.) For a discussion of the *Vita Anskarii*'s political function in backing the unification of Hamburg and Bremen, see Ian N. Wood, *The Missionary Life: Saints and the Evangelization of Europe, 400-1050* (New York: Longman, 2001), 126-7.

<sup>89</sup> For example, see ASC E, 794: "þa hæðenan on Norðhymbrum hergodon"; Cubbin, ed., MS D, 871: "on oðrum wæs Bagsecg & Healfdene, þa hæðenan cyningas"; ASC E, 865: "Her sæt se hæðene here on Tenet".

<sup>90</sup> Whitelock, Brett, and Brooke, *Councils and Synods with Other Documents Relating to the English Church*, 1:36.

attacks and settlement.<sup>91</sup> Thus, it is highly improbable that any region ever became bereft of Christian believers. The organized practice of the Christian religion in the Danelaw, however, disappears from the sources between about 880 and 930. We are also hampered in our investigation by the lack of charters from the Danelaw dating to the last quarter of the ninth century or first quarter of the tenth, as well as by a paucity of Mercian or even West Saxon diplomas.<sup>92</sup> Our evidence for the continuing use of churches comes from chance references found in later documents, from archaeologists' work, and from what we can see of the patterns of church placement by the time of the *Domesday Book*.

The most elusive of these types of evidence – the revealing comments made in later sources – nevertheless manages to provide a number of examples of churches that probably continued to function, despite having been attacked by Vikings. For example, the *Liber Eliensis* tells us of the Danes' total destruction of the religious community at Ely. But the *Liber miraculorum beate virginis*, a separate work incorporated into the *Liber Eliensis*, mentions events that took place at Ely during the reign of King Eadred (946-55), when the author was a priest there.<sup>93</sup> The *Libellus Æthelwoldi episcopi*, compiled in the early twelfth century but based on tenth-century vernacular texts, makes it clear that grants were made to the shrine of St. Æthelthryth at least fifteen years before the community was officially refounded.<sup>94</sup> Thus, both of these works indicate that Ely was the residence of priests and religious by at least the mid-tenth century, if not continuously. Like Ely and other monasteries all over Europe, the monastery of Ripon in North Yorkshire was surely a prime target for the Vikings. Yet we do not hear of

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<sup>91</sup> Cavill, 226-7.

<sup>92</sup> Lesley Abrams, "Conversion and Assimilation," in *Cultures in Contact: Scandinavian Settlement in England in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries*, ed. Dawn M. Hadley and Julian D. Richards (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), 142.

<sup>93</sup> *Liber Eliensis*, 77-82. For a discussion of some of the events in the *Liber miraculorum beate virginis* and the *Libellus Æthelwoldi*, see Simon Keynes, "Ely Abbey 672-1109," in *A History of Ely Cathedral*, ed. Peter Meadows and Nigel Ramsay (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2003), 15-8.

<sup>94</sup> *Liber Eliensis*, 116-8, 120-1; Keynes, "Ely Abbey 672-1109," 15-8.

attacks upon it until 948, when the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* tells us that King Eadred burnt it on his campaign northwards.<sup>95</sup> It is assumed that this is when St. Wilfrid's relics and a copy of the *Vita Wilfridi* were taken from Ripon to Canterbury.<sup>96</sup> Obviously, such relics and manuscripts would not have remained housed at the Ripon monastery, nor would King Eadred have bothered to attack it, unless at least a few people had managed to continue to live there throughout the ninth and first half of the tenth century. Returning to the *Libellus Æthelwoldi*, we read of another monastery found at Horningsea in Cambridgeshire, which at the time of the Viking conquest was under the direction of a priest named Coenwald. Later the same passage tells us that people came to be baptized by Coenwald and gave him gifts of land. Furthermore, Coenwald's successor was a follower of King Æthelstan (924-39).<sup>97</sup> In other words, religious ministry seems to have continued at Horningsea uninterrupted well into the tenth century, and probably longer. The *Domesday Book* gives us a curious piece of information about the famous monastery at Repton, which archaeologists have said appears to have been almost completely destroyed during the late ninth century. We read that when the *Domesday Book* was compiled, the community at Repton was served by two priests.<sup>98</sup> Elsewhere, this is taken as a residual sign of a former community that is being replaced by a new community.<sup>99</sup> In other words, the Danes probably managed to do enough damage to destroy the life of the monastic community at Repton, such that only a few monks and priests remained. By the time another group decided to revive the monastery, only one priest from the older community still survived, so that for a brief period, Repton was served by two priests.

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<sup>95</sup> ASC D, E, F, 948.

<sup>96</sup> Nicholas Brooks, *The Early History of the Church of Canterbury: Christ Church from 597 to 1066* (Leicester: University Press, 1984), 227.

<sup>97</sup> *Liber Eliensis*, 128-9.

<sup>98</sup> Ann Williams and G. H. Martin, ed. and trans., *Domesday Book: A Complete Translation* (London: Penguin Books, 2002), 742: "There is a church and 2 priests with 1 plough."

<sup>99</sup> Hadley, *The Vikings in England: Settlement, Society, and Culture*, 204.

The potential indications of continuing ecclesiastical activity that archaeologists have uncovered are far more extensive, if considerably less precise, than those that a search of manuscripts reveals. Stone sculpture may often be the only sign of a church's survival, but it is found widely. Sculpture showing signs of Scandinavian influence is common. In Yorkshire, archaeologists have found sculpture with Scandinavian motifs or Anglo-Scandinavian crosses or cross shafts at Ripon, West Gilling, Kirkdale, and Collingham, to name a few examples.<sup>100</sup> Curiously, there is one church in Yorkshire, that of Stonegrave, where the sculptors of the tenth century evidently resisted Norse styles, thereby providing us with an unusual case of the continuation of pre-Viking designs.<sup>101</sup> It is hard to doubt that stone sculpture at a church indicates ongoing religious activity, since hewing stone is a time-consuming and difficult task and it is unlikely that anyone would pay for it at a church that no longer functioned. Whether graves constitute evidence of abiding ecclesiastical activity is more debatable. In her research on the Vikings in England, D. M. Hadley often uses the presence of burials as a sign that a church continued to function as such. Thus in her evaluation of the damage done to Monkwearmouth, Beverley, and Repton – all communities that the Norse supposedly destroyed, at least temporarily – she casts doubt on claims of Viking destruction on the grounds that burials continued at these sites.<sup>102</sup> Unlike stone sculpture, however, there is no reason to expect burials to stop during a period of destruction or decline – quite the reverse. People have to do something with dead bodies, and if they are accustomed to burying them at a particular site, they will probably persevere in this habit. In some cases, such as at Repton, where a remnant community looks to have remained, graves may corroborate other signs of religious activity. On its own,

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<sup>100</sup> Hadley, *The Northern Danelaw: Its Social Structure, c. 800-1100*, 234, 242, 265.

<sup>101</sup> Margaret Firby, and J. T. Lang, "The Pre-Conquest Sculpture at Stonegrave," *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, 53, (1981): 29.

<sup>102</sup> Hadley, *The Vikings in England: Settlement, Society, and Culture*, 201-5.

however, the continuing use of a graveyard cannot be used to demonstrate ongoing use of a church.

While it is clear that some form of organized Christian worship continued to take place in some areas of the Danelaw during the ninth and early tenth centuries, it is difficult to assess its nature. John Blair remarks that various forms of evidence (such as pre-Viking charter references, religious sculpture, and saints' cults) indicate that in the northern Danelaw, the "mother" churches of the later Middle Ages were the *monasteria* recorded before 800.<sup>103</sup> By contrast, Lincolnshire and East Anglia had few such older, "mother" churches, a circumstance that Julia Barrow writes might be due to the fact that in these areas, there was an active land market (signs of which can be seen in the *Liber Eliensis*) that probably encouraged the breakdown of large estates<sup>104</sup>. The fact that the later medieval network of "mother" churches found in some areas of the Danelaw was based on pre-Viking networks indicates that a large number of churches must either never have gone out of use, or went out of use for only a short period. It is possible that local priests simply continued to minister to their congregations even in the absence of episcopal authority. Of course, such a situation in any given case could last only as long as that particular priest did, as new priests must be consecrated by bishops. Both

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<sup>103</sup> John Blair, "Ecclesiastical Organization and Pastoral Care in Anglo-Saxon England," *Early Medieval Europe* 4:2 (1995): 199. The fact that the ancient *monasteria* of northern England became the later Middle Ages' "mother" churches should not be viewed as a sign that monastic houses specifically survived the Viking period; rather, it should be viewed as a sign that many churches in general in northern England survived. Christopher Brooke points out, "there is no kind of religious community, or church bereft of a religious community, which was not at one time or another called a *monasterium*" (C. N. L. Brooke, "Rural Ecclesiastical Institutions in England: the Search for their Origins," *Settimane di Studio del Centro Italiano di Studi Sull'alto Medioevo* 28 (1982): 697.) That being said, it is quite possible that of the old *monasteria* that eventually became "mother" churches were what we would not call monastic houses. After all, as Gervase Rosser notes, in the first millennium the laity often had remarkable ease of access to monastic houses and received much of their religious instruction and care at monasteries (Gervase Rosser, "The Cure of Souls in English Towns before 1000," in *Pastoral Care Before the Parish*, ed. John Blair and Richard Sharpe (Leicester: University Press, 1992), 267-68.) It would therefore not be surprising if monastic houses came to function simply as large churches.

<sup>104</sup> Barrow, "Survival and Mutation," 166. For examples of various pieces of land coming under new ownership, which surely indicates the confiscation or breaking up of old estates, read Book II of the *Liber Eliensis*, especially pages 93-198.



Hadley and Barrow note that those pre-Viking churches that went on to become minster or “mother” churches later were generally located at the centre of large estates.<sup>105</sup> This suggests that a strong lord’s might was often necessary to protect a church, and in many cases church organization probably reverted to a system whereby a church was perceived as being the property of a local lord.

Besides the fact that they were located on large estates, one reason that churches in the northern Danelaw were more likely to survive was that they had some sort of connection with the archbishops of York. As Barrow herself points out, York was the only cathedral in the Danelaw to continue to operate as such throughout the Viking period. In all the dioceses between the Thames and the Humber, the bishops were forced to acquire new churches.<sup>106</sup> East Anglia and Lincolnshire, being far to the south, were far out of the orbit of York’s influence and protection. One might argue that by the time Guthrum came to rule East Anglia in 880, he had been nominally Christian for two years, and was likely eager to nurture the support that the Church could provide for his rule. On the other hand, much of the damage to East Anglia’s and Lincolnshire’s churches could have been done long before then. In East Anglia, the see of Elmham’s bishop died in 869 and was not replaced until 955, while the last bishop of Dunwich could not have been consecrated later than 869.<sup>107</sup> In Mercia, all the sees of the East Midlands, and therefore of Lincolnshire, appear to have collapsed.<sup>108</sup> We must also bear in mind that it was in East Anglia that the heathen army first overwintered.<sup>109</sup>

In order to determine how the Norse were converted, we should first try to determine when we see evidence of a shift away from heathenism. How many generations did the

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<sup>105</sup> Hadley, *The Northern Danelaw*, 220; Barrow, “Survival and Mutation,” 165.

<sup>106</sup> Barrow, “Survival and Mutation,” 161.

<sup>107</sup> Powicke and Fryde, 216.

<sup>108</sup> Dumville, *Wessex and England from Alfred to Edgar*, 31.

<sup>109</sup> See page 11.

Scandinavians spend in England as heathens? Disappointingly, an examination of ancient burials gives no answer, for there are few distinctly heathen Norse burials in England. In an article on the burial evidence for the Scandinavian settlement of England, Guy Halsall argues that the only clearly Norse cemetery in England is a cremation cemetery found at Heath Wood, Ingleby, in Derbyshire.<sup>110</sup> Christian Englishmen at the time would have been most unlikely to have cremated their dead, and thus the cremations found at Heath Wood must indicate the practice of Norse heathenism. James Graham-Campbell, by contrast, holds that in addition to several *possible* pagan burials throughout England, there can be found at least two pagan burials in Nottingham and at least two in East Anglia.<sup>111</sup> It seems that the Vikings picked up English burial customs rather quickly, for their inhumations are difficult to distinguish from anyone else's. It is possible that incoming Scandinavians quickly began to use already-existing graveyards. An example of this is the surprising find of a ninth-century Viking woman (identifiable from her Scandinavian brooches) buried at Adwick-le-Street in South Yorkshire. Her remains were found amidst a number of Roman or post-Roman inhumations and burials.<sup>112</sup> English customs add to the confusion, for the Anglo-Saxons often furnished graves, making it impossible to consider grave goods signs of heathenism. Furthermore, it is possible that Norse burial customs had an influence on those of the English, and thus the spike that we see in elaborately furnished graves around the year 900 may show that Scandinavian and English

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<sup>110</sup> Guy Halsall, "The Viking Presence in England? The Burial Evidence Reconsidered," in *Cultures in Contact: Scandinavian Settlement in England in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries*, ed. Dawn M. Hadley and Julian D. Richards (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), 263.

<sup>111</sup> James Graham-Campbell, "Pagan Scandinavian Burial in the Central and Southern Danelaw," in *Vikings and the Danelaw*, ed. James Graham-Campbell, Richard Hall, Judith Jesch, and David N. Parsons (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2001), 106-11.

<sup>112</sup> Greg Speed and Penelope Walton Rogers, "A Burial of a Viking Woman at Adwick-le-Street, South Yorkshire," *Medieval Archaeology* 48 (2004): 51.

aristocratic families were competing with each other.<sup>113</sup> The construction of grave mounds might be considered distinctly Scandinavian were it not for the fact that the English in Cumbria had an unbroken tradition, pre-dating the Viking period, of burying their dead in furnished graves with mounds.<sup>114</sup> The location of a grave cannot be used to identify it as heathen or Christian, as burial in churchyards does not seem to have been universal in the ninth-century, and may even have been restricted to the upper-class.<sup>115</sup> Julian Richards contends that, as it was from Repton that the Vikings drove out the Mercian king Burgred, the mass graves found at Repton might have been some sort of monument designed to emphasize the Vikings' take-over of the area.<sup>116</sup> This is very difficult to prove; it is just speculation. Halsall concludes, "Beyond Ingleby, the scattered furnished inhumation graves of later ninth- and early tenth-century England ...have little bearing on Christian-pagan relationships."<sup>117</sup>

In contrast to Scandinavian cemeteries, places with Scandinavian names can be found up and down Britain. Unfortunately, most of these names are totally non-religious in character. There are a few names that might indicate religious practices – names suggesting a particular site's holiness, for instance – but the spiritual import of such names is generally questionable and vague. Names like "Kirkby" and "Kirby" are obviously Scandinavian, but the most they reveal is that the Norsemen were aware of churches as belonging to a distinct, recognizable set of buildings. As Paul Cavill points out, these names probably refer to already-existing English churches, not to churches built by Scandinavians.<sup>118</sup> There are only a few names that incorporate Old Norse roots that may indicate the practice of Scandinavian heathenism in England. The Old

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<sup>113</sup> Hadley, *The Northern Danelaw: Its Social Structure, c. 800-1100*, 323.

<sup>114</sup> Halsall, 265.

<sup>115</sup> Hadley, *The Northern Danelaw: Its Social Structure, c. 800-1100*, 319.

<sup>116</sup> Julian N. Richards, "Boundaries and Cult Centres: Viking Burial in Derbyshire," in *Vikings and the Danelaw*, ed. James Graham-Campbell, Richard Hall, Judith Jesch, and David N. Parsons (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2001), 99-101.

<sup>117</sup> Halsall, 272.

<sup>118</sup> Cavill, 219-20.

Norse root *haugr*, meaning burial mound, is surprisingly uncommon. A search on the University of Nottingham's Institute for Names-Studies' website for names derived from this root turns up thirty-one place-names. Of these, seven are found in East Anglia, four in the East Midlands, and eleven in Yorkshire. Thus, twenty-two out of the thirty-one *haug* names are located within what was once the Danelaw. The other nine are found in the northwest, especially in Cumberland and Lancashire.<sup>119</sup> These, as well as many of the names in Yorkshire, could actually be the result of the tenth-century invasion from the west, rather than from the ninth-century invasion from the east. We are thus left with probably fewer than twenty *haug* names that originated with the ninth-century invaders. The Old Norse root *lundr*, meaning "holy grove", occurs in twenty-eight English place-names, twenty-one of which are in the old Danelaw.<sup>120</sup> Dorothy Whitelock argues, however, that *lund* names are common enough that this element might mean little more than "grove".<sup>121</sup> By the same token, *haug* might often mean little more than "hill". A search for the root *hof*, meaning "temple" turns up only one site – Hoff, in Westmoreland – that researchers think might be derived from Old Norse.<sup>122</sup> Elloughton, the name of a village in East Yorkshire, might mean "heathen temple hill", but might also simply mean "Helgi's hill."<sup>123</sup>

Unfortunately, it is impossible to find any place-names still in use in England that incorporate the names of ancient Norse gods. The only possible exception is "Thor's Cave" in Staffordshire. Perhaps the most obvious example of a site whose name and geographical characteristics suggest heathen cultic practices is one whose Norse name has been heavily

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<sup>119</sup> English Place-Name Society, "Institute for Name Studies: The Key," University of Nottingham, <http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/english/ins/kepn/search.php> (accessed April 3, 2009).

<sup>120</sup> English Place-Name Society, [http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/english/ins/kepn/results\\_search.php](http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/english/ins/kepn/results_search.php) (accessed on April 3, 2009).

<sup>121</sup> Dorothy Whitelock, "The Conversion of the Eastern Danelaw," *Saga-Book of the Viking Society for Northern Research* 12, no. 3 (1941): 163.

<sup>122</sup> English Place-Name Society, [http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/english/ins/kepn/results\\_search.php#](http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/english/ins/kepn/results_search.php#) (accessed on April 8, 2009).

<sup>123</sup> Cavill, 228.

obscured. Roseberry Topping is a quite distinctive hill in what is now the North York Moors national park. The name Roseberry comes from *Óðins bjarg*, or Odin's hill in Old Norse.<sup>124</sup> Such a name, combined with the hill's location in the Danelaw and striking appearance (it is the second highest hill in the North York Moors), makes it hard to resist the conclusion that it had some sort of cultic significance for Scandinavian devotees of Odin. Roseberry Topping is one of a kind, however, in its obvious implication of Norse religious practice. With this lone exception, place-names of Scandinavian origin tell us little about the religious beliefs of the Scandinavian settlers or those of their children and grandchildren. The answer to the question of when the Norsemen converted must be sought elsewhere.

Peculiarly, it is easier to come to justified conclusions regarding when the Scandinavians were Christianized than how. Evidence comes in the form of a few recorded baptisms, church building activities, Scandinavian-inspired sculpture and monuments in churches, and the donation of lands and resources to churches. First, the baptisms. English sources record the dates and circumstances of the baptism of a very small number of Viking leaders, though it should be noted that the mere baptism of a few political and military leaders might be viewed as poor evidence for the conversion of the masses. But it seems unlikely that many Vikings would convert before their leaders took the first step towards the new faith, so in order to gain a sense of the earliest possible period of Scandinavian conversion, we should look at the baptism of Norse leaders. In 878, after King Alfred had defeated the Norsemen at the Battle of Edington and pursued them to their fortresses, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* records that the Vikings gave King Alfred hostages, swore to leave the kingdom, and promised that their king, Guthrum, would be baptized. We read, "and three weeks later the king Guthrum came to him...at Aller which is

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<sup>124</sup> Gillian Fellows Jensen, "Scandinavian Settlement in the Danelaw in the Light of the Place-Names of Denmark," in *Proceedings of the Eighth Viking Congress*, ed. Hans Bekker-Nielsen, Peter Foote, Olaf Olsen (Odense: University Press, 1981), 135.

near Athelney, where the king stood sponsor to him at baptism; and the confirmation took place at Wedmore.”<sup>125</sup> According to the *Chronicle*, the wife and sons of the Viking lord Hæsten had been baptized by the time they were brought before King Alfred in 893. In all probability, Hæsten’s wife was Scandinavian, for her sons’ baptism clearly took place only as part of a political settlement, though we do not know when this occurred. The *Chronicle* tells us Alfred gave Hæsten’s wife and sons back to him, “because one of them was his godson and the other the godson of Ealdorman Æthelred. They had stood sponsors for them before Hæsten had come to Benfleet, and he had given him hostages and oaths”.<sup>126</sup> In a particularly strange episode that took place c. 883, the *Historia de Sancto Cuthberto* records that the ghost of the dead saint ordered that one member of the Viking army, Guthred, be elected king. Though Guthred’s baptism is not mentioned, it is unlikely that St. Cuthbert’s community would have promoted him or would have proclaimed him king without his baptism. All of these baptisms took place within a few decades of the Norse Great Army’s first overwintering in England in the 860’s. What is striking about them is that they were performed not for the English-born children of immigrants, but for people who had been born in Scandinavia and raised as heathens, and who had come to England as adults. Granted, the baptism, undertaken for purely political reasons, of a few leaders proves nothing about the conversion of the masses of Scandinavian settlers. Nonetheless, if baptism had entailed a loss of credibility amongst his own people, King Guthrum either would not have agreed to it, or would not have held onto power. The fact that the Viking elites were so

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<sup>125</sup> ASC A, 878: “þæs ymb III wiecan com se cyning to him Godrum þritiga sum þara monna þe in þam here weorþuste wæron æt Alre, & þæt is wip Eþelinggaeige, & his se cyning þær onfeng æt fulwihte, & his crismlicing was æt Wepmor”. Also see ASC D, E, F, 878.

<sup>126</sup> ASC D, 894: “Hæstnes wif & his II suna man brohte to þam cyninge, & him ageaf, forþam þe hyra wæs opær his godsunu, oðer Æþeredes ealdormannes, hæfdon hy hyra onfangen ær Hæstan to Beamfleote come, & he him hæfde geseald apæs & gislas”. Also see ASC C, 894.

willing to convert indicates that once the Norsemen settled and adopted an agricultural lifestyle, there was little in their worldview to encourage them to resist conversion.

The taking of baptismal names and the use of symbols of Christian culture betray certain Viking leaders' eagerness to take on many of the features of Anglo-Saxon civilization. The best-known example of post-conversion Viking name change is that of Guthrum, who in 878 adopted the baptismal name of Æthelstan. Even those Scandinavian rulers who did not change their names nevertheless chose to present their names, whether on coins or on monuments, in Roman, rather than runic, characters. The very fact that Scandinavian kings in northern and eastern England minted coins at all indicates their desire to draw on native forms of kingship in order to establish their authority. In short, there was much in Anglo-Saxon culture that the Norse leaders, at least, admired, and it is reasonable to think that conversion was often a price they were willing to pay in order to become a part of this culture.

While we have few written descriptions of Viking christenings, such baptisms must have taken place, for by the second half of the tenth century, we see archaeological evidence of a tremendous ecclesiastical building program throughout the Danelaw. John Blair argues that in the seventh and eighth centuries, religious life was organized around diverse kinds of churches called minsters (from the Latin *monasterium*), which were often founded near royal vill.<sup>127</sup> The *parochiae* which these minsters served were often coterminous with the territories that the vill controlled. In the upheaval of the Viking period, many minsters' land bases were severely diminished and though these minsters did not always completely disappear, Blair writes that overall "the late ninth century was for many of them a time of loss, disruption, and change."<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> John Blair, *Minsters and Parish Churches: the Local Church in Transition, 950-1200* (Oxford: University Committee for Archaeology, 1988), 1-2.

<sup>128</sup> Blair, *Minsters and Parish Churches*, 3.

Given this break-up of large estates, it is not surprising that when new religious houses were eventually founded or re-founded, they seem to have served smaller communities than the old minsters. By the mid-tenth century, numerous small religious foundations had cropped up in East Anglia.<sup>129</sup> Tenth-century stone sculpture is found in three times as many places and in quantities five times as large as eighth- and ninth-century stone sculpture.<sup>130</sup> Although there is little evidence of church building in the ninth century, from c. 950 the number of churches in eastern England soared. This is in contrast to southern and western England, where the growth in the number of churches occurred later and more slowly and caused less disruption for pre-existing churches. Many of the major medieval churches in towns such as Norwich, Lincoln, York, Ipswich, Huntingdon, and Cambridge were built between about 950 and 1000. These churches were often attached to a manor house and, unlike the pre-Viking minsters, appear to have been built for the use of only a single village.<sup>131</sup> They generally had their own cemeteries, showing that from the beginning each probably had its own congregation.

The little information we have about the people who were establishing new churches shows that they had a mixture of Old English and Old Norse names.<sup>132</sup> An example of an Old Norse name's association with the re-foundation of a church occurs at St. Gregory's Minster in Kirkdale, in Yorkshire. Here there survives an eleventh-century inscription on a sundial reading, "Orm, son of Gamal, bought St. Gregory's church when it was completely ruined and collapsed, and he had it constructed recently from the ground to Christ and St. Gregory, in the days of King Edward and in the days of Earl Tosti. And Hawarð made me and Brand the priest."<sup>133</sup> A

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<sup>129</sup> Whitelock, "The Conversion of the Eastern Danelaw," 173.

<sup>130</sup> Whitelock, "The Conversion of the Eastern Danelaw," 169.

<sup>131</sup> Blair, *Minsters and Parish Churches*, 7.

<sup>132</sup> Barrow, "Survival and Mutation," 169.

<sup>133</sup> Lorna Watts, Philip Rahtz, Elisabeth Okasha, S. A. J. Bradley, and John, Higgitt, "Kirkdale – the Inscriptions," *Medieval Archaeology* 41 (1997), 81-7: "+ ORM : GAMAL : SVNA : BOHTE , SCS GREGORIVS : MINSTER: DONNE HIT :



passage in the *Libellus Æthelwoldi* confirms that the Scandinavians participated in the building or re-building of many churches. Here we read of a monastery at Horningsea, in Cambridgeshire, where “the people of the place, who had come rushing together in a flood-tide from paganism to the grace of baptism, then gave the aforesaid minster five hides at Horningsea and two in Eye.”<sup>134</sup>

The Scandinavian-inspired architecture found throughout northern and eastern England in the early tenth century indicates that the Scandinavian settlers participated in the building and re-foundation of churches that was taking place. Dating and identifying the origins of stone sculpture is not easy, and some of the zoomorphic designs once assumed to be of Scandinavian inspiration may have been native Anglo-Saxon developments. Much of the so-called Anglo-Scandinavian sculpture includes images of gods and scenes from Norse heathenism, however, which obviously only Norsemen in England could have inspired. Despite the heathen imagery, this type of sculpture is generally considered to belong to a Christian milieu. In fact, the same sculptor’s work has been identified on both crosses and monuments depicting heathen images. Richard Bailey argues that Norse mythology may have been used as a means of presenting Christian teachings.<sup>135</sup> A late ninth-century cross-shaft from Nunburnholme, in Yorkshire, seems to support such a theory. On one panel of this cross-shaft, in which a priest is shown holding a chalice, a second sculptor has added a scene of Sigurd tasting the dragon’s blood. James T. Lang argues that the second sculptor was not trying to destroy the original carving’s Christian message, but rather to explain the priest’s actions through the use of the story of

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WES JEL : TOBROCAN : 7 TOFALAN : 7 HE HIT LET MACAN : NEWAN : FROM GRVNDE XPE , 7 SCS GREGORIVS : IN EADWARD DAGVM : CNG 7 N TOSTI: DAGVM : EORL + + 7 HAWARD: ME WROHTE: 7BRAND PRS.”

<sup>134</sup> *Liber Eliensis*, 128.

<sup>135</sup> Richard N. Bailey, *England’s Earliest Sculptors* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute for Medieval Studies, 1996), 77-94.

Sigurd.<sup>136</sup> Numerous similar uses of Norse mythology have been identified on other crosses.<sup>137</sup> Depictions of apparently secular warriors also appear on tenth-century crosses, a fact that D. M. Hadley argues indicates an increasing interest among lordly elites in commissioning such crosses. In the Danelaw, of course, such elites would often be Norsemen. It is also likely that churchmen tolerated this secular imagery in an attempt to accommodate the Scandinavian aristocratic culture. Due to the fact that Anglo-Scandinavian stone sculpture does not appear to have been influenced by styles popular amongst Scandinavians by the late tenth century, James Lang dates most Anglo-Scandinavian sculpture to a rather small window of time in the late ninth or early tenth century.<sup>138</sup> It should be pointed out, however, that by the late tenth century, Norsemen who had been in England since the ninth century would not be familiar with the latest artistic trends in Scandinavia. In other words, the fact that this sculpture reflects styles current in Scandinavia in the late ninth and early tenth century simply shows that that is when the Vikings left Scandinavia. There is no reason why they could not have continued to use these styles into the later tenth century. In any event, what the archaeological record of the tenth-century Danelaw reveals is busy church-building accompanied by a mixture of English and Scandinavian sculpture in distinctly Christian contexts. It is reasonable to suppose that the Anglo-Scandinavian sculpture that we see emerging in the late ninth-century indicates an increasing participation amongst the Norsemen in Christian culture, while the sudden increase in church-building that begins *c.* 950 indicates the existence of a large, recently converted population who, no longer content to carve stone monuments and engage in other forms of Christian display,

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<sup>136</sup> James T. Lang, "Sigurd and Weland in Pre-Conquest Carving from Northern England," *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal* 48 (1976), 89.

<sup>137</sup> Lang discusses many examples in his article "Sigurd and Weland in pre-Conquest Carving from Northern England".

<sup>138</sup> James T. Lang, "Recent Studies in the Pre-Conquest Sculpture of Northumbria", in *Studies in Medieval Sculpture*, ed. F. H. Thompson (London: The Society of Antiquities of London, 1983), 186.

needed regular religious ministry. This argument implies that most of the Norse population had converted by about 950. That is to say, most Norsemen converted in the first half of the tenth century, so that by 950, the initial work of evangelizing had finished, and the task of providing proper village churches had begun.

In addition to the archaeological evidence for a dramatic increase in church building and renovating, we also have certain written sources that make it clear that by the mid-tenth century, and sometimes even earlier, clergymen and members of religious orders had re-inhabited church establishments abandoned in the wake of Viking attacks. The twelfth-century *Liber Eliensis*, for instance, suggests that the religious community at Ely was completely destroyed by Vikings, a view that is supported by the fact that no early records of this community can be found. It is likely, however, that some religious community existed before the official re-founding in 970. As we have seen, the *Libellus Aethelwoldi episcopi*, compiled in the early twelfth century but based on tenth-century vernacular texts, reveals that grants were made to the shrine of St. Aethelthryth at least fifteen years before the official re-founding. The late tenth-century *Liber miraculorum beate virginis*, which was incorporated into the *Liber Eliensis*, mentions events that took place at Ely during the reign of King Eadred (946-55), when the author was a priest there. These events suggest that in the mid-tenth century, and perhaps continuously, Ely housed priests and clerics.<sup>139</sup> Another example is that of Whitby Abbey, whose nuns, Roger of Wendover tells us, were massacred by the Vikings in 867. By the eleventh century the site was known as *Presebi*, or “priests’ habitation” in Old Norse, suggesting that it had housed clergymen long enough for it to have become permanently associated with them.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> *Liber Eliensis*, 77-8.

<sup>140</sup> Hadley, *The Vikings in England: Settlement, Society, and Culture*, 205.

Other sources of information confirm that by the beginning of the tenth century, Christianity was making a comeback in regions that had seen churches pillaged and kings martyred only a generation before. One such source of information is the existence of the East Anglian “St. Edmund” coins. The St. Edmund coins commemorated the king of East Anglia, who was executed by the Danish Great Army in 869. Towards the end of the tenth century, Abbo of Fleury, who had once taught at Ramsey Abbey, in Cambridgeshire, described King Edmund’s tortuous death in gruesome detail.<sup>141</sup> Over eighteen hundred such coins, the overwhelming majority of those that have been discovered, were found in a hoard at Cuerdale, Lancashire. Dorothy Whitelock dates these coins to the first half of the reign of Edward the Elder (899-924), largely on the grounds that, when St. Edmund coins are discovered amidst any other coins at all, they are generally found along with coins of the ninth century.<sup>142</sup> She argues that it is unlikely that these coins date to the period between St. Edmund’s martyrdom and the Norse settlement, that is, between 869 and 878, as many of the moneyers’ names that appear on the St. Edmund coins also appear on Edward the Elder’s coins and three even appear on Æthelstan’s coins. It is not clear where they were minted. Jonathan Rashleigh thought that they were minted at York, but for issue in East Anglia.<sup>143</sup> Herbert Grueber, however, held that they were struck in East Anglia.<sup>144</sup> The evidence is mixed. In any event, they were clearly minted in Danish territory, probably towards the beginning of Edward the Elder’s reign.<sup>145</sup>

Why the very people who had killed King Edmund chose to mint coins to commemorate him is a point of debate, but it obviously has implications for the acceptance of Christianity by

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<sup>141</sup> Michael Winterbottom, ed., *Three Lives of English Saints* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute for Medieval Studies, 1972), 76-80. This is a translation of Ælfric of Eynsham’s version of Abbo’s work.

<sup>142</sup> Whitelock, “The Conversion of the Eastern Danelaw,” 165-66.

<sup>143</sup> Jonathan Rashleigh, “Remarks on the Coins of the Anglo-Saxon and Danish Kings of Northumbria,” *The Numismatic Chronicle and Journal of the Numismatic Society* 9 (1869): 92.

<sup>144</sup> Herbert A. Grueber, *Handbook of the Coins of Great Britain and Ireland in the British Museum* (London: The Trustees, 1899), xvii.

<sup>145</sup> Whitelock, “The Conversion of the Eastern Danelaw,” 166-68.

the Danes. In East Anglia, the issue of St. Edmund coins had been preceded by coins minted in the converted king Guthrum's baptismal name, Æthelstan.<sup>146</sup> Hadley considers it likely that the St. Edmund coins were struck in East Anglia and the midlands, which suggests that they were part of an official promotion of Christianity conducted by the East Anglian kings.<sup>147</sup> It is possible that these kings simply picked up on a cult developing amongst the English in East Anglia, and chose to promote it as a sign of their cultural sophistication. Alternatively, these Scandinavian kings may have promoted St. Edmund's cult as a means of separating themselves morally from the invaders who had killed Edmund. In other words, they wisely associated themselves with the victims of the fiendish deed, rather than with the perpetrators. In any event, the St. Edmund coinage is surely an indication that the Viking leaders had developed an interest in Christian culture as early as the end of the ninth century.

The St. Peter and St. Martin pennies also testify to Norse rulers' attempts to adopt elements of Christian culture. The St. Peter coinage first appeared *c.* 905 and, because the minting of it was briefly interrupted by the minting of Rægnald's coins after he captured York *c.* 919, it is likely that the St. Peter coins came from this town.<sup>148</sup> St. Peter was presumably chosen because he is the patron saint of York Minster. Similarly, because of St. Martin's connection with Dernstall, pennies commemorating this saint are thought to come from Lincoln.<sup>149</sup> Certainly, such coins indicate that Norse leaders were willing to tolerate Christianity, since it is unlikely that such coins would have been produced without ecclesiastical involvement. It is also quite improbable that the minting of coins ever slipped totally into the hands of churchmen,

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<sup>146</sup> Mark Blackburn, "Expansion and Control: Aspects of Anglo-Scandinavian Minting South of the Humber," in *Vikings and the Danelaw*, ed. James Graham-Campbell, Richard Hall, Judith Jesch, and David N. Parsons (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2001), 128.

<sup>147</sup> Hadley, *The Vikings in England: Settlement, Society, and Culture*, 35.

<sup>148</sup> Hadley, *The Vikings in England: Settlement, Society, and Culture*, 47.

<sup>149</sup> Philip Grierson and Mark Blackburn, *The Early Middle Ages*, vol. 1 of *Medieval European Coinage* (Cambridge: University Press, 1986), 322-3.

since, as Mark Blackburn has commented, we know of no other Anglo-Saxon secular ruler who allowed the Church to take full control over the minting of coins and the profits derived from it.<sup>150</sup> The poor literacy to be seen on many coins strengthens the idea that secular leaders remained in charge of coinage. Unlike that of St. Edmund, the cults of St. Peter and St. Martin were neither new nor in any way connected with the Vikings. It may be argued, therefore, that their issue does not necessarily represent as strong a policy of Christianization as does the St. Edmund coinage. St. Peter and St. Martin may have been chosen more for their local rather than their religious significance. Nevertheless, for the Viking rulers even to have known of these saints indicates their collaboration with churchmen. This, in turn, shows that clergymen survived in these areas and perhaps even continued to exercise considerable influence. The very minting of coins at all – let alone ones intended to evoke the local, indigenous culture – demonstrates the Norse rulers' desire to adopt the trappings of Christian civilization.

The career of Oda, Archbishop of Canterbury and member of an ecclesiastically important family, provides much testimony to the speed with which the Danes in England converted. As Oda had become bishop of Wilton by 929, or maybe even 927, Dorothy Whitelock argues that he must have been born in the last few years of the ninth century.<sup>151</sup> According to tradition, he was the son of a Viking who came to England with Inguar and Hubba, the Viking leaders responsible for killing St. Edmund, king of East Anglia. The likelihood that Oda was born and grew up in East Anglia, or at least the eastern Danelaw, is suggested by a number of facts. On one occasion he interceded with the king regarding the marriage of a Cambridgeshire thane, and in return for his help he was given some land in that county at

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<sup>150</sup> Mark Blackburn, 136.

<sup>151</sup> Whitelock, "The Conversion of the Eastern Danelaw," 169.

Burwell.<sup>152</sup> His nephew must have had connections in the eastern counties, as he was related to Archbishop Oscytel, who owned land in Leicestershire, and was in turn a kinsman to Thurcytel, Abbot of Bedford, who owned estates in Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire. Both Oscytel and Thurcytel are clearly Anglo-Saxon attempts to spell the Scandinavian names Ásketill and Þorketill. We know a little bit about Oscytel; for instance, that he came from a mixed Danish and Anglo-Saxon family that owned lands in the Fens and neighboring parts of the Eastern Midlands, that he succeeded to the see of Dorchester in 949 or 950, and that he became the archbishop of York in 959.<sup>153</sup> Last but not least, the grant to Oda of land at Ely is easiest to explain if he had family connections to the area.<sup>154</sup> If we are correct in surmising that Oda was of Danish background on at least one side of his family, then we see the transition from heathenism all the way to the mightiest position within the English Church within just two generations. Oda might have been a bit more enthusiastic than most of the children of Danish settlers, but not by much; after all, if we assume that Oscytel was the same age when he became bishop of Dorchester as Oda was upon becoming bishop of Wilton, then Oscytel must have been twenty years younger. That is less than a generation's difference. Thurcytel was probably a little younger than Oscytel, for it was perhaps Oscytel who offered him the church of Bedford.<sup>155</sup> Thus, even if we assume that Oda was especially keen, we are still left with the conclusion that the grandchildren, or maybe even the children, of the Danish invaders were thoroughly Christianized.

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<sup>152</sup> William Dunn Macray, ed., *Chronicon Abbatiae Rameseiensis* (1886; repr. Vaduz: Kraus Reprint, 1966), 49.

<sup>153</sup> Andrew Wareham, "Saint Oswald's Family and Kin," in *St. Oswald of Worcester: Life and Influence*, ed. Nicholas Brooks and Catherine Cubitt (London: Leicester University Press, 1996), 48-9; Michael Lapidge, introduction to *Byrhtferth of Ramsey: The Lives of St. Oswald and St. Ecgbwine*, ed. and trans. Michael Lapidge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2009), lxvi.

<sup>154</sup> Whitelock, "The Conversion of the Eastern Danelaw," 170.

<sup>155</sup> Barrow, "Survival and Mutation," 162.

From the conglomeration of evidence of all sorts, it is clear that the Scandinavian settlers and their descendants were totally converted by the mid-tenth century. Unfortunately, it is far more difficult to identify the means by which this came about. Many churches in East Anglia probably survived because of Guthrum's conversion and his and his successors' subsequent promotion of Christianity. Guthrum's conversion, however, would not have affected the northern Danelaw. Despite this, we still see evidence, in the form of Anglo-Scandinavian sculpture, of Norse participation in church life. Furthermore, there is no sign that Guthrum forced Christianity on his Scandinavian subjects, nor could he have performed the work of baptizing. The conversion of the mass of Norsemen in England cannot be explained merely by reference to the conversion of a few prominent leaders.

One possible cause of Norse Christianization that must be discussed is inter-marriage. Obviously, a marriage between a Scandinavian heathen and an English Christian would certainly result in Christian children. Although many churches may have been destroyed or abandoned, and many churchmen killed, the native English population was not displaced by the incoming Norse. Even in Northumbria, therefore, where intermittent Norse rule lasted the longest, no child of mixed background could have failed to be influenced by the surrounding Christian population. Furthermore, the children of mixed marriages would probably have known only the Christian side of their family; the heathen side, of course, would have been in Scandinavia or scattered in other parts of the Danelaw. Perhaps the most influential factor in the child's religion must have been the fact that Christianity demands a degree of loyalty and purity of belief that tends to be incomprehensible in heathen belief systems. As Gro Steinsland points out, Norse religion was never dogmatic. She classifies Norse heathenism as a folk religion and writes, "folk religions have their center of gravity in the cult, not in belief. True, folk religions develop comprehensive mythologies and cosmologies in which gods and powers play important roles, but these beliefs



are not chiseled in dogmas or systematic teachings.”<sup>156</sup> In Judaism and Christianity, the aim of the first three of the Ten Commandments is to guarantee undivided, uncompromised faith. By contrast, historical sources record multiple instances of Norsemen accepting Christ into their pantheon of gods and regarding Christian sacraments as just one more religious ceremony to be performed with many others. A famous example of this is that of Helgi enn magri, Helgi the lean, who, the *Landnámabók* tells us, “was very mixed in his faith; he believed in Christ, but called on Thor in cases of sea-faring and hard times”.<sup>157</sup> A somewhat vaguer implication of the mixing of religions is found in *Landnámabók*’s description of Torf-Einarr jarl, Earl Turf-Einarr, and his brothers’ hallowing of the land they claimed in Iceland. We read that they “put up an axe on Reistar Peak and called the fjord Oxarfjord. In the west they put up an eagle, and called that place Arnarthufa; and at a third place they raised a cross and called the place Kross Ridge”.<sup>158</sup> In his *Life of Anskar*, Rimbert tells us of Danish merchants who practiced Christianity when they were doing business and the continental market town of Dorestadt, but became heathens again upon their return home.<sup>159</sup> Given the ideological demands of Christianity, and considering the unquestionably Christian character of English culture in the ninth and tenth centuries, it is likely that the Christian partner in a mixed marriage would have maintained his or (in most cases) her religion, while the heathen partner would have let his or her religion become mixed.

<sup>156</sup> Gro Steinsland, *Norrøn Religion: Myter, Riter, Samfun* (Oslo, Pax Forlag, 2005), 35.

<sup>157</sup> “Landnámabók” 250: “Helgi var blandinn mjök í trú; hann trúði á Krist, en hét á Þór til sjófara ok harðræða.”

<sup>158</sup> “Landnámabók,” 285: “Þeir settu øxi í Reistargnúp ok kølluðu því Øxarfjlrð; þeir settu ørn upp fyrir vestan ok kølluðu þar Arnarpúfu; en í þriðja stað settu þeir kross; þar nefndu þeir Krossás. Svá helguðu þeir sér allan Øxarfjörð.”

<sup>159</sup> For instance, in chapter 27, Rimbert tells us of Ansgar’s arrival at Birka, which caused great confusion for a Swedish crowd. He tells us that an old man spoke to the crowd at Birka, saying, amongst other things, “some of us who on various occasions have been to Dorstadt have of our own accord adopted this form of religion [Christianity], believing it to be beneficial.” The implication, obviously, is that many in the crowd had been baptized but had quickly abandoned Christianity, if indeed they had ever followed it. The original quote in Latin is “Aliquando nempe quidam ex nobis Dorstadum adeuntes, huius religionis normam profuturam sibi sentientes, spontanea voluntate suscipiebant.” See *Vita Anskarii Auctore Rimberto*, ed. G. Waitz, 58.

The possibility that Christianization took place through inter-marriage raises an important question: did significant numbers of Scandinavian women come to England? If they did, then it would be theoretically possible for purely Norse communities to have survived in England for generations. If the Viking invaders were overwhelmingly male, however, then they must have taken English wives. Surprisingly, a number of sources indicate that many Scandinavian women were among the invaders. First, the discovery of the Adwick-le-Street burial of a woman who most likely came from Norway (though she could possibly have come from northeastern Scotland) shows that there were at least a few women amongst the incoming Scandinavians.<sup>160</sup> There were many Norse female names that achieved brief popularity in northern and eastern England.<sup>161</sup> The *Domesday Book* records fifty-seven place names that contain a Scandinavian female name as their first element. As Judith Jesch points out, it was relatively rare for property to remain in a woman's hands long enough for it to become permanently associated with her.<sup>162</sup> Therefore, while fifty-seven such names do not form a huge group, they are enough to indicate that enough Scandinavian women must have moved to England for some of their names to be incorporated into the local place-names. There is also some documentary evidence to indicate that some of the Vikings brought their families with them. In 893, the *Chronicle* records that the Viking fortress at Benfleet, in Essex, was taken by the English, including "both goods, and women, and also children."<sup>163</sup> It further describes the Norsemen as "placing their women, their ships and their property in East Anglia." Finally, the fact that entire Scandinavian families

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<sup>160</sup> Greg Speed and Penelope Walton Rogers, 84.

<sup>161</sup> Judith Jesch, *Women in the Viking Age* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1991), 76.

<sup>162</sup> Jesch, 78.

<sup>163</sup> ASC A, 893: "befæston hira wif & hira scipu & hira feoh on Eastenglum".

settled in Iceland shows that it is quite plausible that Scandinavian women and children would have left their homeland in order to move to England.<sup>164</sup>

Nevertheless, the percentage of Scandinavian names in northern and eastern England, as recorded in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, was much lower amongst women than amongst men. The most likely explanation for this fact is that there were fewer Scandinavian women than men who came to England, and thus fewer Norse female names and naming patterns were introduced into the English language. In the Danelaw of the ninth and early tenth century, therefore, there must have been English-English marriages, English-Norse marriages, Norse-Norse marriages contracted in Scandinavia, and Norse-Norse marriages contracted in England. Given that more Scandinavian men appear to have come to England than women, it is highly probable that conversion often came about through intermarriage. The *Chronicle* indicates, however, that many entire Norse families came over, and the children of such families could have learnt about Christianity only from people outside their family. Obviously, the pressure created by intermarriage cannot explain their conversion.

Given that many churches and monasteries in the Danelaw were destroyed and their clergymen killed or driven away, it is quite reasonable to think that at least in some areas, missionaries from somewhere else must have been needed before Christian worship and preaching could resume. The most obvious place whence such missionaries would have emerged is the southern and eastern parts of England dominated by Wessex. Unfortunately, no church record or history explicitly records any examples of Wessex evangelization of the Danelaw. We must not let this discourage us! After all, we know from Scandinavian and German sources that the evangelization of Scandinavia, and especially Norway, was largely

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<sup>164</sup> For instance, in the *Landnámabók* we read of Úlfr Grímsson and Svanlaugar Þormóðardóttir who settled at Geitland ("Landnámabók," 77). We also read of Grímr Ingjaldsson who seems to have come to Norway with his wife Bergdís and son Þórir ("Landnámabók," 95-6).

undertaken by English missionaries. Yet the English sources themselves say next to nothing about this. Before dismissing the possibility of Wessex evangelization, therefore, we must see whether there are any hints of such activity.

The re-foundation of various religious establishments shows that by the mid-tenth century, at least some Wessex kings were certainly interested in promoting Christianity in northern and eastern England. For example, according to twelfth-century writers, the church at Beverley, in Yorkshire, was destroyed by Vikings, but re-founded by King Æthelstan in the 930's. It must be noted, however, that as our only record of these events comes from the twelfth, and not the ninth or tenth centuries, we cannot view this destruction and re-foundation as fact.<sup>165</sup> Also in the 930's another Æthelstan, termed the "half-king", was made ealdorman of East Anglia. This appointment was to prove most beneficial for Christianity in the area, for from the handful of mid-tenth century documents that survive, it is clear that there were many small religious establishments throughout the eastern Danelaw that were already in existence by the time these documents were written. Dorothy Whitelock speculates that this ealdorman was responsible for establishing or at least encouraging the establishment of these communities. As she points out, he was an exceptionally pious man who eventually became a monk at Glastonbury.<sup>166</sup> It must also be noted that episcopal consecrations presumably required the approval of the king of Wessex. In 900, despite the fact that York lay firmly within their foes' territory, Æthelbald, York's new archbishop, was consecrated in London.<sup>167</sup> In addition, the witness-lists of charters from the 930's occasionally preserve the names of bishops who cannot

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<sup>165</sup> Richard Morris and Eric Cambridge, "Beverley Minster Before the Early Thirteenth Century", in *Medieval Art and Architecture in the East Riding of Yorkshire*, ed. Christopher Wilson (Leeds, W.S. Maney and Son, 1989), 9-10.

<sup>166</sup> Whitelock, "The Conversion of the Eastern Danelaw," 172-73.

<sup>167</sup> *The Chronicle of Æthelweard*, ed. A. Campbell (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1962), 52.

be identified with any known see.<sup>168</sup> We see a similar phenomenon when we read about the evangelization of Scandinavia: occasional documents name bishops who appear to have had no fixed see. In his *History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen*, Adam of Bremen complains about these wandering English bishops, writing, “[King Olaf Haraldsson] had with him many bishops and priests from England...at the king’s command they also went to Sweden, Gothia, and all the islands beyond Norway, preaching the Word of God and the Kingdom of Jesus Christ to the barbarians.”<sup>169</sup> It is thus possible, even probable, that the English also had wandering bishops in those parts of England that were under foreign control. Such bishops must have depended on the Wessex kings not only to allow their appointment, but to provide them with funding. The existence of missionaries from the south of England is hinted at in the fact that during the tenth century, the northern Danelaw saw a shift in its stone sculpture away from northern styles of ornamentation towards southern ones. David Stocker links this with both the capture of Lincolnshire by King Edmund and attempts to reunite the province of Lindsey with southern England and the diocese of Canterbury.<sup>170</sup> Another possibility is that some of these northern churches were served by southern clergymen. Clearly, at least a few of the Wessex kings took an interest in promoting missionary work amongst the newly arrived Norsemen.

Despite these examples of the Wessex kings’ interest in evangelism, it must be admitted that there is no sign that the Wessex kings went out of their way to spread Christianity. Granted, there might have been little they could do about the state of religion in lands out of their control.

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<sup>168</sup> Abrams, “Conversion and Assimilation,” 142.

<sup>169</sup> *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum*, ed. G. Waitz (Hannover, Hahn: 1876), 79: “Habuitque secum multos episcopos et presbyteros ab Anglia, quorum monitu et doctrina ipse cor suum Deo praeeparavit subiectumque populum illis et regendum commisit. Quorum clari doctrina et virtutibus errant Sigafrið, Grimkil, Rudolf, et Bernard. Hi etiam iussu regis ad Suediam et Gothiam et omnes insulas, quae Nortmanniam sunt, accesserunt evangelizantes barbaris verbum Dei et regnum Iesu Christi.”

<sup>170</sup> David Stocker and Paul Everson, “Five Towns Funerals: Decoding Diversity in Danelaw Stone Sculpture,” in *Vikings and the Danelaw*, ed. James Graham-Campbell, Richard Hall, Judith Jesch, and David N. Parsons (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2001), 238.

It was only when those lands were re-conquered that religious establishments could be built. Perhaps the only thing they could have done was to appoint and support missionary bishops. Overall, however, they seem to have been reluctant to do this. The few possible instances where such bishops are mentioned come only from the 930's. This might be thought a mere coincidence, were it not for the fact that King Æthelstan's probable re-founding of the church at Beverly also occurred in the 930's, as did the appointment of the saintly ealdorman Æthelstan in East Anglia. Furthermore, a number of pieces of information testify to King Æthelstan's piety and interest in furthering the cause of Christianity. An Anglo-Saxon charter from the Priory of St. Peter in Exeter, for instance, records that Æthelstan brought many saints' relics from the continent, and especially from Brittany, to England.<sup>171</sup> The presence of Breton inscriptions in the church at Wareham suggests that Æthelstan imported not only Breton saints to England, but Breton clergymen as well.<sup>172</sup> Æthelstan was also a generous benefactor of ecclesiastical institutions. He established two new religious houses – one at Milton Abbas and one at Muchelney and gave large land grants to other churches.<sup>173</sup> Æthelstan was possibly as enthusiastic about collecting books as he was about collecting relics. He is known to have given manuscripts, some of which were quite expensive, to Christ Church (Canterbury), Bath Abbey, St. Augustine's (Canterbury), and St. Cuthbert's (Chester).<sup>174</sup> All things considered, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that it was Æthelstan, king from 924 or 925 to 939, who was interested in missionary work.

Such a view might be considered uncharitable towards the previous Wessex kings.

Perhaps they simply did not have the opportunity or resources for such work. There are many

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<sup>171</sup> Gabriella Corona, "Saint Basil in Anglo-Saxon Exeter," *Notes and Queries* 49:3 (2002): 316.

<sup>172</sup> Dumville, *Wessex and England from Alfred to Edgar*, 157.

<sup>173</sup> Dumville, *Wessex and England from Alfred to Edgar*, 163.

<sup>174</sup> Simon Keynes, "King Athelstan's Books," in *Learning and Literature in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. Michael lapidge and Helmut Gneuss (Cambridge: University Press, 1985), 147-98.

indications, however, that the kings in Wessex were understandably hesitant to send educated, politically useful clerics into the lands of their enemies. We should not forget Pope Formosus' letter, written sometime between 891 and 896, criticizing the slow reaction to the growth of heathenism in England and ordering that a new bishop be elected and consecrated as soon as the old bishop of a see died. The consecration in 900 of a new archbishop for York might have been unavoidable, as failure to fill such a position would look irresponsible and spiteful. It cannot be argued that it was impossible to send bishops to work in foreigners' territory, for that is exactly what the English did in the case of Scandinavia. Finally, while the northern Danelaw was not permanently recaptured until 954, East Anglia came back under English control in 917. Yet there seems to have been no rush to have old dioceses re-established. In fact, after the Wessex kings regained East Anglia, far from encouraging the consecration of new bishops for the area, they placed ecclesiastical control for Suffolk, and probably for all of East Anglia, under the authority of the bishop of London. (This can be deduced from the will made by Theodred, bishop of London, sometime between 942 and 951, in which he mentions numerous estates that he administers in Suffolk, Norfolk, Cambridgeshire, Nottinghamshire, and Essex.)<sup>175</sup> In short, the Wessex kings were largely disinterested in, and at times may have been actively opposed to the consecration of bishops for service in the Danelaw.

The removal of many saints' relics also suggests that the Wessex kings took the opportunity to remove any religious objects that could be used by their enemies. It might be argued that these removals were carried out not so much to destroy these saints' cults, as to assert the authority of southern and western churches over northern and eastern churches. But frankly, if the Wessex kings were interested in converting the Scandinavian immigrants, it is hard to imagine why they would remove relics from Scandinavian areas. Quite the opposite, a

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<sup>175</sup> Dorothy Whitelock, ed. and trans., *Anglo-Saxon Wills* (Cambridge: University Press, 1930), 2-5.

missionary would want to emphasize a local saint's might, so as to attract a theologically wavering people who would be likely to follow whichever god could provide them with the most practical benefits. Even if Æthelflaed's theft of many Mercian saints were viewed as a religious act, it could hardly be considered an evangelizing one. The re-conquest of the Danelaw was clearly of far greater interest to the Wessex kings than the evangelizing of the Norsemen.

If the Scandinavians' conversion cannot be ascribed overwhelmingly to either the effects of intermarriage or Wessex policy, we must ask who is left who could have influenced religion in the Danelaw. A look at the family and activities of Oda, Archbishop of Canterbury, may provide some hints. As has been mentioned, Oda was from a Danelaw family of mixed Scandinavian and English origin, whose members included at least three other prominent churchmen: Oswald, Oscytel, and Thurcytel. Oda's ability to rise beyond his Danelaw origins to attain the highest position in the English Church – for which he would surely have needed the favor of Wessex – may have been due to the fact that he was brought up by a thegn who bore the Old English name of Æthelhelm, who probably lived outside of the Danelaw.<sup>176</sup> This thegn must have been a man of wealth and power, for he was able to take young Oda on a pilgrimage to Rome. Oda may also have been helped by connections formed in France, for he probably professed as a monk in Fleury and was well-disposed towards the church reform movement.<sup>177</sup> Given his wide-ranging connections and concern for reform, it is almost certainly not a coincidence that the period during and following his rise to power was marked by an increasing number of churches and better ecclesiastical organization in East Anglia. He must have taken at

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<sup>176</sup> *Vita Oswaldi Archiepiscopi Eboracensis*, in *The Historians of the Church of York and its Archbishops*, vol. 1, ed. James Raine (1979; repr. Vaduz: Kraus Reprint, 1965), 404. The *vita* tells us that Oda “reliquit patrem et matrem et omnia quæ ejus juris erant, et adhæsit cuidam venerando militia Deo fideliter credenti, onomate Æthelhelmo, cum quo gratiam paterni affectus adeptus est.” The *vita* does not say that Oda physically left the place of his upbringing and went to live somewhere else, though that would certainly be many people's assumption from the words above. That is why I say that Æthelhelm probably lived outside the Danelaw.

<sup>177</sup> Macray, ed., *Chronicon Abbatiae Ramesiensis*, 15.



least some interest in the education of children from eastern England, for as archbishop of Canterbury he presided over his younger kinsman Oswald's education.<sup>178</sup> Like Oda, Oswald was descended from Danish follower of Inguar who had settled in the eastern Danelaw.<sup>179</sup> It is not unreasonable to think that if Oda took steps to ensure Oswald's education, he may have done the same for other young descendants of the Vikings. In the case of Oswald, his investment certainly paid off, for Oswald proved remarkably adept at using his Danelaw connections to found and reform a number of monasteries throughout eastern England during the second half of the tenth century. For instance, in 962 he founded Westbury-on-Trym near Bristol and had a hand in the foundation of Deerhurst in Gloucestershire and in the re-establishment of monasteries at Winchcombe, Pershore, and Evesham.<sup>180</sup>

There are indications of Oda's evangelizing work, however, that are more concrete than his young kinsman's schooling. Noting that Oda's pontificate was "a notable period in diocesan reorganization", R. R. Darlington once remarked, "it is probably not by accident that the sees of Elmham and Lindsey reappear while Oda was archbishop."<sup>181</sup> Even as bishop of Ramsbury, Oda was surely able to promote religious foundations in eastern England, for although Ramsbury is not in the Danelaw, it was an extremely important diocese from which further archbishops of Canterbury after Oda, such as Sigeric the Serious and Ælfric, came. Anyone who achieved such a position would enjoy favor and influence with the secular rulers and would be in a position to have some bearing on the decisions of other bishops. He could have urged the promotion of Theodred to the bishopric of London c. 931. From Theodred's will, we know that as bishop of

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<sup>178</sup> *The Lives of St. Oswald and St. Ecgbine*, ed. and trans. Michael Lapidge (Oxford: University Press, 2009), 33.

<sup>179</sup> *The Lives of St. Oswald and St. Ecgbine*, 17.

<sup>180</sup> Cavill, 139.

<sup>181</sup> R. R. Darlington, "Ecclesiastical Reform in the Late Old English Period," *English Historical Review* 51 (1936): 386.

London, he also administered churches in at least Suffolk, if not the whole of East Anglia.<sup>182</sup>

Dorothy Whitelock, in fact, suggests that he could have been chosen specifically to reorganize the area of the former Danelaw.<sup>183</sup> His will mentions a number of small religious establishments in East Anglia whose interests he had presumably promoted. He was certainly responsible for the re-establishment of an identifiable diocese in East Anglia, for in 956, Eadulf, Bishop of Elmham, made his profession to Oda.<sup>184</sup> As this was the first diocese to be organized in East Anglia since the Viking conquest, it came to function simply as the bishopric of East Anglia for well over a century. On one occasion, King Eadwig (955-59) made a grant of land to Oda at Southwell. This site later became the core of the Nottinghamshire diocese, suggesting that Oda must have quickly taken the opportunity to use the site as a base from which to promote the Christian cause. Paul Cavill suggests that Oda's promotion to Canterbury in 942 may well have been because of his success in promoting and reorganizing the Church in heavily Scandinavian areas. Just a few years earlier Olaf Sihtricsson (generally known as Amlaíb Cuarán), the Irish-Norse king defeated at the Battle of Brunanburh in 937, had reneged on his promises and had re-taken Northumbria. King Edmund was therefore forced to make an advance into Northumbria. It is likely that in considering the permanent re-conquest of Northumbria, Edmund recognized the value of a churchman of Danish ancestry who could help the church advance in Danish areas and incorporate it into the structure of the rest of the English Church.<sup>185</sup>

This is not to suggest that Oda was singularly responsible for converting the Danes in England. The very fact that the *Liber Eliensis* records that in the very early tenth century, the priest at Horningsea was already baptizing heathens, means that some churches must have

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<sup>182</sup> Whitelock, "The Conversion of the Eastern Danelaw," 171.

<sup>183</sup> Whitelock, "The Conversion of the Eastern Danelaw," 172.

<sup>184</sup> Frank Merry Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1943), 437.

<sup>185</sup> Cavill, 234-35.

survived and continued to function throughout the period of Scandinavian rule.<sup>186</sup> In East Anglia, Guthrum's conversion probably played a large role in preventing further destruction of churches, while further north, the survival of the pre-Viking church structure indicates those churches aligned with the see of York must have continued to be used for religious purposes, despite the loss of their bishops.<sup>187</sup> The willingness of the archbishops of York to collaborate with the Viking rulers in order to guarantee the survival of their diocese was surely one of the most important factors contributing to Northumbrian religious life in the late ninth and all of the tenth centuries. Such collaboration was also good for missionary purposes, for some Viking rulers in Northumbria clearly converted relatively early. Guthfrith, for instance, was buried at the high church at York in 895, a fact that must indicate that he had been baptized.<sup>188</sup> For instance, the evidence of stone sculpture and coinage indicates strong links between York and Lincoln in the early tenth century, suggesting that the archbishop of York may have been responsible for religious practice in Lindsey.<sup>189</sup> In a study of stone sculpture in Yorkshire and Lincolnshire, David Stocker and Paul Everson found that in the early tenth century, much of the sculpture in both areas was done on stone from York. They propose that York must have been the centre of stone sculpture production at this time.<sup>190</sup> Furthermore, the wide distribution of stone sculpture from York is surely a sign that the archbishop of York had become involved in the founding and building of churches in dioceses that had been destroyed.<sup>191</sup>

In conclusion, the Norsemen in England appear to have converted over the course of the first half of the tenth century, with the 930s probably being the most critical period in the

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<sup>186</sup> See the discussion of this incident at Horningsea on page 32.

<sup>187</sup> See page 35.

<sup>188</sup> Innes, 79.

<sup>189</sup> Hadley, *The Vikings in England: Settlement, Society, and Culture*, 225.

<sup>190</sup> David Stocker and Paul Everson, *Summoning St. Michael: Early Romanesque Towers in Lincolnshire* (Oxford: Oxbow, 2006), 229-33.

<sup>191</sup> Hadley, *The Vikings in England: Settlement, Society, and Culture*, 52-3.

eventual conclusion of this process. Although intermarriage doubtlessly sped this process up tremendously, it was, by itself, insufficient to convert the Scandinavians, for much of the ecclesiastical structure that served even the already Christian Anglo-Saxons had been destroyed. In both Northumbria and East Anglia, the embrace of Christianity by local Scandinavian leaders probably encouraged their followers to do likewise. Formal missionary work by English churchmen seems to have been pursued in East Anglia by King Æthelstan between 924 and 939 and by Oda, bishop of Ramsbury from c. 927 to 941 and archbishop of Canterbury from 941 to 958. Unless we count the continuing consecration of archbishops of York, there is no evidence that any of the Wessex kings or archbishops of Canterbury attempted to do missionary work in Northumbria. This is not surprising, however, as Northumbria remained under Scandinavian political control much longer than other parts of the Danelaw, a situation that surely complicated any attempts to send evangelizing priests into the area. A poem found under the year 942 in all but the E and F manuscripts of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* celebrates King Edmund's capture of Leicester, Lincoln, Nottingham, Stamford, and Derby by proclaiming, "the *Dæne* were before subjected by force under the *Norðmannum*, for a long time in bonds of captivity to the heathens, until the defender of warriors, the son of Edward, King Edmund, redeemed them, to his glory."<sup>192</sup> As the poem is celebrating Edmund's capture of these five boroughs from Amlaíb Cúarán, a member the Hiberno-Norse family from Dublin that spent decades laying claim to York, it is likely that *Dæne* refers to Scandinavians who had been in northern England since the mid-ninth century and *Norðmannum* to Scandinavians who had only recently arrived from Ireland. What is significant is that by contrasting the *Dæne* with the heathen *Norðmannum*, the

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<sup>192</sup> ASC A, 942: "Her Eadmund cyning, Engla þeoden/maga mundbora, Myrce geode/dyre dædfruma, swa Dor scadeþ/Hwitanwylles geat & Humber ea/brada brimstream. Burga fife/Ligoraceaster & Lin[d]cylene/& Snotingham, swylce Stanford/eac Deoraby. Dæne wæran ær/under Norðmannum nyde gebegde/on hæþenra hæfteclommum/lange þraga, oþ hie alysde eft/for his weorþscipe wiggendra hleo/afera Eadweardes, Eadmund cyning." The same poem, with only a few spelling changes, is found in ASC B, C, D, 942.

poem implies that those Scandinavians who had arrived in the ninth century had become Christian by 942. Such a poem, combined with the existence of a great deal of Anglo-Scandinavian sculpture that must have been carved in a Christian context, indicates that the Vikings who settled in Northumbria in the late ninth-century converted at about the same time as the Scandinavians further to the south. Their conversion must have been aided by the fact that the ecclesiastical structure in Northumbria, unlike that in East Anglia, never collapsed. The archdiocese of York survived, frequently aligned itself politically with the Viking leaders who had taken over, and protected those churches that were aligned with it. There is no evidence that any of the archbishops of York ever organized any evangelical work amongst the Scandinavians in their area, but as they were able to protect local churches, they may have perceived the need for such work to be less keen. In conclusion, the conversion of the Norse in England was brought about through a combination of intermarriage, political conversions and alliances, and the specific efforts of King King Æthelstan, Oda, and (to a lesser extent) the other churchmen related to Oda.

There is little sign that the ninth-century Norsemen who invaded England had much interest in Christianity. The few conversions that we read about, such as that of Guthrum, seem to have been purely political. That being said, once the Vikings began to take up an agricultural lifestyle in the lands in northern and eastern England assigned to them, they showed no resistance to Christianity. On the contrary, the lack of place-names indicating the existence of Scandinavian cults suggests that such cults did not survive very long. Furthermore, the minting of coins like the St. Edmund pennies demonstrate that the Scandinavian leaders in the Danelaw were eager for all to see how Christian they could be. If Oda, a heathen's son, was at all typical of children raised in the Danelaw, then Scandinavian heathenism lasted not longer than a

generation or two in England. The transformation of the Vikings into peasants clearly had a dramatic impact on their religious views. A similar pattern will be seen in Normandy, where the settlement of the Vikings amongst a native, Christian, agricultural population resulted in rapid conversion and assimilation. The early history of the Norsemen in Ireland was quite similar to that of those in England and Normandy, and thus it is reasonable to expect that they would show an increased interest in Christianity upon becoming established in Ireland. The Irish Church and political system were organized differently, however, from their counterparts in England. The extent to which these differences would affect the Irish Vikings' religion remains to be seen.

## Chapter 2

### The Conversion of the Normans

Like the Danelaw in England, Normandy was created when groups of probably mostly Danish, though sometimes Norwegian, pirates began to settle amongst the population whom they had been plundering. Many of the pirates who eventually settled in Normandy had even spent time in England, as is shown by place-names in the Bessin and Cotentin, which contain Anglo-Saxon elements.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, both Normandy and the Danelaw were established only after the Vikings had spent decades raiding the countryside where they would eventually settle. Despite these similarities, it is important to note a few significant differences between the Danelaw and Normandy. First, the Scandinavians attained more power in England than they ever could have hoped for in the western Carolingian empire. It is true that the Danelaw, like Normandy, was created by a treaty, and that this treaty was made after King Alfred had defeated the Vikings. But Alfred's victory merely stopped the Vikings' advance, while the treaty formalized what was already clear to everyone – that within a few years the Danish "Great Army" had overrun and now controlled most of northern and eastern England. By contrast, while the Normans were probably especially active in the area that came to be Normandy, they moved over much of the western Carolingian empire and never managed to replace the Carolingian administration of any area with their own rule.<sup>2</sup> An act dated December 17, 905, by which King Charles III gave his chancellor Ernust eleven serfs from Pîtres, in the *pagus* of Rouen, shows that the Carolingian administration in the region of Rouen had not completely collapsed.<sup>3</sup> In addition, while the Treaty of Wedmore divided England between Alfred and Guthrum, recognizing Guthrum as an independent ruler of his territory, it is clear that the Treaty of St-Clair-sur-Epte never established

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<sup>1</sup> L. Musset, "Pour l'étude comparative de deux fondations politiques des Vikings: le royaume d'York et le duché de Rouen," *Northern History* 10 (1975): 47-52; François de Beaurepaire. "Les noms d'Anglo-Saxons contenus dans la toponymie normande." *Annales de Normandie* 10 (1960): 307-12.

<sup>2</sup> See the discussion of the Vikings' destruction of the kingdoms of eastern and northern England on pages 12-15.

<sup>3</sup> M. Philippe Lauer, ed., *Recueil des Actes de Charles III le Simple, Roi de France (893-923)* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1949), 112-13.

Rollo as an autonomous sovereign, unburdened by any duties towards the Carolingians.<sup>4</sup> We know from a diploma dated March 14, 918, that speaks of “the part of this abbey that we conceded to the Normans of the Seine for the safe-keeping of the kingdom”, that Rollo was expected to prevent the Carolingians from being bothered by further attacks, whether Viking or Breton.<sup>5</sup> Certainly by the time that Dudo wrote, a little less than a century after the Treaty of St-Clair-sur-Epte, the Norman dukes must have recognized that they were subordinate to the Carolingian kings, for Dudo, who was writing on their behalf, portrays them that way. In short, the Vikings in the western Carolingian Empire never achieved, even for a moment, the autonomy or might that their brethren in England did.

The western Carolingian Empire suffered several decades of raids by Scandinavian pirates. The Vikings, however, were just one of a number of problems to befall the lands of the Franks during the early ninth century. Breton raiders forced the Franks to struggle constantly to defend the northwestern part of their territory, while the members of the Carolingian dynasty fought amongst themselves over the rule of the empire.<sup>6</sup> The region called Neustria, which included what eventually became Normandy, was thus “a land exposed to Breton expansion and to punitive deterrent Frankish expeditions against the Bretons...it had been backward long before the Vikings arrived.”<sup>7</sup> Charles the Simple’s agreement in 911 to cede this land to Rollo and his Scandinavian followers should, therefore, be seen as an attempt both to settle many Vikings and to lay on them the burden of defending the northwestern edge of the empire. In short, although Normandy did not exist until 911, to understand Norman history and the conversion of the Norse

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<sup>4</sup> Roger Jouet, *Et la Normandie devint française* (Paris: Mazarine, 1983), 13.

<sup>5</sup> *Recueil des Actes de Charles III le Simple, Roi de France (893-923)*, 211: “partem ipsius abbacie quam annuimus Normannis Sequanensibus, videlicet Rolloni suisque comitibus, pro tutela regni”.

<sup>6</sup> To read about the complicated rivalries amongst the Carolingians that contributed to the instability of the region, see Jacques Boussard, “Les destinées de la Neustrie du 9<sup>e</sup> au 11<sup>e</sup> siècle,” *Cahiers de civilisation medieval* 11 (1968): 20-7 and Jan Dhondt, *Etudes sur la naissance des principautés territoriales en France (IXe-Xe siècle)* (Bruges: De Tempel, 1948).

<sup>7</sup> Eleanor Searle, *Predatory Kinship and the Creation of Norman Power, 840-1066*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988, 35.



who settled in Normandy, we must first look at earlier Viking activity in the western Carolingian empire, particularly along the Seine.

The Franks living along the Seine met the Vikings for the first time in 820, when thirteen boats *de Nordmannia* attacked first Flanders, and from there sailed down along the coast towards the Seine. When an unspecified number of such boats appeared in the mouth of the Seine, the Franks managed to repulse the pirates and to kill five of them.<sup>8</sup> Over the next couple decades the Scandinavian incursions increased in intensity, a situation that the disunity among Charlemagne's family members did nothing to discourage. A series of really devastating attacks against the towns of France began on May 14, 841, when, according to the *Annales Fontanellenses priores*, the Vikings sacked Rouen and the rich abbey of St. Ouen.<sup>9</sup> They went on to burn the monastery of Jumièges on May 24. On March 20, 845, a hundred ships full of Vikings appeared on the Seine. They raided along the shore and reached Paris on March 28. King Charles the Bald was forced to bribe them with 7000 silver *livres* to depart, though the enormity of this sum probably encouraged other Vikings to attempt similar attacks.<sup>10</sup> Over the next few decades a number of works, most prominently the *Annales de Saint-Bertin*, the *Annales de Saint-Vaast*, Eginhard's *Annales Royales*, and Flodoard's *Annales* and *Historia Remensis ecclesiae*, record many Viking attacks on different locations throughout France.<sup>11</sup> The *Annales de Saint-Bertin*, for instance, record in 856 that "in mid-August, other Danish pirates again sailed up the Seine. They ravaged and plundered the *civitates* on both banks of the river and even some

<sup>8</sup> G. H. Pertz, ed., *Annales Regni Francorum inde ab anno 741 usque ad annum 829* (Hannover: Hahn, 1895), 153-54.

<sup>9</sup> J. Laporte, ed., excerpt from "Annales Fontanellenses priores," in *Documents de l'Histoire de la Normandie*, ed. Michel de Boüard (Toulouse: Privat, 1972), 68.

<sup>10</sup> Félix Grat, Jeanne Vielliard, and Suzanne Clémencet, eds., *Annales de Saint-Bertin* (Paris: Librairie C. Klincksieck, 1964), 845.

<sup>11</sup> The *Annales de St-Bertin*, or *Annales Bertiniani*, cover the years 830 to 882 and were written at the monastery of St-Bertin in Pas-de-Calais. The *Annales de St-Vaast* (*Annales Vedastini*) cover the years 874 to 900 and were written at the monastery of St-Vaast in Arras, also in Pas-de-Calais. Eginhard's *Annales Royales* cover the years between 741 and 829. Flodoard was an early tenth-century chronicler and canon at the church in Reims. He based his *Historia Remensis ecclesiae* on original sources and wrote his *Annales* between 919 and 966, when he died.

further away, also monasteries and *villae*".<sup>12</sup> In 857 and again in 861 we read that Danish pirates burnt Paris.<sup>13</sup> But between 867 and 885 there appears to have been relative calm in Neustria.

In 880, groups of Vikings, especially those chased from England by Alfred the Great, began to collect in the region of Ghent, whence they organized military operations larger than ever before.<sup>14</sup> The departure of large numbers of Scandinavians from southeastern England to the northern coast of the Carolingian empire is noted in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, which in 880 tells us that "the host which had occupied Fulham went oversea to Ghent in the land of the Franks". Two years later we read, "the host went up along the Meuse deeper inland into the land of the Franks", and a year after that, "the host went up the Scheldt to Condé", and the next year, "the host went up the Somme to Amiens".<sup>15</sup> In 885 a fleet of about 700 ships sailed up the Seine.<sup>16</sup> Abbo, a monk at the abbey of Saint-Germain-des-Prés, described the ensuing siege in great detail. Under the command of Count Eudes, the son of Robert the Strong, the city managed to resist the attackers, but not to drive them off. In October 886 Charles the Fat paid them to leave with 700 *livres* of silver and the right of passage on the river. In 889 they devastated large areas of Neustria. Count Eudes paid them again to leave, but a group of them simply went to Saint-Lô, which they besieged. The people of the town surrendered in 890, only to be massacred. The *Annales de Saint-Vaast* record a number of Viking attacks along the Seine in 890, 896, 897, and 898.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>12</sup> *Annales de St-Bertin*, 856: "Iterum pyratae Danorum alii mediante augusto Sequanam ingrediuntur, et vastatis direptisque ex utraque fluminis parte ciuitatibus, etiam procul positis, ac monasteriis atque uillis."

<sup>13</sup> *Annales de St-Bertin*, 857, 861.

<sup>14</sup> *ASC A, D, E*, 880.

<sup>15</sup> *ASC A*, 882, 883, 884: "se here up andlang Mæse ofor on Frangland," "se here up on Scald to Cundoð," "se here up on Sunnan to Embenum." The same information is also found in *ASC D, E, F*, 882, 883; *ASC D, E*, 884; *ASC C*, 883 [=882], 884 [=883], 885 [=884].

<sup>16</sup> Anthony Adams and A. G. Rigg, ed. and trans., "A Verse Translation of Abbo of St. Germain's *Bella Parisiacae urbis*," *The Journal of Medieval Latin* 14 (2004): 18-68. Adams' and Rigg's work is a translation of Paul von Winterfeld, *Abbonis Bella Parisiacae urbis*, MGH Poetae Latini Aevi Carolini 4.1 (Berlin, 1899), 72-122.

<sup>17</sup> Chrétien César Auguste Dehaisnes, ed., *Les Annales de Saint-Bertin et de Saint-Vaast, Suivies de Fragments d'une Chronique Inédite* (Paris: Chez Mme. V. Jules Renouard, 1871), 890, 896, 897, 898.

Unsurprisingly, much of the administration of the Christian Church and the ability to carry out its cult was destroyed by the Viking pillaging of the countryside and especially of the churches and monasteries. It is impossible to count the total number of churches destroyed by the Vikings in the land where their descendants later set up house. The surviving annals were written at monasteries outside of what became Normandy and their descriptions of ruin tend to be vague. In a depressingly typical entry, the annalist of St-Bertin tells us that in 843, “Scandinavian pirates attacked the city of Nantes, with the bishop and many clerics and laymen and women being killed and the *civitas* pillaged and they attacked the lower parts of Aquitaine, which were soon to be depopulated.”<sup>18</sup> Janet L. Nelson, in her introduction to her translation of the *Annals of St-Bertin*, argues that the annalists tended to use the word *civitas* to refer to a town where a bishop’s see was located.<sup>19</sup> Thus we can surmise that the Viking raid of 843 probably did much to lessen the worldly resources of the local church administration. The devastation in northern France does not appear to have been as severe as it was in East Anglia, where the old diocesan structure was so completely destroyed that new dioceses later had to be created out of whole cloth. In the area granted to the Vikings, there remained enough of a sense of what the local church administration should be that it was possible to assign new bishops to ancient sees. Nevertheless, of the sees in what became Normandy, only Rouen remained occupied continuously throughout the later ninth century. After Walbert, who was at the Council of Pîtres in 862, there is no longer any mention of a bishop at Avranches; Erchambert, the bishop of Bayeux, was not replaced after his death in 876.<sup>20</sup> There is no record of any bishop of Sées after

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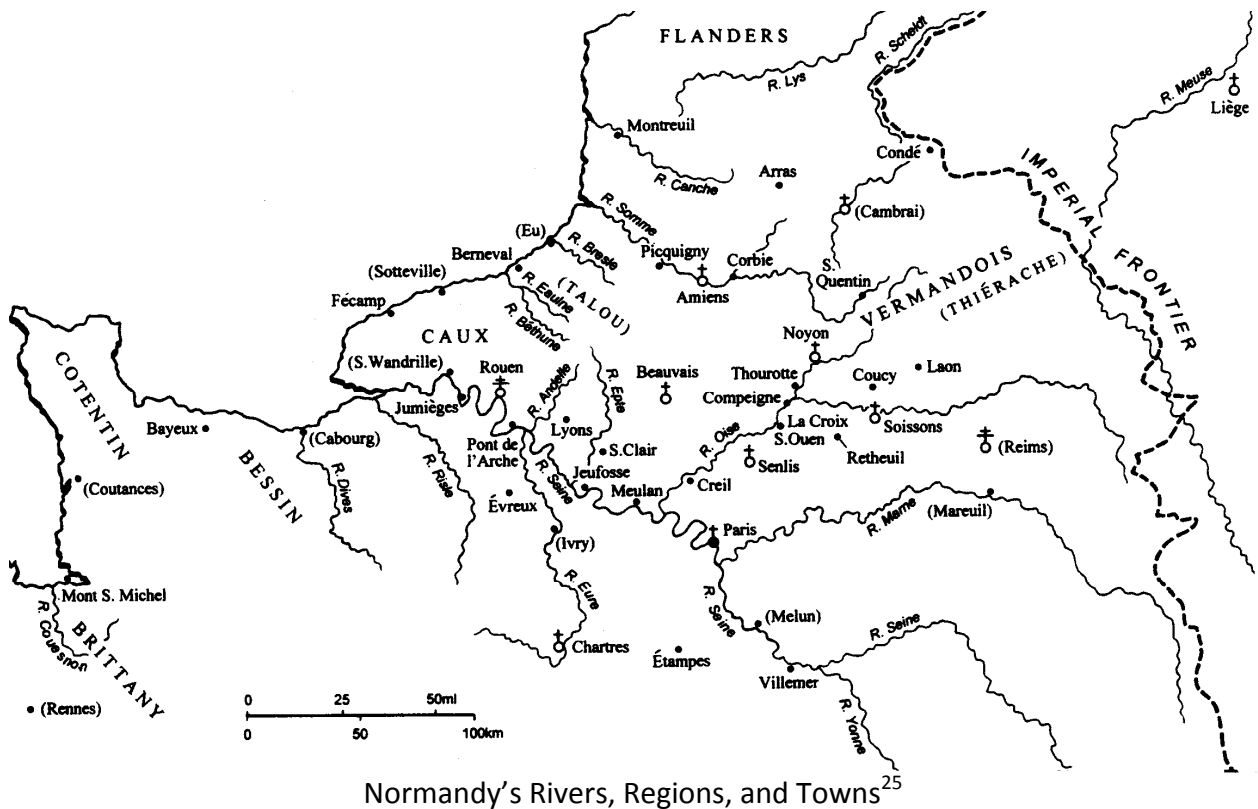
<sup>18</sup> *Annales de Saint-Bertin*, 843: “Pyrate Nordomandorum urbem Namnetum adgressi, interfectis episcopo et multis clericorum atque laicorum sexusque promiscui, deprædata ciuitate, inferiores Aquitaniae partes depopulaturi adoriuntur.”

<sup>19</sup> Janet L. Nelson, introduction to *The Annals of St-Bertin*, ed. and trans. Janet L. Nelson (Manchester: University Press, 1991), 18.

<sup>20</sup> *Gallia Christiana in Provincias Ecclesiasticas Distributa* (Paris: Welter, 1900), 11:473-74; 11:352.

910.<sup>21</sup> The total lack of a bishop or the exile of a bishop from his see could be long-lasting:

Bayeux remained without a bishop for fifty years and no bishop lived in Lisieux for more than a hundred years, from the end of the ninth century until 990.<sup>22</sup> A succession of five bishops of Coutances was forced to leave its diocese to live in Rouen.<sup>23</sup> Evidence for the collapse of the episcopal structure in northern France, or at least of the displacement of the bishops and of the chaotic conditions of the region, can be seen in the final act of a council called by Pope John VIII in 878. Neither the signature of Jean, bishop of Rouen, nor of any other bishop from the area that became Normandy appears at the end of this act.<sup>24</sup>



<sup>21</sup> *Gallia Christiana*, 11: 679.

<sup>22</sup> *Gallia Christiana*, 11: 766.

<sup>23</sup> *Gallia Christiana*, 11: 869.

<sup>24</sup> Philippe Labbé and Gabriel Cossart, eds., "Consilium Tricassinum II ab Ioanne VIII Papa et Episcopis Gallicanis," in *Sacrosancta concilia ad regiam editionem exacta: quæ nunc quarta parte prodit auctior*, (Paris: Impensis Societatis Typographicæ Librorum Ecclesiasticorum ussu Regis constitutæ, 1671-2), 9: 313.

<sup>25</sup> Christiansen, maps for *History of the Normans by Dudo of St-Quentin*, trans. Eric Christiansen (Rochester: The Boydell Press, 1998), 232.

Like the episcopal structure, the once thriving monasticism of northwestern Neustria all but collapsed.<sup>26</sup> Most of the monasteries of the town of Rouen survived, although they sent their relics elsewhere – generally to the dioceses of Amiens, Thérouanne, and Cambrai – for safekeeping.<sup>27</sup> One example of a rouennais monastery that did not survive is that of St-Ouen; its monks fled at the beginning of the 860's.<sup>28</sup> We also know that the monks of Fontenelle (St-Wandrille) went into exile in 858 and that at around the same time the monks of Jumièges sought refuge at Haspres.<sup>29</sup> Though impossible to date with precision, the monasteries of St-Taurin d'Evreux, La Croix-Saint-Leufroy, Montivilliers, and Fécamp were destroyed in the 850's.<sup>30</sup> The monks of all of the monasteries, with the exception of Fécamp, fled with their relics and treasures; those of Fécamp were massacred.<sup>31</sup> The violence against religious establishments does not seem to have diminished towards the end of the ninth century; on the contrary, Flodoard describes Archbishop Fulk taking in priests, other clerics, and monks escaping from Norsemen “infesting the lands and depopulating diverse places” in the 890's.<sup>32</sup> In short, although the church structure of northern France was not as completely obliterated as that of eastern England, it is clear that enough churches and monasteries were destroyed, and the episcopacy was thrown

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<sup>26</sup> For a case study of the effects of Viking violence on a single Carolingian monastery that we have more information about than we have about most, see Hélène Noizet's study of the monks from St-Martin de Tours and their attempts to safeguard their relics (Hélène Noizet, “Les chanoines de Saint-Martin de Tours et les Vikings,” in *Les fondations scandinaves en Occident et les débuts du duché de Normandie*, ed. Pierre Bauduin (Caen: Publications du CRAHM, 2005), 53-66.)

<sup>27</sup> Le Maho, Jacques, “Les Normands de la Seine à la fin du IXe siècle,” *Les fondations scandinaves en Occident et les débuts du duché de Normandie*, ed. Pierre Bauduin, Caen: Publications du CRAHM, 2005, 161-79, 168.

<sup>28</sup> *Gallia Christiana*, 11: 136.

<sup>29</sup> *Gallia Christiana*, 11:158; 11:190. Lucien Musset studies the flight of the monks from St-Wandrille, Jumièges, and St-Ouen in “L'exode des reliques du diocèse de Sées au temps des invasions normandes,” *Bulletin de la société archéologique et historique de l'Orne* 83 (1970): 8-17.

<sup>30</sup> *Gallia Christiana*, 11: 626; 11: 632-3; 11: 281; 11: 201.

<sup>31</sup> *Gallia Christiana*, 11: 201.

<sup>32</sup> *Flodoardi Canonici Remensis Ecclesiae Libri Quatuor*, PL 135, col. 0288.

into a state of such upheaval, that the survival of the Christian religion in the region must have seemed in doubt to observers at the time.<sup>33</sup>

Unfortunately, the *Annales de Saint-Vaast* cut off in the year 900, while Flodoard's annals do not pick up until 919, so that the decade immediately preceding the formal establishment of Normandy is almost blank for us. Obviously the Scandinavians probably continued to engage in the same sort of raiding along the Seine that they had done in the 890's, but nothing more specific can be known. Our main source of information about the events that led to the foundation of Normandy is *De moribus et actis primorum Normanniae Ducum*, a frequently anachronistic and politically partisan work written by the monk Dudo some time between 996 and 1020.<sup>34</sup> Dudo was not a native of the land he described. Rather, he visited Normandy for the first time in 987 as an envoy of Count Albert, who wanted to secure the Norman Count Richard I's help in averting an invasion by the new king, Hugh.<sup>35</sup> Over the next few years, he continued to visit Rouen, and in 996 was asked by the dying Richard I to "describe the customs and deeds of the Norman land".<sup>36</sup> This task did not immediately claim Dudo's attention, but after being reminded of it by Richard I's "most super-excellent son, the patrician Richard who lives to this day, and by the distinguished count Rolf," Dudo composed a highly fanciful history.<sup>37</sup> It claims that the Vikings were originally "Dacians" who, having escaped from the Greek destruction of Troy, were later uncharitably expelled from among their own people, and were thus forced to wander around Gaul, pillaging and killing as they went.<sup>38</sup>

Although chance references in other works allow us to check the truthfulness of some of Dudo's

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<sup>33</sup> For more on the damage that the Vikings did to the Church, see Olivier Guillot, "Les conditions religieuses de l'installation des Normands autour de l'année 911," *Revue historique de droit français et étranger* 52 (1974): 545-7.

<sup>34</sup> Eric Christiansen, introduction to *History of the Normans by Dudo of St-Quentin*, trans. Eric Christiansen (Rochester: The Boydell Press, 1998), xiii-xv.

<sup>35</sup> Christiansen, xi.

<sup>36</sup> *De moribus et actis primorum Normanniae Ducum*, PL 141, col. 0612C.

<sup>37</sup> *De moribus et actis primorum Normanniae Ducum*, PL 141, col. 0612D.

<sup>38</sup> *De moribus et actis primorum Normanniae Ducum*, PL 141, col. 0620B-C.

claims, no other work composed at this time even attempts to describe the early history of the duchy of Normandy. We must begin, therefore, with Dudo's history.

Dudo obviously knew that his patrons were the counts of Normandy, and he understandably avoids statements that would cast his patrons' forefather, Rollo, in a negative light. He could not completely avoid the subject of Viking violence, however, and an acknowledgement of the harm done by them in what he calls "the Frankish kingdom" can be found in his first book, where he describes the evil conduct of the chieftain Hasting.<sup>39</sup> To Hasting and his followers, Dudo attributes the invasion of the sovereignty of Gaul, persecution, butchery, rape, the cruel death of churchmen, the desecration of the priesthood and trampling of holy places, and the enslavement of many people.<sup>40</sup> Dudo goes on to mention specific attacks on various towns and religious buildings. His report of Viking atrocities culminates in an episode in which a particularly wicked Viking pretends to be ill so that the local bishop will baptize him. He is baptized, but his men report a few hours later that he has died. As he was a convert, his men are able to hold his funeral in a nearby monastery. When all the locals, including the bishop and count, have assembled within the monastery, the Viking jumps from his bier and leads his men in slaying or enslaving everyone.<sup>41</sup> The fact that an almost identical story is told in the

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<sup>39</sup> Lucien Musset discusses Dudo's portrayal of the Vikings before their settlement in Normandy in "L'image de la Scandinavie dans les œuvres normandes," in *Nordica et Normannica: Recueil d'études sur la Scandinavie ancienne et médiévale, les expéditions des Vikings et la fondation de la Normandie* (Paris: Société des études nordique, 1997), 215-19.

<sup>40</sup> *De moribus et actis primorum Normanniae Ducum*, PL 141, cols. 0621D-0622A: "Galliae potestatis invasit dominium, Franciscum usurpavit sibi regnum. Temeravit sacerdotium, conculcavit sanctuarium. Verbis factisque lacescivit Francorum regem, civitatibus cum suis triste commorantem. Fremit circa muros praesidiorum, ceu lupus circa caulas ovium. Floccipendit Francos, suis praesidiis metu receptos. Persequitur cunctos, ceu leo cervos. Trucidat inventos, quos reperit sepositos. Efficitur strages, jugulantur cuspide tristes. Mulctatur clerus, crudeli morte punitus. Casulas nefarii induunt, quas altaribus sacris diripiunt. Vestitur alba, officio missae dedicata. Quisquis in illos arma sumit, interimitur crudeliter. Caetera gens armis frigida ducitur captiva. Uxores a pluribus stupratae ducuntur flebiliter advenae. Omnis puellarum sexus ab ipsis turpiter devirginatur. Cum juvenibus senes longe lateque trahuntur extorres. Quidquid est animalium redigunt in pretium. Crescit rabies furiosa, multis malis augmentata." Eric Christiansen argues that contrary to Dudo's portrayal, Hasting was not a uniquely vicious Viking. In fact, Christiansen suggests that Hasting appears to have been the Viking who made peace with King Alfred in 893 (Christiansen, introduction to the *History of the Normans*, xv).

<sup>41</sup> *De moribus et actis primorum Normanniae Ducum*, PL 141, cols. 0622C-0624D.

*Heimskringla* of Harald Hardrada suggests that this particular ruse had become a well-known, entertaining anecdote that could be ascribed to any Viking whom one wanted to vilify.<sup>42</sup> It is also possible that in this episode Dudo probably confused Vikings with Saracens. Nevertheless, his telling of this story reflects the common stereotype that Scandinavians were generally fake converts.

Dudo cleanly separates Rollo from such crimes by not introducing him until the second book of his narrative. It is important to note that he does not portray Rollo as a uniquely saintly man, but merely as an instrument used by God in the re-building of the Church. He tells us that Rollo once had a vision in which he beheld himself in a Frankish dwelling, being washed free of leprosy at a spring, while thousands of different types of birds flew around him, washed themselves in the same spring, sat down to eat together with no separation according to genera or species, and then carried off twigs to build nests, all the while yielding to Rollo's authority.<sup>43</sup> One might ask how Dudo could possibly know so much about the inner workings of the mind of a man who had died years before Dudo even came to Normandy, but this would be to miss the image that Dudo creates of Rollo, and by extension, of the soon-to-be-established Normandy. In a move that is quite unusual for his time, Dudo portrays the Normans not as descendants of a common ancestor, but as a mixture of many different types of people.<sup>44</sup> Like Rollo, they are all dipped in the spring before they come together, showing that Dudo saw the Normans as a people that did not exist before being converted. The baptism of individuals preceded the formation of the Norman people. Like birds building nests, the Normans will rebuild the cities that they have

<sup>42</sup> *Heimskringla*, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, vol. 26 in ÍF (Reykjavík: Íslenska Fornritafélag, 1941), 80-81.

<sup>43</sup> *De moribus et actis primorum Normanniae Ducum*, PL 141, col. 0633A-0634A.

<sup>44</sup> Medieval writers tended to portray peoples as being all descended either from one ancestor or from culturally homogenous groups who had been forced to flee their homelands. The anonymous eighth-century *Liber Historiae Francorum*, for instance, says that the Franks were the descendents of a group of Trojans who had been forced into exile following the fall of Troy (Bruno Krusch, ed., *Liber Historiae Francorum*, in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica: Scriptores Rerum Merovingicarum* (Hannover: Hahn, 1888), 2: 241.) The eleventh-century *Lebor Gabála Éirenn* ultimately traces the history of the Gaels back to one of the seventy-two men who built the Tower of Babel (R. A. Stewart Macalister, ed. and trans., *Lebor Gabála Éirenn: The Book of the Taking of Ireland* (Dublin: Irish Texts Society, 1941), 1:147-99.)



devastated. Finally, as they lack a shared ancestry, the various individuals are united by loyalty to a leader, that is, Rollo, the count of Rouen.

Returning to the narration of actual events, Dudo tells us that Rollo first reached the Seine in 876.<sup>45</sup> Having found the land around Rouen to be fertile, but lacking any real leaders, Rollo and his followers decided to claim the region for themselves.<sup>46</sup> From there, they moved on to conquer nearby towns, along the way defeating the Scandinavian band led by Hasting. Dudo follows the Viking expeditions of Rollo for some years, and though he does not portray him as being treacherous or cruel, like the Vikings described in his first book, he does not hide the destruction done by Rollo and his men in Francia. After King Charles managed to rout Rollo's forces at Chartres, the two men agreed to negotiations. With Franco, the archbishop of Rouen, and Duke Robert acting as go-betweens, Rollo and Charles met at St. Clair and Rollo "put his hands between the hands of the king" while the king "gave his daughter, Gisla by name, to be the wife of that same duke, and he gave the specified territory from the river Epte to the sea, and all of Brittany, as an *allod* and property."<sup>47</sup> Dudo goes on to tell us that in 912, "archbishop Franco baptized Rollo, after he had been instructed in the catholic faith of the Holy Trinity; and Robert, duke of the Franks, received him from the font of the Saviour, bestowed his name upon him, and honourably enriched him with great rewards and gifts."<sup>48</sup>

Some aspects of Dudo's account can be confirmed elsewhere, some are misleading, and some are just plain wrong. The information that Dudo gives us about Rollo's origin and the date

<sup>45</sup> *De moribus et actis primorum Normanniae Ducum*, PL 141, col. 0638B.

<sup>46</sup> *De moribus et actis primorum Normanniae Ducum*, PL 141, cols. 0639A-0639B.

<sup>47</sup> *De moribus et actis primorum Normanniae Ducum*, PL 141, col. 0650D: "manus suas misit inter manus regis, quod nunquam pater ejus, et avus, atque proavus cuiquam fecit. Dedit itaque filiam suam Gislam nomine uxorem illi duci, terramque determinatum in alodo, et in fundo, a flumine Eptae usque ad mare."

<sup>48</sup> *De moribus et actis primorum Normanniae Ducum*, PL 141, col. 0651C: "Franco archiepiscopus catholica fide sacrosanctae Trinitatis imbutum Rollonem baptizavit, duxque Francorum Rotbertus de fonte Salvatoris eum suscepit, nomenque suum ei imposuit, magnisque muneribus et donis honorifice ditavit." Lucien Musset points out that Franco could not possibly have been the bishop who baptized Rollo; it must have been Bishop Witto. Musset also writes that Gisla was "imaginary" (Lucien Musset, "Ce que l'on peut savoir du traité de Saint-Clair-sur-Epte," in *Nordica et Normannica: Recueil d'études sur la Scandinavie ancienne et medieval, les expéditions des Vikings et la foundation de la Normandie* (Paris: Société des études nordique, 1997), 378).

and circumstances of his arrival in Neustria is at best doubtful. His claim that Rollo first entered the Seine in 876 is clearly based on a record of a Viking incursion in 876 found in the *Annales de Saint-Vaast*. Dudo imagines Rollo at the head of this expedition. There is considerable debate about whether Rollo was Danish, as Dudo claims, or Norwegian. The *Landnámabók* says that Göngu-Hrólfr, the son of the Norwegian jarl Rögnvaldr, from Møre, conquered Normandy.<sup>49</sup> Later West Norse works, such as the late twelfth- or early thirteenth-century *Orkneyinga Saga*, “Haralds saga hárfagra” and “Óláfs saga helga” in Snorri’s *Heimskringla* all echo this tradition in greater or lesser detail.<sup>50</sup> The *Historia Norvegiae*, from c. 1200, gives an unusually detailed description of the conquest of Rouen and Normandy in which it says that “Gongurolfr”, one of a group of Vikings that conquered the Orkneys, captured Rouen and took Normandy.<sup>51</sup> Interestingly, one of the earliest known Old Norse works, the early twelfth-century *Íslendingabók*, says that Hrollaugr, the son of Rögnvald of Møre, settled in Iceland. It says nothing about any conquest of Normandy.<sup>52</sup> The thirteenth-century *Annales des Ryenses* refer to “Rollo dux Danorum,” while William of Malmesbury in the twelfth century says that Rollo was

<sup>49</sup> “Landnámabók,” 314: “Annarr var Göngu-Hrólfr, er vann Norðmandí; frá honum eru Rúðujarlar komnir ok Englakonungar.”

<sup>50</sup> *Orkneyinga saga* briefly mentions one “Hrolf” as the conqueror of Normandy and ancestor of all of the earls of Rouen and the English kings. See Finnbogi Guðmundsson, ed., *Orkneyinga saga*, vol. 34 in ÍF (Reykjavík: Íslenska Fornritafélag, 1965), 7: “þeira sonr var Hrólfr, er vann Norðmandi.” Rollo is discussed in the *Heimskringla* both in Harold Fairhair’s saga and St. Olaf’s saga. See *Heimskringla*, 26:123-4: “Rögnvaldr Møerajarl var inn mesti ástvinr Haralds konungs, ok konungr virði hann mikils. Rögnvaldr átti Hildi...Synir þeira váru þeir Hrólfr ok Þórir...Hrólfr var víkingr milill...Hann var kallaðr Göngu-Hrólfr... Göngu-Hrólfr fór síðan vestr um haf í Suðreyjar, ok þaðan fór hann vestr í Valland ok herjaði þar ok eignaðisk jarlsríki mikit ok byggði þar mjök Norðmönnum, ok er þar síðan kallat Norðmandi. Af Hrólf’s ætt eru komnir jarlar í Norðmandi.” Also see *Heimskringla*, 27:26: “Þá váru í Vallandi jarlar tveir, Viljálmr ok Roðbert. Faðir þeira var Ríkarðr Rúðujarl. Þeir réðu fyrir Norðmandi...Ríkarðr Rúðujarl var sonr Ríkarðar, sonar Viljálms langspjóts. Hann var sonr Göngu Hrólf’s jarls, þess er vann Norðmandi. Hann var sonr Rögnvalds Møerajarls ins ríka.”

<sup>51</sup> Inger Ekrem and Lars Boje Mortensen, eds., *Historia Norvegiae*, trans. Peter Fisher (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2003), 66: “Istas itaque nationes in diebus Haraldi Comati, Regis uidelicet Norwegie, quidam pirate, prosapia robustissimi principis Rogwaldi progress, cum magna classe Solundicum Mare transfretantes de Diuturnis sedibus exutas ex toto deleuerunt ac insulas sibi subdiderunt...De quorum collegio quidam Rodulfus – a sociis gongurolfr cognominatus quia ob enormem corporis quantitatem equitare nequiens semper incessit – Rodam ciuitatem Normandie cum paucis mirabilis ingenio deuicit.”

<sup>52</sup> “Íslendingabók,” in *Íslendingabók, Landnámabók*, ed., Jakob Benediktsson, vol. 1 in ÍF (Reykjavík: Íslenska Fornritafélag, 1968), 6: “Hrollaugr, sonr Rögnvalds jarls á Møri, byggði austr á Síðu: þaðan eru Síðumenn komnir.”

from a noble Norwegian family.<sup>53</sup> The late twelfth-century Danish historian Saxo Grammaticus, who records every possible tradition of famous Danes conquering patches of land anywhere, mentions neither Rollo nor the colonization of Normandy. In short, the medieval sources are divided and in Normandy, no tradition, other than that recorded by Dudo, has survived of Rollo's origins.

Frankly, though, an intense investigation of Rollo's background need not delay us, for it has little impact on our impression of Scandinavian activity and settlement in the northwestern part of the Carolingian empire. Long before Rollo and his men "decided to claim the region for themselves", as Dudo says, Neustria must have been the victim of especially intense Viking attention. This was probably due less to any unusual wealth and more to the fact that the Vikings had to pass through Neustria in order to reach the rich churches and monasteries of Paris. The Vikings first sacked Rouen and destroyed nearby monasteries in 841.<sup>54</sup> In "The Wandering Monks of Saint-Philibert", we read that some time between 856 and 867, "the Normans attacked the city of Rouen and devastated and burned it." Having attacked Paris and several nearby towns, they must have turned northwards again and re-entered the region that became Normandy, where "they struck into the cities of Evreux, Bayeux, and other neighboring towns. Almost no place, and no monastery, remained unscathed."<sup>55</sup>

It is important to separate Scandinavian settlement from Scandinavian pillaging. Although the period of attacks lasted for decades, the impression we get from Dudo, that Scandinavian settlement in Normandy occurred rather suddenly, appears to be probable. It is true that in the late tenth century the chronicler Richer wrote that by 888, "pirates...were

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<sup>53</sup> *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, ed. and trans. R. A. B. Mynors, R. M. Thomson, and M. Winterbottom (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 200.

<sup>54</sup> Excerpt from "Annales Fontanellenses priores" in *Documents de l'Histoire de la Normandie*. 68.

<sup>55</sup> Paul Edward Dutton, ed. and trans., "The Wandering Monks of Saint-Philibert," in *A Carolingian Civilization: A Reader*, 434-37 (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1993), 436.

dwelling in the province of Rouen, which is part of Celtic Gaul.”<sup>56</sup> If any permanent Norse communities existed before 911, however, there is no surviving trace of them.<sup>57</sup> It is possible that Richer meant that there were Viking encampments near Rouen, rather than attempts to settle permanently in the area. What little we know of the Viking colonization of Neustria must be gained mostly from place-names. From these, it appears that the Scandinavian establishment in Normandy was a combination of the homesteading of a Norse peasantry and the political takeover of towns in Neustria by Viking elites. But let us put the last first and begin with the peasants.

Both the concentration of names with Norse elements and the forms such names take suggest that although a substantial number of Norse-speaking peasants came to Normandy, the period of their settlement was of brief duration and was really strong in only a few areas. Although place names of Norse origin are found all over present-day Normandy, they are particularly concentrated along the coast, in the northern part of the Cotentin peninsula, and in the maritime regions of Upper Normandy. The incidence of Norse names is most intense in the Pays de Caux, just to the north of the Seine estuary.<sup>58</sup> Place-names that incorporate Norse terms for natural features are quite common.<sup>59</sup> These names could come about only if so large a Norse-speaking population collected in an area that Norse words for local geographic features overwhelmed the previously existing Frankish terms. In other words, there must have been a stage, even if brief, when substantial Norse-speaking communities existed in parts of Normandy. The existence of names that indicate an extension of a cultivated area also points to the presence of homesteading farmers. But the rarity of *thorp* and the total absence of *by*, both terms thought

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<sup>56</sup> *Richeri Historiarum Libri Quatuor*, PL 138, col. 0021A: “Hic patrem habuit Karlomannum regem , avum vero paternum Ludovicum cognomento Balbum, abavum autem Karolum Calvum, Germanorum atque Gallorum imperatorem egregium...piratae qui Rhodomensem provinciam incolebant, quae est Celticae Galliae pars.”

<sup>57</sup> Renaud, 70.

<sup>58</sup> David Bates, *Normandy before 1066* (London: Longman, 1982), 16.

<sup>59</sup> Bates, 18.

to indicate secondary settlements, suggest that the period of Scandinavian colonization was not long.<sup>60</sup> One Scandinavian term that is found more frequently in Normandy than in the Danelaw is *toft*, which has become *tot* in modern French. This term is thought to refer to deserted settlements and therefore its frequency might indicate that the Vikings devastated more communities along the northern Seine than they did in eastern England.<sup>61</sup> Åse Kari H. Wagner argues that the 89 place-names in Normandy (most in the Pays de Caux) ending in *tuit*, a French form of *þveit*, are probably of Danish or Anglo-Scandinavian, rather than Norwegian, origin.<sup>62</sup> Both Lucien Musset and François de Beaurepaire identify a number of place-names, especially in the Bessin and Cotentin, that are formed from Anglo-Saxon masculine names. Examples include Brestanville (Beorthstan), Dénestanville (Dunstan), and Linverville (Leofhere).<sup>63</sup> These Anglo-Scandinavian place-name elements, combined with David Bates' argument that the place-names indicate a short period of Scandinavian settlement, suggest a scenario in which the children of Vikings who had not done well in England in the late ninth-century, upon hearing that land across the channel had been granted to a Scandinavian, moved in large numbers over a short period of time to the new colony.

Not only was the immigration of a Scandinavian peasantry of short duration, but it was also limited largely to the coast. Much of the Norman establishment, particularly further inland, seems to have consisted of a military and political takeover. One of the largest types of Norman place-names reflects this. Many Scandinavian place-names consist of a Norse personal name attached to a Frankish suffix, such as "Toki's *ville*" (Tocqueville) and "Osbern's *ville*"

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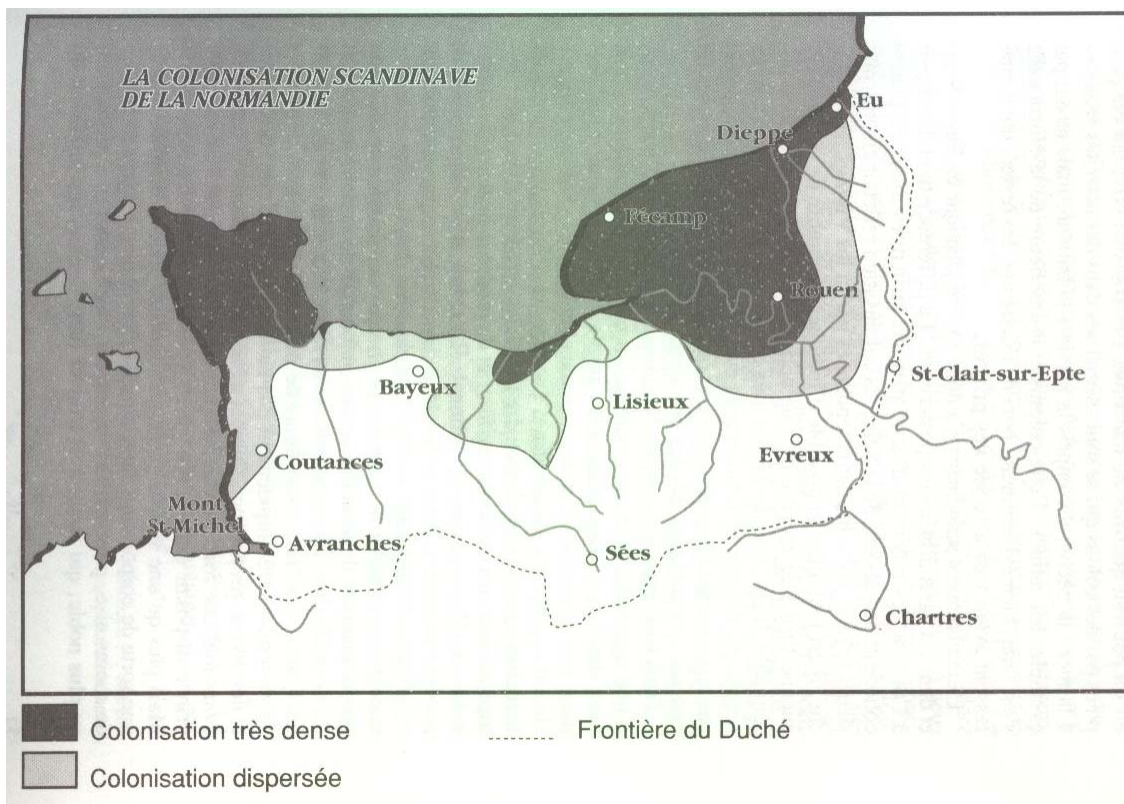
<sup>60</sup> Bates, 19.

<sup>61</sup> Gillian Fellows-Jensen, "Scandinavian Place-Names in Normandy," *Namn och Bygd: Tidskrift för Nordisk Ortnamnnsforskning* 76 (1988): 113-37.

<sup>62</sup> Åse Kari H. Wagner, "Les noms de lieux issus de l'implantation scandinave en Normandie: le cas des noms en *tuit*," in *Les fondations scandinaves en Occident et les débuts du duché de Normandie*, ed. Pierre Bauduin (Caen: Publications du CRAHM, 2005), 241-52.

<sup>63</sup> Musset, "Pour l'étude comparative de deux fondations politiques des Vikings," 47-52; Beaurepaire, "Les noms d'Anglo-Saxons contenus dans la toponymie normande," 47-52.

(Auberville). Names of this sort are thought to reflect an abrupt and violent change in lordship, such as would characterize a sudden political takeover. Many of the villages with such names probably never had substantial Norse populations. Their names were changed, but not their populations. They were, as Lucien Musset writes, “old communities re-baptized.”<sup>64</sup>



The Norse Colonization of Normandy<sup>65</sup>

Contrary to what Dudo says, the area that had become Normandy by the mid-tenth century was considerably larger than that ceded to Rollo in 911. The lands that Charles granted to Rollo were almost certainly centered around the Pays de Caux and the mouth of the Seine, the area bounded on the east roughly by the Bresle and the Epte and on the west by the Risle. In his annals, Flodoard details for us the expansions and contractions of Norman territory. In 925, Flodoard laconically notes, “the Normans from Rouen broke the treaty to which they had

<sup>64</sup> Lucien Musset, “Le peuplement de la Normandie,” in *Nordica et Normannica: Recueil d'études sur la Scandinavie ancienne et médiévale, les expéditions des Vikings et la fondation de la Normandie* (Paris: Société des études nordiques, 1997), 396.

<sup>65</sup> Renaud, 71. The dark gray shows areas of heavy Norse colonization; the light gray shows areas of sparser Norse colonization.

formerly agreed and laid waste the *pagus* of Beauvais and Amiens.”<sup>66</sup> Actually, from Flodoard’s own writings we know that the Normans had been breaking their treaty regularly since at least 919, when Flodoard began to write. Under Rollo and his son William Longsword, they seem to have engaged in indiscriminate warfare continuously, sometimes gaining territory, but losing it later. In 924 Flodoard tells us that “with the king’s consent, more lands were conceded to the Normans in a pact of peace, that is, Maine and the Bessin.” A little later, in 933, we read, “William, the Normans’ *princeps*, committed himself to the king, who then gave William the land of the Bretons sitting in the mouth of the sea”, that is, the Cotentin and Avranchin.<sup>67</sup> Thus, within two decades of having been granted a small plot of land along the Seine, Rollo and his descendants had coerced the Franks into giving them considerably more territory, stretching the newly-established duchy to what would be its permanent size.

There are only a few signs that the Vikings in France were already beginning to convert to Christianity on the eve of the Treaty of St-Clair-sur-Epte. The lack of references to missionary work among the heathens in their midst in Frankish religious sources suggests that most churchmen were not, as yet, interested in this task. It is in the political sphere that we first begin to see signs of Viking-Frankish interactions that were not overtly hostile. In the mid-890’s Charles the Simple tried to negotiate a treaty with a group of Vikings, only to be sharply rebuked by Archbishop Fulk for being so ready to take up arms alongside the enemies of God.<sup>68</sup> It is unsurprising, therefore, to read that in the same year that Charles made a serious attempt to ally himself with some Norsemen, the Viking chief Hundeus was baptized, presumably as part of a political agreement, presumably so that Charles could avoid the charge that he was in partnership

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<sup>66</sup> Flodoardus Remensis, *Les Annales de Flodoard*, ed. Philippe Lauer (Paris, A. Picard, 1905), 29-30: “Nordmanni de Rodomo foedus quod olim pepigerant irrumpentes, pagum Belvacensem atque Ambianensem depopulantur.”

<sup>67</sup> *Les Annales de Flodoard*, 55: “Willelmus, princeps Nordmannorum, eidem regi se committit; cui etiam rex dat terram Brittonum in ora maritima sitam.”

<sup>68</sup> *Flodoardi Canonici Remensis Historiae Remensis Ecclesiae Libri Quatuor*, PL 135, col. 0276B.

with outright heathens.<sup>69</sup> Dudo certainly portrays the conversion of the Scandinavians in Normandy as politically motivated, though not necessarily insincere for that. According to Dudo's history, Duke Robert persuaded Charles to make a treaty with Rollo, if for no other reason than "in order that such a people may be acquired for Christ".<sup>70</sup> After the king granted Rollo "the specified territory from the river Epte to the sea", the king departed from St-Clair, leaving Robert and Archbishop Franco to instruct Rollo in the faith.<sup>71</sup>

Dudo's work does not separate the conversion of the Normans from the conversion of the leadership, as embodied in Rollo and his household. According to Dudo, Franco baptized Rollo in 912 with Robert standing as godfather. After rising from the font of salvation, "Robert, also known as Rollo, had his counts and knights and the whole complement of his army baptized and instructed in the observances of the Christian faith by preaching."<sup>72</sup> Rollo's baptism, Dudo tells us, had the immediate effect of restoring status and some of the wealth to at least a few old Neustrian churches, especially those in Rouen. Rollo asked Franco which parts of his land he should give up "to God and to St. Mary and to the saints" and having received an answer, he spent several days giving estates to specifically named churches in Rouen, Bayeux, Évreux, and other areas.<sup>73</sup> Dudo portrays Rollo's descendants as imitating this precedent of hearty support for the Church. He describes Rollo's son William as a particularly holy man who would have become a monk at Jumièges, had he not been treacherously assassinated in 943. William's son Richard, being Dudo's original patron, naturally receives favorable treatment in Dudo's writing. Dudo tells us of his patronage to monasteries and alludes vaguely to the survival of heathenism in Normandy by describing Richard as "subjecting the pagans to the light and most gentle yoke

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<sup>69</sup> Renaud, 62.

<sup>70</sup> *De moribus et actis primorum Normanniae Ducum*, PL 141, cols. 0650B-C: "ut acquiratur tantus populus Christo."

<sup>71</sup> *De moribus et actis primorum Normanniae Ducum*, PL 141, cols. 0650D-0651A.

<sup>72</sup> *De moribus et actis primorum Normanniae Ducum*, PL 141, cols. 0651C-D: "Rotbertus autem, qui et Rollo, comites suos et milites omnemque manum exercitus sui baptizari fecit, atque Christianae religionis fidei per praedicationes instrui."

<sup>73</sup> *De moribus et actis primorum Normanniae Ducum*, PL 141, cols. 0652B-C.



of Christ”.<sup>74</sup> When a new band of Vikings attacked Normandy, Richard restored “at his own expense all the broken churches situated on Norman and Frankish soil.”<sup>75</sup> By the time Richard died in 996, Christianity was apparently making a full recovery in Normandy, for his funeral was carried out by multiple bishops and his body was placed in a specially built chapel “annexed to the greatly expanded church.”<sup>76</sup>

Some of the most basic elements of Dudo’s history can indeed be confirmed in other sources. That Charles’ treaty with Rollo was predicated on the latter’s baptism is highly likely, for other agreements, or near-agreements, with Vikings demanded conversion. Furthermore, Flodoard, in his annals under the year 923, mentions that the lands beyond the Epte were granted to the Normans so that they might become Christian and keep the peace.<sup>77</sup> It is also likely, if not certain, that Rollo sought to ingratiate himself with the local population of Rouen with grants to some of the city’s churches, though it is unlikely that he made gifts to all of the churches that Dudo claims, as several of them, such as those of Bayeux and Mont-Saint-Michel, had not yet come under Norman control. The *Recueil des actes de Charles III, roi de France* specifically records that Rollo granted the abandoned monastery of St-Ouen a large patrimony made up of many of its former estates and that he allowed the saint’s relics to be returned.<sup>78</sup> Whether Rollo was really the convinced Christian that Dudo portrays cannot be known, but under his rule it seems that the religious institutions of Rouen, at least, managed to regain some of their wealth and standing.

Dudo’s saintly image of Rollo’s son, William Longsword, is also not without support. Judging from the large contributions that William made towards re-founding ecclesiastical

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<sup>74</sup> *De moribus et actis primorum Normanniae Ducum*, PL 141, col. 0730C: “paganos jugo Christi levi et suavissimo subdens.”

<sup>75</sup> *De moribus et actis primorum Normanniae Ducum*, PL 141, col. 0750C.

<sup>76</sup> *De moribus et actis primorum Normanniae Ducum*, PL 141, col. 0756C-D.

<sup>77</sup> *Les Annales de Flodoard*, 16: “Itta fluvio transito, ingressus est terram, quae dudum Nordmannis ad fidem Xpisti venientibus, ut hanc fidem colerent et pacem haberent, fuerat data.”

<sup>78</sup> *Recueil des Actes de Charles III le Simple, Roi de France*, 211.

establishments in recently conquered areas, there is little doubt that he was a committed Christian. Despite Dudo's statement that Rollo made donations to Jumièges, it was probably William who was responsible for restoring this abbey.<sup>79</sup> It was under William's rule that two old monks who had fled Jumièges returned, along with a new abbot and some monks from the abbey of St-Cyprien of Poitiers.<sup>80</sup> It is possible that William's Christianity contributed to the anger of some of the Scandinavian settlers in Normandy. According to Dudo, William was on one occasion besieged by a group of Norman chiefs who were dismayed by the extent of his Frankish connections.<sup>81</sup> Though not noted for any monastic aspirations, Duke Richard was likewise sufficiently generous to the Church that by the end of the tenth century, most of the churches had recovered the majority of their property and almost all of the bishops had returned to their sees.<sup>82</sup>

Unfortunately, while Dudo may have been correct in telling us that Rollo founded a house whose members did much to re-establish Christianity in their realm, he tells us very little about the religious beliefs or practices of the other Scandinavians who came to Normandy. In this, he is not unusual, for there is almost complete silence in the sources regarding the practice of religion amongst common people. Unlike in England, neither archaeology nor toponymy reveals any sign of heathen beliefs or observations.<sup>83</sup> Nevertheless, it is hard to believe that the conversion of the ducal family led to an immediate religious transformation among the Scandinavian peasants. In fact, based on the chieftains' rebellion against William Longsword, it is quite possible that Rollo's conversion aroused some hostility among the other Norman leaders.

In discussing the conversion of the Normans, it is important to bear in mind that the formal establishment of a Scandinavian colony in France occurred decades later than the carving

<sup>79</sup> *De moribus et actis primorum Normanniae Ducum*, PL 141, col. 0652C.

<sup>80</sup> *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, ed. J. Marx (Rouen: A. Lestringant, 1914), 38-9.

<sup>81</sup> *De moribus et actis primorum Normanniae Ducum*, PL 141, col. 0664A-D.

<sup>82</sup> Renaud, 80.

<sup>83</sup> Renaud, 82. See the discussion of archaeological and place-name evidence for Scandinavian heathenism in England on pages 35-9.

out of Danish and Norwegian kingdoms in England and well over a century after large numbers of Norsemen began to settle in parts of the British Isles. Both place-names and chance notices in the historical annals leave little doubt that many of the settlers in Normandy had already spent time in England or in Gaelic-speaking areas, where they would surely have been exposed to Christianity. According to the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, the army of one Thurcytel, or Þorketill, went to the land of the Franks in 916.<sup>84</sup> Lucien Musset argues, based on the presence of many English words found specifically in the dialect of the southern Bessin, from the Cinglais to Tilly-sur-Seulles, that this Anglo-Scandinavian army probably settled in this region.<sup>85</sup> A number of Anglo-Saxon elements in the place-names of the Pays de Caux likewise suggest secondary settlement by Scandinavians for whom there was not enough room in England.<sup>86</sup> In addition, a number of Norman place-names indicate that some of the settlers must have come from Gaelic-speaking regions. Examples of such place-names include Digulleville (from the Gaelic name Dicuil), Donecanville (from Duncan), Quinéville (from Kined), La Meurdraquière (from Murdac), Néhou (from Nial), and Le Mesnil-Patry (from Patric).<sup>87</sup> The personal name Beccán continues to be used in Normandy. Because Duncan, Kined, and Murdac are usually Scottish, while Patric, Nial, and Beccán appear in Icelandic sources in association with immigrants from the Hebrides, Gillian Fellows-Jensen suggests that there was a particularly large flow of immigrants from the Northern and Western Isles of Scotland to Normandy. It is not at all improbable that many, even most of the Scandinavian settlers in Normandy arrived after having lived in the Britain or Ireland. The *Landnámabók* records several immigrants to Iceland, such as Ørlygr son of Hrapp Bjarnarson bunu from the Hebrides and his family as well as Auðr from the

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<sup>84</sup> ASC A, 916: “& þy ilcan geare for þurcytel eorl ofer sæ on Froncland mid þam mannum.”

<sup>85</sup> Musset, “Le peuplement de la Normandie,” 393.

<sup>86</sup> Musset, “Pour l’étude comparative de deux fondations politiques des Vikings: le royaume d’York et le duché de Rouen,” 50.

<sup>87</sup> Fellows-Jensen, 132.

Dublin hinterland (*Dyflinnarskíði*), who had already lived for years in the British Isles.<sup>88</sup>

Furthermore, in his annals, Flodoard records that in 943, King Louis was forced to fight against some heathens newly arrived in Normandy, whom Flodoard identifies vaguely with a king “Setricus”.<sup>89</sup> Michael Dolley and Jacques Yvon tentatively suggest that this Setricus was Sihtric Sihtricsson, an exile from York and brother of Amlaíb Cuarán, the famous king of Dublin whose Norwegian family had been in Ireland for generations.<sup>90</sup> Jean Adigard des Gautries, however, argues that he was the Sigtryggr who was expelled from Hedeby c. 935.<sup>91</sup> In short, many, even most, of the Scandinavian colonists in Normandy had probably already lived for years in some other predominantly Christian country. Their religious beliefs likely ranged along a spectrum from fully Christian to fully heathen.

As in the case of the Norsemen in England, one of the most obvious means by which conversion could have occurred was through intermarriage and the cultural integration that this would entail. There are some signs that the Norse pirates in France, as elsewhere, were overwhelmingly male.<sup>92</sup> In his study of Scandinavian personal names attested in Normandy between 911 and 1066, Jean Adigard des Gautries managed to identify seventy-nine masculine Norse names, but only three feminine names.<sup>93</sup> Moreover, a good argument can be made that many of the Norman settlers integrated very quickly into Frankish, Carolingian civilization. This was probably especially true in those areas where the Norman establishment consisted not of the creation of Scandinavian communities, but rather of a political takeover by a military elite, obviously made up exclusively of men. The evidence for this speedy assimilation is mostly

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<sup>88</sup> “Landnámabók,” 52, 136.

<sup>89</sup> *Annales de Flodoard*, 88.

<sup>90</sup> Michael Dolley and Jacques Yvon, “A Group of Tenth-Century Coins Found at Mont-Saint-Michel,” *British Numismatic Journal* 40 (1972): 11.

<sup>91</sup> Adigard des Gautries, 67n.

<sup>92</sup> See the discussion of this issue in England on pages 52-3.

<sup>93</sup> Jean Adigard des Gautries, *Les Noms de Personnes Scandinaves en Normandie de 911 à 1066* (Lund: Carl Bloms Boktryckeri, 1954), 71-174.

negative, but still striking. There is absolutely no Norman equivalent to the Scandinavian-inspired sculpture found throughout England.<sup>94</sup> On a more abstract level, the Vikings seem to have generally taken over and left intact many native institutions, since by the eleventh century, when documents become available, it is clear that rural estates had preserved essentially Carolingian features and that ducal government operated largely through mechanisms which were inspired by Carolingian notions of authority.<sup>95</sup> Both of these factors suggest the sudden integration brought about by intermarriage, not the creation of Scandinavian communities. Assuming that these men must have taken Frankish, Christian wives, their children, like the children of mixed Scandinavian-English marriages, would surely have been drawn into the dominant Christian culture of their mothers' families.

It is likely, however, that there were more women amongst the Scandinavian settlers in Normandy than the studies of names indicate. After all, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* mentions that some of the Vikings brought women and even children with them.<sup>96</sup> If this were true in England, why should it not have been true in Normandy, especially considering the fact that many of those settling in Normandy appear to have been Scandinavians who had originally tried to roost in England? We know from the settlement of Iceland that whole Scandinavian families migrated from either Scandinavia or the British Isles to other countries. It is therefore likely that whole Scandinavian families moved to Normandy.<sup>97</sup> Furthermore, as we have already seen, many of Normandy's place-names could have been created only within a Norse-speaking milieu. The intensity of these names in certain regions, notably the Pays de Caux, suggests the presence of largely Scandinavian peasant communities. Obviously, such communities could not have

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<sup>94</sup> Bates, 20.

<sup>95</sup> Bates, 11.

<sup>96</sup> ASC A, 893.

<sup>97</sup> For instance, in *Landnámabók* we read of Úlfr Grímsson and Svanlaugar Þormóðardóttir who settled at Geitland ("Landnámabók," 77). We also read of Grímr Ingjaldsson who seems to have come to Norway with his wife Bergdís and son Þórir ("Landnámabók," 95-6).

been sustained for even a few years without both men and women; a totally male immigrant population would have been forced to intermarry and immediately integrate itself into the surrounding culture. It is unlikely that these predominantly Norse peasant communities were suddenly converted by the friendly overtures of their lords in Rouen towards the Church. In addition, both Flodoard and Dudo specifically mention that the new wave of Scandinavian invaders in the 940's caused many Normans to slide back into heathenism.<sup>98</sup> We are therefore left with a question: assuming that many Normans were *not* converted through the process of intermarriage, how were they converted?

After telling us that Count Robert had conceded Brittany and the *pagus* of Nantes to the Vikings in 921, Flodoard, clearly placing great value on vagueness, says, "the Normans began to take up the faith of Christ".<sup>99</sup> A few other observations that we can make of Flodoard's annals hint – just barely – that there was a general movement towards Christianity at this time. In 923, Flodoard writes that land had been granted to the Normans in order that they might convert and keep the peace. He then goes on to justify King Raoul's decision to invade this land on the grounds that they had broken the peace. Significantly, he does not say that they had remained idolaters.<sup>100</sup> More generally, during the first few decades that he covers – the 920's and 30's – he never mentions the Norsemen as being heathens, even though it is clear, from his discussion of *new* heathens in 943, that he had no particular objection to doing so. Clearly, some sort of transformation must have been taking place in the 920's and 30's, for it was not too long before that, probably a little before 914, that Archbishop Witto of Rouen wrote in great discouragement to Hervé of Reims asking for advice as to how to how to convert the Scandinavians surrounding him and what to do with those who apostatized after being baptized. The collection of letters

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<sup>98</sup> *Annales de Flodoard*, 88: "Ludowicum Rodomum repetens Turmodum Nordmannum qui, ad idolatriam gentilemque ritum reversus"; *De Moribus et Actis Primorum Normanniae Ducum*, PL 141, col. 0705B.

<sup>99</sup> *Annales de Flodoard*, 6: "quique fidem Xpisti coeperunt suscipere."

<sup>100</sup> *Annales de Flodoard*, 16.

sent back by Hervé provides us with the only written evidence available regarding any organized attempt to evangelize the Normans.<sup>101</sup>

The letter that Hervé wrote back to Witto is preserved in a manuscript composed at Saint-Remi de Reims.<sup>102</sup> With it is a second letter, written by Pope John X to Hervé in response to the latter's request for information on converting heathens. Both letters are now kept in France's Bibliothèque nationale and are catalogued as "ms. lat. 4280A fol. 106v<sup>o</sup>". In his *Historia Remensis ecclesiae*, Flodoard naturally takes the opportunity to claim for his church as much credit as possible for the Norman conversion. He writes that Hervé "worked exceedingly for the bettering and converting of the Normans...and also in response to the request of Witto, then bishop of Rouen, he sent to this archbishop 33 holy fathers' chapters collected from diverse authorities as to how these Normans should be bent."<sup>103</sup> A little before talking about Hervé's missionary work, Flodoard tells us of the many churches that the Normans had destroyed that Hervé helped to restore and consecrate.<sup>104</sup> This, combined with the trouble Hervé went to in writing to the pope and collecting letters of advice for Witto, indicates that Hervé probably did have a genuine interest in rebuilding the Church.

Accepting Flodoard's contention that Hervé worked to restore the Church in the wake of Viking violence, we are still left with some questions. When did Hervé begin to undertake missionary work, what prompted him to do so, and how was this work carried out? We must look at these questions in turn. As to the question of when Hervé specifically began to try to convert the Normans, it seems most unlikely that it was before 911. First, he could not possibly

<sup>101</sup> For a discussion of the ecclesiastical continuity that existed at Rouen as opposed to the rest of Normandy, see Jacques Dubois, "Les listes épiscopales témoins de l'organisation ecclésiastique et de la transmission des traditions," *Revue d'histoire de l'Église de France* 62 (1976): 12-13.

<sup>102</sup> Olivier Guillot, "La conversion des Normands peu après 911," » *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale* 24 (1981): 102.

<sup>103</sup> *Flodoardi Canonici Remensis Ecclesiae Libri Quatuor*, PL 135, col. 0293A: "De Nortmannorum quoque mitigatione, atque conversione valde laboravit...Ad petitionem quoque Wittonis tunc Rothomagensis episcopi, collecta ex diversis auctoritatibus sanctorum Patrum triginta tres capitula qualiter ipsi Nortmanni tractari deberent, eidem archiepiscopo delegavit."

<sup>104</sup> *Flodoardi Canonici Remensis Ecclesiae Libri Quatuor*, PL 135, col. 0292B.

have written his request for Pope John X's advice in this matter before 914, as it was not until this year that John even became pope. Hervé died in 922. Even if we assume that Hervé wrote his letter towards the end of his reign, c. 920, the very fact that he wrote such a letter implies that he had been perplexed by the challenge of evangelization for a little while. Thus, his efforts to convert the Normans could date to the middle of the second decade of the tenth century. But his interest in this matter could not have gone back much further than this. In 909 Hervé called a council that met at Trosly. Despite Witto's presence at this council, the word "Norman" does not appear in the acts of this council, nor is the subject of converting these Normans ever raised. Rather, the harm caused by the "infestation of pagans" is described as one of God's just punishments.<sup>105</sup> If Hervé had any interest in converting the heathen in 909, he certainly did not mention it. In short, Hervé's formal efforts to rebuild the Church in Normandy must have begun at least a few years before his death in 922, but almost certainly did not predate the Council of Trosly in 909.

The question of when Hervé first took a serious interest in the Normans is naturally tied to the question of what inspired him to do so. The very date that his interest began – some time between about 910 and 920 – suggests that he was inspired by the formal establishment of a Norman duchy and by Rollo's baptism. As we have seen, the creation of a Norman zone centered at Rouen led to a period of heavy Norse colonization. Such a sudden influx of permanent settlers could well have prompted Archbishop Witto's plaintive letter asking how he should approach the non-baptized and the apostatized. Perhaps Witto's complaints motivated

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<sup>105</sup> Philippe Labbé and Gabriel Cossart, eds., "Concilium Trosleianum," in *Sacrosancta concilia ad regiam editionem exacta: quæ nunc quarta parte prodit auctior*, (Paris: Impensis Societatis Typographicæ Librorum Ecclesiasticorum ussu regis constitutæ, 1671-2), 9: 521: "Quonium per aliquot annos, parrim [sic] infestatione paganorum, partim etiam gravissimis regnis perturbationibus, ac quorundam falsorum Christianorum infestationibus præpediti, juxta decreta canonum nequivimus congregari;" 9: 522: "Videtis quam sit evidens furor domini, & manus ejus ad feriendum extenta. Ecce enim quotannis, ex quo terram nostram ex parte ægra sterilitate damnatam aspicimus, quibus cladibus populus quotidie intereat videmus. Depopulatæ urbes, destructa vel incensa monasteria, agri in solitudinem sunt redacti."



Hervé to take more serious action. Alternatively, Duke Robert could have encouraged Hervé to take a hand in the matter. We know that Robert had at least some interest in conversion (even if this interest was politically motivated), for he was present at Rollo's baptism. Dudo may have been wrong about which bishop baptized Rollo, as a simple study of the dates of the archbishops of Rouen shows that it could not, as Dudo claims, have been Franco. It must have been Witto. He was surely right, however, in claiming that Robert stood as Rollo's godfather and gave the Norman his name and many gifts, for official Norman sources refer to Rollo as Robert. In 968, for example, Richard spoke of his forebear Robert.<sup>106</sup> A third possibility is that Charles the Simple undertook the conversion of the Normans through Hervé. Olivier Guillot points out that Hervé was not only an archbishop, but also a royal chancellor. The first record we have of him in this role is a diploma, of which the original survives, that is dated June 17, 911.<sup>107</sup> As we have already seen, that is exactly the year that Charles the Simple granted land to Rollo. It is also around the same time that Hervé began to take an interest in Norman conversion. Perhaps Charles more or less ordered Hervé to organize a mission. We have, therefore, three possibilities: that Witto's genuinely difficult predicament moved Hervé to act, that Duke Robert encouraged him to do so, or that the king ordered him. In any event, it is clear that under Hervé's leadership, the church of Reims worked for the conversion of the Normans.

*How* the churchmen of Reims worked for this task is impossible to know. Flodoard's description, in his *Historia Remensis ecclesiae*, of Hervé's generosity in rebuilding destroyed churches suggests that Reims' efforts may have taken a mostly monetary form. Perhaps Reims helped to fund the restoration of churches and monasteries. Reims might also have sent clergymen. Ironically, the possibility that Reims sent its own clergymen, who remained under the authority of the archbishop of Reims, could explain why the episcopal structure of the duchy

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<sup>106</sup> Marie Fauroux, ed., *Recueil des Actes des ducs de Normandie de 911 à 1066* (Caen: Mémoires de la Société des Antiquaires de Normandie, 1961), 71.

<sup>107</sup> Guillot, 187.

remained moribund until the end of the tenth century, despite the slow but steady re-growth of monasticism. When archdioceses take a particular region under their wing, they are frequently reluctant to release it later from their control by allowing it to have its own, theoretically independent bishops. It is not until 990, with the appearance of a charter naming the new archbishop of Rouen and his six suffragans, that we first see evidence that bishops actually existed in the various Norman dioceses.<sup>108</sup> It was not until the early eleventh century that the bishop of the far western see of Coutances dared to return home.<sup>109</sup> While this delayed revival of Normandy's episcopal structure could indicate that Reims was reluctant to let go of the duchy, it must be recognized that we just do not know what Hervé or any other Reims churchman did in response to Witto's complaint, besides writing supportive letters.

Nevertheless, the fact that Flodoard mentions that the conversion of some Normans began in the mid-920's, combined with our knowledge that Hervé had begun to take an interest in this subject about a decade earlier, allows us to conclude that some sort of formal missionary work was done. This work involved at least the efforts of Archbishop Witto of Rouen and of the church of Reims. It may have also had the backing of certain well-placed secular leaders. This work began to bear fruit in about the third decade of the tenth century, though its progress was not unchecked. The rebellion of some Normans against the excessively Frankish William Longsword and the relapse into paganism after the duchy was re-invaded by Vikings in the 940's, both show that there were wild parts of the country where the Norse religion was still influential more than a generation after the establishment of Normandy.<sup>110</sup> The fact that many of the invaders of the 940's settled down, thus planting new heathen communities just as the old

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<sup>108</sup> Bates, 30.

<sup>109</sup> John Le Patourel, "Geoffrey of Montbray, Bishop of Coutances, 1049-1093," *English Historical Review* 59 (1944): 134-5.

<sup>110</sup> See pages 86 and 88.

ones were being converted, doubtlessly explains why the far west of Normandy lacked a bishop's presence after the bishops of the other dioceses had all returned home.

Clearly, we have less information about the conversion of the Vikings in Normandy than in England. From Flodoard, we know that those Scandinavians who had already settled in Normandy were in the process of conversion *c.* 920. In areas where the Scandinavian settlement consisted simply of a political takeover, the Scandinavian elite must quickly have intermarried and assimilated with the local Frankish elite. But in areas such as the Pays de Caux, where Viking settlement appears to have been heavy enough briefly to create Norse-speaking communities, formal missionary work must have been necessary. The very fact that Witto, archbishop of Rouen, asked for advice in this matter shows that he must have engaged in or organized such work. During the second decade of the tenth century, Hervé, archbishop of Reims, also became involved in evangelical work, though exactly what form his efforts took is difficult to say. Reims was the mightiest diocese in the northwestern part of the Carolingian empire, so it could surely supply Normandy with more money for rebuilding churches and more clergymen to preach in them than the damaged and much smaller see of Rouen could. The patron saint of Reims, moreover, was Rémi (or Remigius in Latin), the churchman who famously brought Clovis, king of the Franks, from heathenism to Christianity. Given this fact, it not hard to imagine that Hervé would feel obliged to try to convert the heathens who had settled amongst the Franks. The slow revival of the diocesan structure in Normandy probably indicates that either Rouen or Reims, and possibly both, were sending clergymen to Norman churches. The bishops of Rouen and Reims would have been reluctant to see new bishops take control of churches to which they (the bishops of Rouen and Reims) had been sending clergymen. The arrival of many new heathens in the 940's also must have made missionary work necessary. Their arrival, combined with the rebellion of certain Scandinavian chieftains against William

Longsword because of his excessive Frankishness, show that there remained for decades wild areas of Normandy that were only nominally under the control of the counts of Rouen. It is not surprising that no fewer than five bishops of Coutances could not live in their see, but lived instead in Rouen. Coutances, however, is where the new Vikings of the 940's settled, so the slow re-growth of Christianity in this region is probably due not any unusually strong resistance to Christianity amongst these Scandinavians, but to the fact that they did not settle in Normandy for more than a full generation after most Normans. Overall, the Normans converted quickly after settlement under the combined influence of intermarriage and the evangelical efforts directed by Rouen and Reims.

As in England, the granting of land to the Vikings in the Carolingian Empire had a dramatic impact not only on their lifestyle, but ultimately, on their religious beliefs. Flodoard's comment in 921, a decade after Normandy's foundation, that the Normans were beginning to convert could not show more clearly that viewed it as entirely natural, upon settling in a new land, to take up the worship of a new god. If anything, the Scandinavians in Normandy assimilated even more quickly than the Vikings in England did. Unlike in England, in Normandy we find none of the stone carvings or runic inscriptions that suggest the survival of some elements of Scandinavian culture.<sup>111</sup> The rebellion of some of the Norse leaders against William Longsword is one of the few signs that a distinctively Scandinavian culture survived in the more remote areas of Normandy.<sup>112</sup> Thus, a tendency towards rapid assimilation and conversion appears to be a common feature of the history of the Vikings. For a variety of reasons, the Vikings in Ireland proved to be the exception to the rule.

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<sup>111</sup> See pages 42-4 to read about such carvings and inscriptions in England.

<sup>112</sup> See the discussion of this incident on pages 85 and 87.

## Chapter 3

### Features Common to the Religious History of Scandinavian Groups

Before beginning to examine the history of the Scandinavian attacks and settlement in Ireland, however, it would be wise to look at what we know of the conversion of the Vikings in England and Normandy and to see if there are any points of similarity. In other words, what features characterized the processes of Christianization that Scandinavian groups went through, especially Scandinavian groups who had immigrated to countries that were thoroughly Christian and had been so for centuries? While we cannot leap to the conclusion that the Vikings in Ireland behaved exactly as their counterparts in England and France did, it is important to be aware of the patterns of behavior that Scandinavians tended to follow so that we recognize them if we see them in Ireland.

Carole Cusack argues that the evangelization of Germanic groups always followed a general pattern: missionaries would focus their efforts on the group's prince or king and if he converted, his people would do likewise.<sup>1</sup> Gaining a ruler's acceptance and support was thus a missionary's most important task; until he managed this, the process of teaching the people Christian beliefs and reforming their way of life could not even begin. In support of this argument, Cusack mentions a number of cases in which groups from across northwestern Europe, and especially in England, would become Christian with their king and then apostatize when the next king showed himself to be a follower of the old gods. Cusack argues that this dependency on the king for religious direction resulted from the nature of the institution of

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<sup>1</sup> Carole M. Cusack, *Conversion among the Germanic Peoples* (New York: Cassell, 1998), 175. Cusack's work was not met with great acclaim. In a review of Cusack's book, Julia M. H. Smith writes, "Whilst rarely completely wrong, [Cusack's] knowledge of late antiquity and the early Middle Ages is too superficial for the task." Furthermore, "weak methods of arguing compound these limitations, too often substituting narrative for analysis...Covering material from the Gothic St. Sabas in the fourth century to the Norwegian St. Olaf in the eleventh, she assumes without question that the Germanic peoples (an essentially linguistic category) have sufficient in common to be fruitfully examined as an ensemble, but then is surprised at the differences she encounters. Her conclusion, that kings were central, will surprise no-one" (Julia M. H. Smith, "Review: *Conversion among the Germanic Peoples*," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 52 (2001): 707).

kingship in Germanic societies. This institution, she says, was not governmental, but sacral. The king was the gods' channel of power. He provided his people with their only access to divine might. It is therefore unsurprising that his god or gods would become theirs; the rituals that he took part in would become the rituals that they took part in.<sup>2</sup>

Peter Brown admits that Germanic kings tried to associate themselves with and control missionaries, but argues that the sacral role later historians have assigned to them might not have been the long-standing tradition that scholars have assumed.<sup>3</sup> A number of examples cast doubt on whether Germanic peoples, or at least Scandinavians, really followed their kings as unquestioningly as Cusack suggests. It is true that Bede depicts the spiritual state of whole groups of people as being entirely dependent on the inclinations of the Anglo-Saxon kings. He describes, for instance, how King Sighere, frightened by the toll a particular plague was taking, apostatized "with his part of the population".<sup>4</sup> But other records of the conversion process, particularly those from Scandinavia, portray local groups of people as considerably less compliant towards their kings. In his *Heimskringla*, Snorri Sturluson portrays the Norwegian people as being so resistant to the missionary efforts of Hákon the Good, a popular king whose right to rule was well accepted, that they eventually forced *him* to abandon Christianity.<sup>5</sup> *Ágrip af Nóregskonungasögum*, a late twelfth-century history of the Norwegian kings written in Old Norse, describes the Norwegians burning King Hákon's churches and killing his priests. Finally, the Trønders at Mærin, threatening to drive Hákon from his kingdom, demanded that he offer sacrifices just as earlier kings had done. He complied with their wishes.<sup>6</sup> According to the

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<sup>2</sup> Cusack, 176-9.

<sup>3</sup> Peter Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 2003), 343.

<sup>4</sup> *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. Bertram Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 322 (book 3, chapter 30): "Quae videlicet prouinciae cum praefatae mortalitatis clade premeretur, Sigheri cum sua parte populi, relictis Christianae fidei sacramentis, ad apostasiam conuerses est."

<sup>5</sup> *Heimskringla*, 26:171.

<sup>6</sup> M. J. Driscoll, ed., *Ágrip af Nóregskonungasögum* (London: University College, 1995), 10: "Ok þar eftir gerðu þrændir fgr at hónum á Mæri ok þóðu hann blóta sem aðra konunga í Nóregi...en fyr því at hann sá ákafa þeira

*Heimskringla*, King Olaf Tryggvason, who ruled a few decades after Hákon, managed to establish Christianity in Norway only after overcoming considerable resistance.<sup>7</sup>

One might argue that these kings' difficulties were caused by the fact that most Norwegians looked to their local chieftains to fulfill their religious needs. As a distant overking, Hákon and Olaf did not play enough of a role in the religious lives of individuals to command their automatic obedience. Most individuals would instinctively follow the smaller chieftain on whom they were accustomed to rely. For their part, such chieftains could not view a missionary king as anything but a threat. A number of problems arise with this argument. First, if these kings were so distant, then why were the Norwegians so eager to see Hákon participate in the traditional heathen sacrifices? Clearly, the people making this demand saw Hákon as having a religious role, but this role was not enough to cause them to be willing to follow him away from their customary practices. Second, the Norwegian kings appear to have been no less familiar to their people than the English kings were to theirs. After all, the memories of ninth-, tenth-, and eleventh-century kings survived long enough to be recorded in a number of works from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, including the *Heimskringla*, *Ágrip af Nóregskonungasögum*, *Óláfs Saga Tryggvasonar*, and the *Historia Norwegie*.<sup>8</sup> Assuming that the Norwegian kings had a role similar to that of the English kings, why were the Norwegian people not nearly so willing to follow their kings over to Christianity as Bede portrays the English as being?

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[oooooooo] á hǫnd hǫnum [oooooooo] at hǫfðingja ráði, þá snøri hann svá til, at hann fyrkvað eigi í nekkverum hlut í yfirbragði til vingunar við þá." Driscoll provides the following translation: "And later the Þrændir rose against him at Mærin and asked him to worship the gods as other kings in Norway had done...Because he saw their zeal against him, and following the advice of the chieftains, he responded in such a way that he refused nothing so as to appear to appease them."

<sup>7</sup> *Heimskringla*, 26:319-33.

<sup>8</sup> See Driscoll, ed., *Ágrip*, 2-58, for a discussion of the reigns of Haraldr hárfagri, Eiríkr blóðøx, Hákon, Haraldr gráfeldr, Hákon jarl, Óláfr Tryggvason, Eiríkr jarl, Óláfr Haraldsson, Sveinn and Ælfgýfu, Magnús góði, and Haraldr Haraldsson. See *Óláfs Saga Tryggvasonar*, ed. Finnur Jónsson (Copenhagen: G.E.C. Gads Forlag, 1932), for a detailed description of the tenth-century king of Norway, Óláfr Tryggvason. The *Historia Norwegie* claims to trace the Norwegian kings' lineage back to its Swedish roots. Of the Norwegian kings, it discusses in some detail Haraldus Comatus (Haraldr hárfagri), Ericus Sanguinea Securis (Eiríkr blóðøx), Hacon (Hákon), Haraldus, Siwardus, and Gunrodus (Haraldr gráfeldr and his brothers), Hacon cognomitus crudelitate (Hákon jarl), Olavus (Óláfr Tryggvason), and Olavus filius Haraldi Grenscensis (Óláfr Haraldsson).

Such a question is impossible to answer, given the limited number of sources. The inexplicability of these differing reactions, however, does highlight the degree to which our view of the conversions of these nations is shaped by a very small number of texts. The factors and events that Bede, for instance, chose to underline assume an extraordinary importance in later historiography precisely because Bede is almost our only source of information regarding the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons. Peter Brown points out that that Bede dedicated his *Ecclesiastical History* to a king and suggests that, knowing that he had a kingly audience, Bede chose to put kings at the heart of his work.<sup>9</sup> Brown also suggests that Bede wished to compare the English people to the people of Israel. “As in ancient Israel,” Brown writes, “so among the *Angli*, it was the behavior of the kings which tipped the balance of God’s favor toward the people as a whole.”<sup>10</sup> Thus, we must bear in mind that medieval historians’ interests, combined with a universal tendency to simplify complex events, might have led to an exaggerated impression of the kings’ importance in the evangelization of various Germanic groups.

While Germanic peoples might not have followed their kings into a new religion as readily as Cusack suggests, the surviving written sources do give the impression that large groups would not convert *without* the lead having been taken by their king. The ninth-century missionary Anskar, when he set up a church in Birka, did not succeed in converting the local ruler.<sup>11</sup> Significantly, the *Vita Anskari* names only one convert in Birka – a man called Herigar. Whether the *Vita Anskari* names this man because he was the most notable convert among many, or rather because he was virtually the only convert, is impossible to say. What is clear is that Anskar’s mission to Birka was not a lasting success. Thus, Cusack’s stress on the importance of the king’s conversion is not totally without basis. The rural societies of far northwestern Europe

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<sup>9</sup> Brown, 352.

<sup>10</sup> Brown, 352.

<sup>11</sup> *Vita Anskarii Auctore Rimberto*, 32.



were marked by an instinctive conservatism that caused them sometimes to resist kings who tried to change religion and to be reluctant to convert without their kings.

It is questionable, however, whether Cusack's ideas would hold true with regard to any particular Viking who had left his home and was surrounded by non-Scandinavians whose access to the divine did not depend on the leader on whom he relied. It could be argued that separation from his native environment would cause his spiritual reliance on his king to weaken. On the other hand, groups of people who had left their homeland might cling ever more tightly to whoever was serving as their new leader. In many cases, especially before the Vikings began to settle permanently on the continent and in England, an individual Viking probably would not perceive himself as having abandoned his home or the religious power of his king. Obviously, however, Scandinavians could not settle permanently in a new country without breaking many of the ties to the communities of their birth. A vacuum of leadership must have briefly existed at various times amongst groups of settling Vikings. Such a vacuum could be filled both by figures already invested with authority in England and France and by Scandinavians who had emerged as leaders amongst bands of Vikings.

It is clear that by the time the Vikings began to establish themselves on a long-term basis in England and France, new leaders had arisen who could fulfill the military, political, and religious functions of petty kings in Scandinavia. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* mentions specific Viking leaders by name. In 871, the *Chronicle* tells us that Alfred and Æthelred fought against a Viking army, in one division of which were the "Bagsecg and Halfdan, the heathen kings".<sup>12</sup> In 875, we read that "Guthrum and Oscytel and Anund, the three kings, went from Repton to Cambridge with a great host".<sup>13</sup> Occasionally the *Chronicle* makes reference to the deeds of Scandinavian leaders even though it does not name them. In 893, for example, the *Chronicle*, in

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<sup>12</sup> ASC A, D, E, F, 871 (A); "Bachsecg & Halfdene þa heþnan cyningas;" ASC C, 872 [=871].

<sup>13</sup> ASC A, D, E, 875 (D); "Goðrum & Oscytel & Anwend þa þry cyningas of Hreopedune to Grantanbrycge mid micclum here;" ASC C, 876 [=875].

describing the movement of both English and Scandinavian forces, tells us that the Norsemen were forced to remain behind because their king had been wounded.<sup>14</sup> While the *Chronicle* does not name the Scandinavian chiefs, the very fact that it describes these leaders' actions shows that among the invaders, certain men were distinct enough in their role that the English paid special attention to them. Clare Downham writes that Ívarr's descendents, who were active in both Ireland and England, certainly qualified as a dynasty, comparable to that of the Viking Rurik in Russia or Rollo in Normandy.<sup>15</sup> She writes further that in founding such dynasties, the Vikings colonizing various lands were doing no more than mirroring the political and social organization found all over Europe.

Like their English counterparts, Frankish sources make it clear that specific men had emerged as leaders among the Vikings on the continent and that these elites, in their leadership role, were sufficiently distinguished from the other Vikings that the local Christian population took note of them. In describing Rollo's emergence as a chieftain in "Dacia", Dudo was probably romanticizing Rollo's past and forcing his own ideas of social order onto a society he knew little about.<sup>16</sup> But Dudo's account of what was for him the much more recent Norman past is surely more reliable, since his report had to be recognizable to his patrons. When he writes of Rollo's death and his son William's succession to the throne, Dudo says that Rollo called together the *principes* in order to ensure that they would recognize his son's right to rule.<sup>17</sup> Not long afterwards, Dudo writes, "Count Berenger and Alan likewise, and the other Bretons, and the *principes* of the Northmen submitted themselves willingly to William".<sup>18</sup> Dudo's use of the word *principes* is significant, for it is a vague word that does not clarify what position these men

<sup>14</sup> ASC A, 893: "& ða Deniscan sæton þær behindan, forþæm hiora cyning wæs gewundod."

<sup>15</sup> Downham, *Viking Kings of Britain and Ireland*, 6-7. The descendents of Ívarr, or Ímar as his name was written in Irish, will be discussed throughout chapters 4 and 5.

<sup>16</sup> See the section on Dudo and his portrayal of Rollo in chapter 2, pages 73-5.

<sup>17</sup> *De moribus et actis primorum Normanniae Ducum*, PL 141, col. 0660C.

<sup>18</sup> *De moribus et actis primorum Normanniae Ducum*, PL 141, col. 0660D: "Berengerus comes, et Alannus pariter, caeterique Britones, nec non Northmannorum principes, subdiderunt se volentes Guillelmo unanimes."

held within a Carolingian hierarchy. Its use suggests that these men held power not because some feudal, Carolingian arrangement had invested them with it, but because they had emerged as leaders amongst the Scandinavians who had gathered in the land of the Franks. In other words, their leadership was probably based more on a Scandinavian model than on a Carolingian one. Eleanor Searle argues that Dudo's portrayal of these *principes* as being freely chosen by their followers, eloquent, and willing to engage in argument is similar to the Norse sagas' image of Scandinavian leadership.<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, Lucien Musset writes that in Normandy "the institutions of rural domain remained faithful everywhere to Carolingian tradition."<sup>20</sup> During William's reign, a group of *principes*, led by one Riulf, rebelled out of dissatisfaction with William's close ties to Frankish rulers.<sup>21</sup> Given Musset's statement that Carolingian models of property and domain survived, perhaps these *principes* were also dissatisfied with a Carolingian system of government that they viewed as encroaching on their rights. In any event, that such men, even decades after the establishment of Normandy, still existed and still felt mighty enough to rise up suggests that a Scandinavian worldview and culture must have survived until at least 933 or 934, when this rebellion is thought to have occurred.<sup>22</sup>

Although it is clear that in Scandinavia itself it was difficult to convert large groups of people without the help of the local king, it is not clear whether Scandinavians who had left their homeland would continue to be so religiously dependent on those men who emerged as military and political leaders. As we have seen, such leaders clearly existed amongst the Vikings both in England and France, but their cultic significance might have been lessened in the eyes of their followers by the fact that the local population already had its own cultic leaders. Indeed, in some

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<sup>19</sup> Searle, 87.

<sup>20</sup> Lucien Musset, "Origine et nature du pouvoir ducal en Normandie jusqu'au milieu du XI<sup>e</sup> siècle," in *Nordica et Normannica: Recueil d'études sur la Scandinavie ancienne et medievale, les expeditions des Vikings et la foundation de la Normandie* (Paris: Société des études nordique, 1997), 263.

<sup>21</sup> *De moribus et actis primorum Normanniae Ducum*, PL 141, col. 0664B.

<sup>22</sup> Bates, 13.

cases disgruntled Norsemen might have viewed Christian priests as alternative sources of supernatural power. English and Frankish sources, to the extent that they discuss Viking conversions at all, generally concentrate on the baptisms of the leaders, such as Rollo or Guthrum. This might be simply the result of the sources' biases; medieval chroniclers might not have regarded the baptism of some random Viking as being significant enough to note. But whether the sources reflect bias or the true nature of the religious situation amongst the Vikings, they give us very few accounts of ordinary Scandinavians being baptized.

There appear to be only two cases, one each in England and France, in which the conversion of ordinary Vikings is mentioned. In England, the *Liber Eliensis* tells us that to the monastery at Horningsea, "the people of the place, who had come rushing together in a flood-tide from paganism to the grace of baptism", gave gifts of land.<sup>23</sup> In France, under the year 921, Flodoard's *Annals* tell us, "The Normans began to take up the faith of Christ".<sup>24</sup> With these two exceptions, any description of conversion is of that of the Viking upper-crust. The archaeological record is no better at giving us any indication of whether Scandinavians often converted without being inspired to do so by their leaders. The crosses found throughout northeastern England, with their mixed Christian and heathen imagery, could have been paid for only by wealthier members of the Scandinavian community – those most likely to be in a position of leadership. Likewise, the minting of coins is an activity that only the local king could engage in; coins such as the pennies of St. Edmund, St. Peter, and St. Martin, therefore, cannot be proven to reflect the interests of anyone except the highest members of society. In short, all the surviving forms of evidence reflect the choices of the leaders of the Norse community. Vikings who had left their homelands might have looked less and less to their chiefs as sources of religious power, but there is little evidence to prove it.

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<sup>23</sup> *Liber Eliensis*, 128.

<sup>24</sup> *Les Annales de Flodoard*, 5: "quippe fidem Xpisti coeperunt suscipere." See more on this period in Norman history on page 88.

While it is difficult to say how reliant individual Norsemen remained on their kings' spiritual might, it is clear that groups of Scandinavians were quite comfortable in remembering their collective conversion as a practical, political event. The histories that describe (or purport to describe) the conversion of Scandinavian groups reveal a startlingly different attitude towards religion than the one we find in the older, more conventional accounts that describe the evangelization of peoples further to the south. Eusebius' *Vita Constantini* gives what is perhaps the most famous account of a mass conversion. As Eusebius was a Church Father whose works were widely read and copied, it is not surprising that his vision of large-scale religious change became quite influential.<sup>25</sup> According to Eusebius, Christianity began to be promoted by the Roman Empire when, prompted by a number of miraculous visions, the emperor Constantine led his troops to victory under the Chi-Rho symbol.<sup>26</sup> The dominance of Eusebius' view of conversion is shown by the fact that even in fairly remote spots like Northumbria and Iona, folk groups were clearly encouraged to see their conversion as similar to that of Constantine's army. Both Bede and Adomnán record that a series of events, nearly identical to those that befell Constantine, befell King Oswald. Bede tells us that shortly before going into battle against the Britons, who were allied with the heathen king Penda of Mercia, Oswald raised a cross and had his army pray before it. His army went on to victory, thus demonstrating the power of an army *fide Christi munito*, "strengthened by faith in Christ" over the other English kings' slide back into heathenism, *apostasiam regum Anglorum*.<sup>27</sup> Considering the large amount of missionary work that the monks from the monastery of Iona did in northern England, it is not surprising that in the late seventh century Adomnán, the abbot of Iona, described Oswald's conversion. In his *Vita Columbae*, Adomnán gives a more detailed version, according to which St. Columba visited Oswald in a dream and assured him of victory. Upon awakening, the king naturally related his

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<sup>25</sup> Perhaps it was not so widely read in Scandinavia.

<sup>26</sup> Eusebii Pamphili de Vita Beatissimi Imperatoris Constantini Liber Primus, PL 8, cols. 0021C -0025A.

<sup>27</sup> Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, 214 (book 3, chapter 1).

vision to his councilmen, and “the whole folk promised that after returning from war they would believe and receive baptism.”<sup>28</sup>

The image of conversion revealed in these accounts is one in which miracles obviously play a central role. Perhaps the most notable feature of Eusebius’ conversion model is that the burden of choice, and certainly the burden of initiating change, lies mostly on God’s side. The people about to be converted are fairly passive figures who do not consciously choose Christianity, but rather are so overwhelmed by an obvious display of the Christian god’s might that they begin to follow Him without question. It is God who chooses to display his might to particular people, thus bringing large numbers of people into the Christian fold. This vision of religious change reflects a Christian worldview, in which all power ultimately belongs to God and men wield only as much power as God gives them.

The conversion of Scandinavia, at least according to the medieval histories written by Scandinavians, was startlingly different. These accounts record few miracles when they describe how the change in religion came about. In *Íslendingabók*, written in 1122 or 1133, Ari Thorgilsson the Wise says that Iceland became Christian when, at the yearly *thing*, the tension between heathens and Christians became too great to bear. Not wishing to be divided in their worship, the Icelanders agreed that they would all follow the decision of their law-speaker, Thorgeir of Ljósvatn. The law-speaker engaged in a shamanistic séance in which he spent the next day and night unspeaking under a cloak. When he emerged, he announced that all Icelanders would be christened.<sup>29</sup> Significantly, Ari Thorgilsson does not attempt to portray Thorgeir’s decision as the result of any sort of divine interference; he is content to let the Christianization of the entire country remain the result of one political authority’s judgment.

<sup>28</sup> *Adomnán’s Life of Columba*, ed. and trans. Alan Orr Anderson and Marjorie Ogilvie Anderson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 14: “totus populus promittit se post reuersionem de bello crediturum et baptismum suscepturum.”

<sup>29</sup> “Íslendingabók,” 16-7: “þá lagðisk hann niðr Þorgeirr ok breiddi feld sinn á sik ok hvíldi þann dag allan ok nóttina eptir ok kvað ekki orð. En of morguninn eptir settisk hann upp ok gørði orð, at menn skyldi ganga til lögbergis...Þá vas þat mælt í lögum, at allir menn skyldi kristnir vesa ok skírn taka.”

The various histories that describe the conversion of Norway are equally hesitant to portray this change as having come about through God's intervention into human events. St. Olaf (Olaf Haraldsson) performs some miracles - for instance, he heals a boy who has a boil in his throat – but there is no claim that these miracles moved anybody towards Christianity.<sup>30</sup> These miracles are performed in a society that seems to have been largely, if superficially, Christianized. Thus, they serve to demonstrate St. Olaf's holiness, but not to act as the catalyst for Norway's conversion. Theodoricus Monachus describes Olaf Tryggvason's conversion as being the result of a miracle, but he writes that in order to evangelize Norway, this king engaged in "prayers and sermons, reinforcing these at times with threats and intimidation".<sup>31</sup> *Ágrip af Nóregskonungasögum* writes of Olaf Trygvasson that

during the five years he bore the name of king in Norway he Christianized five lands: Norway, Iceland, the Shetlands, the Orkneys, and the fifth, the Faeroes. He first raised churches on his own estates and abolished heathen sacrifices and feasts and instead, as a favor to the people, he instituted the feasts of Christmas and Easter, a St. John's mass ale, and an autumn ale at Michaelmas.<sup>32</sup>

In the *Heimskringla*, Snorri fills these accounts out with numerous anecdotes, in which Hákon the Good, Olaf Tryggvason, and Olaf Haraldsson trek about the countryside, addressing groups of men. The protests that these men issue are usually, though not always, motivated not so much by wickedness as by an automatic conservatism and by a sense that the worship that had resulted in prosperity in the past would surely do so in the future. Thus Asbjørn, representing an assembly of farmers, tells King Hákon, "you will have us again enthralled with strange things, so that we must forego that faith which our fathers and all our forefathers have had before us...they

<sup>30</sup> *Heimskringla*, 27:341.

<sup>31</sup> *Historia de Antiquitate Regum Norwagiensium: An Account of the Ancient History of the Norwegian Kings*, ed. and trans. David and Ian McDougall (London: University College, 1998), 14.

<sup>32</sup> Driscoll, *Ágrip af Nóregskonungasögum*, 30-2: "ok á þeim .v. vetrum er hann bar konungs nafn í Nóregi krisnaði hann .v. lönd: Nóreg ok Ísland ok Hjaltland, Orkneyjar ok it .v. Færeyjar, ok reisti first kirkjur á sjálf<s> sins höfuðbólum, ok felldi blot ok blótdrykkjur, ok lét í stað koma í vild við lýðinn hótíðardrykkjur jól ok páskar, Jóansmessu mungát, ok haustöl at Míkjálsmessu."

were much greater than us and all the same this faith has availed us well”.<sup>33</sup> While it is doubtful whether Snorri’s anecdotes are factually accurate, the general message that we can draw from all of these works is that Scandinavians viewed their conversion as calmly considered shifts in policy, according to which their forebears, having weighed the options, gave up the worship of their old gods in order to worship a new one.<sup>34</sup>

This business-like approach to Christianity marked not only Scandinavians at home, but also Scandinavians abroad. Dudo wrote the only narrative account of the Norman conversion, and while he was not a Norman, he was inspired to write it by Richard I and completed it while in the employ of Richard II. Most of his information must have come from Normans and what he wrote must have met with the approval of the Norman aristocracy. His *De moribus et actis primorum Normanniae Ducum* is unusual among continental conversion stories in that, although it portrays Rollo as being responsible for Normandy’s foundation as a Christian land within the Frankish empire, it does not portray him as being a holy figure. The Rollo whom we meet in Dudo’s work is a virtuous man whom God chooses for a holy task, but there is no claim that he is a saint or that he can work miracles. His decision to become Christian is not based on any divinely inspired perception of Christianity’s truth; indeed, he receives instruction in the new faith only after he decides to be baptized.<sup>35</sup> Nor is Rollo’s choice the result of his moral goodness or of his having witnessed a miracle. Rather, he and the other Viking chiefs interpret a prophetic dream that Rollo has had. They go on to discuss the value of the land that they will get if they agree to Charles’ terms. In the end, they agree that “things will turn out prosperously for

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<sup>33</sup> *Heimskringla*, 26:170: “muntu nú láta þrækla oss af nýju með undarligum hætti, at vér minim hafna átrúnaði þeim, er feðr várir hafa haft fyrir oss ok allt forelliri...ok hafa þeir verit miklu gøfgari en vér, ok hefir oss þó dugat þessi átrúnaðr.”

<sup>34</sup> Peter Sawyer says that Snorri’s *Heimskringla* “enshrined not history but tradition” (Sawyer, *The Age of the Vikings*, 38). Of course, it is not specific historical details, but the Scandinavians’ general, traditional view of their conversion that is of interest.

<sup>35</sup> *De moribus et actis primorum Normanniae Ducum*, PL 141, cols. 0635D -0639A, 0648A-0651B.



us within this territory”.<sup>36</sup> It is a statement that says as much about their attitude towards religion as it does about their attitude towards settlement. This is a significant scene, for it shows that even a few generations after becoming Christian, the Normans were quite comfortable viewing their baptism as the outcome of a collective, rational assessment of the new faith. This view of conversion evidently managed to survive for at least a few generations – long enough to be recorded – without being replaced by a more conventional model of conversion, such as that of Constantine.

Unfortunately, no account similar to Dudo’s exists for the Vikings in England. That is to say, there survives no narrative, written in the Danelaw (or out of it, for that matter), that describes how Christianity became re-established in northern and eastern England. The only information we have about the baptism of Vikings in England is found in tiny snippets, mostly in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.<sup>37</sup> This work, which mentions the baptisms of Viking leaders only, certainly portrays Scandinavians as undergoing baptism for worldly, political reasons. For example, Guthrum’s baptism in 878 is presented as one of the terms by which he and King Alfred made peace. From what we know of it, his conversion differed little from that of Rollo. Works such as the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and the *Liber Eliensis*, however, cannot be said to represent a Scandinavian view of conversion. It is worth noting that there survive no traditions of missionary saints or miracles by which the Danes in England were christened. It is possible that the reason East Anglian kings began to mint St. Edmund coins was because the story of St. Edmund’s martyrdom, followed by his head’s miraculous ability to call out to those looking for him, had somehow become connected with the conversion of the local Norsemen.<sup>38</sup> There is probably only a small chance, however, that this was the case, for neither the *Anglo-Saxon*

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<sup>36</sup> *De moribus et actis primorum Normanniae Ducum*, PL 141, col. 0648D: “in istis finibus vertetur nobis in prosperum.”

<sup>37</sup> See the information about Guthrum’s and Hæsten’s sons’ christenings in chapter 1, pages 13-14, 39.

<sup>38</sup> To read about how King Edmund’s head was found, see Winterbottom, *Three Lives of English Saints*, 81. Also see the discussion of King Edmund’s martyrdom on page 12-13.

*Chronicle* nor Abbo of Fleury's *Vita Sancti Eadmundi* indicate that Edmund's martyrdom caused any Vikings to approach the baptismal font. While we do not have any work comparable to Dudo's that can tell us how the Norsemen in England viewed conversion, there is no reason to think that they did not view it as the Normans did: that is, as a change in behavior that was made after cool consideration of benefits and drawbacks.

A striking similarity between the histories of the Vikings in France and in England is that neither Scandinavian culture nor Scandinavian religion seems to have survived long after these groups had settled on the land and become firmly attached to a particular area. It is perhaps symbolic that the formal settlement of the Vikings in eastern England and Normandy was accompanied in both cases by the baptism of a Viking leader. In England Guthrum was baptized as part of the terms by which the Danelaw was created in 878. In France Rollo's baptism was a condition for the creation of the duchy of Normandy. Before the period of settlement, the written records do not indicate that the Vikings had any interest in religious change. There are no records of the christening of Scandinavians in England between 865 and 878, the period when the "Great Army" was most active. After the Vikings became invested in local English communities, however, their conversion became not only possible, but fairly rapid. The first record of the Viking settlement occurs in 876, when the *Chronicle* tells us that "Halfdan shared out the lands of Northumbria".<sup>39</sup> A number of factors indicate that the overwhelming majority of the Scandinavians in England had converted by the middle of the tenth century. Of the facts that we can observe, the explosion in church building in eastern England c. 950 is perhaps most indicative that the Danelaw had undergone a huge religious shift by the middle of the century. In other words, in a period of less than seventy-five years the Vikings went from being new arrivals in England with minimal knowledge of Christianity to being baptized Christians building new

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<sup>39</sup> ASC A, D, E, 876 (A): "Healfdene Norpanhymbra lond gedelde." The same information is found in ASC C, 877 [=876].

churches and restoring older ecclesiastical establishments. The period of transition lasted less than three generations. If Oda, the son of an English mother and a Scandinavian father whom the *Vita Oswaldi* specifically describes as heathen, was at all typical children of mixed marriages, then we must conclude that intermarriage generally caused heathen beliefs and practices to be limited to the immigrant parent.<sup>40</sup>

We see a similar pattern a little to the south. Ninth-century Frankish writings record the attacks of Vikings and Carolingian leaders' negotiations with them, but the few baptisms they mention are generally portrayed as deliberate attempts to fool the Christians for the purpose of robbing them, as in the case that Dudo describes in which a recently christened Viking chieftain is borne into the church as part of a funeral procession.<sup>41</sup> Like the Scandinavians in England, however, once the Scandinavians in France were encouraged to put down roots in a specific area assigned to them, their conversion appears to have followed fairly quickly. Archbishop Witto of Rouen's letter, written c. 914 to Hervé of Reims asking for advice on what to do with baptized Normans who continued to act like heathens, suggests that many Normans were being baptized at that time, even if their behavior did not undergo any sudden changes.<sup>42</sup> Flodoard's observation that "the Normans began to take up the faith of Christ" was made in 921, exactly ten years after the duchy of Normandy had been set up.<sup>43</sup> During the 920's and 30's Flodoard does not describe the Normans as heathens or give any indication that they were proving obstinate about converting. In short, the few bits of evidence available to us indicate that there was a rather sudden move towards Christianity amongst the Scandinavians following their permanent establishment in a specific area.

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<sup>40</sup> See the description of Oda's childhood on page 58.

<sup>41</sup> *De moribus et actis primorum Normanniae Ducum*, PL 141, cols. 0623C-0625B.

<sup>42</sup> Guillot, 102.

<sup>43</sup> *Les Annales de Flodoard*, 6: "quippe fidem Xpisti coeperunt suscipere."

Although intermarriage can partially explain this sudden religious shift, it remains unclear why immigrant families and people living in largely Scandinavian communities – such as those that probably existed in the Pays de Caux – should have given up their old religious beliefs and practices. Archbishop Witto's letter indicates that there were at least a few clergymen engaged in conscious evangelical work amongst the settlers in Normandy, while in Northumbria, the mixture of images from Scandinavian stories on otherwise Christian monuments is often thought to be a deliberate attempt to convey Christian teachings to a Scandinavian audience. It is possible that it was only when the Vikings settled on the land that they remained in a single spot long enough for clergymen who were so minded to have time enough to work on converting them. It is very difficult to convert people, whether by appealing to their emotions, their reason, or their sense of expediency, if they never stay in one place. The contrast between the Scandinavians' lack of interest in conversion before settling and rapid conversion after settling, might also be said to indicate the extent to which pre-Christian Norsemen believed in gods who were attached to specific areas and specific groups of people. By settling in England or Normandy, the Vikings might have felt that they were breaking their ties with their previous communities and were thus cut off from those communities' cults. Gro Steinsland points out that Scandinavian religion was based around cults practiced more by kinship groups than individuals. She calls Scandinavian heathenism a "folk religion" and writes that such religions are characterized by the fact that "to belong to the folk group is synonymous with belonging to the religious fellowship".<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, "it is characteristic for folk religions that the gods are tied to the folk group's own territory. In another man's territory different gods rule".<sup>45</sup> Similarly, in her study of a graveyard at Høre church in Valdres, Inger Helene Vibe Müller points out that pre-Christian burial practices, like pre-Christian religion, seem to have

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<sup>44</sup> Steinsland, 31-2.

<sup>45</sup> Steinsland, 32.

been based on kinship groups.<sup>46</sup> When they planted themselves permanently in a new land where they were surrounded by people practicing a different cult, the Scandinavians might well have decided that it was only logical to abandon the cult practiced by the old kinship group and to participate in what must have at first appeared as the new group's local cult. Any explanation, however, as to why the Norsemen so quickly gave up their old religious habits upon settlement cannot be anything more than speculation. What is clear is that for whatever reason, the religious change that the Vikings in both England and France went through was closely connected with the establishment of permanent Norse colonies in these countries.

A comparison of the conversion histories of the Scandinavians in eastern England and Normandy leads us to the observation of three features that seem to apply to groups of Vikings in general. The first is that while Norsemen may not have been as dependent on their kings for spiritual direction as Carole Cusack suggests, the available evidence suggests that large-scale conversion did not occur until the king took the lead.<sup>47</sup> Perhaps our sources, in their concentration on aristocratic figures, mislead us on this score. Nevertheless, we do not see signs of widespread conversion, such as the sudden building of churches in East Anglia in the mid-tenth century, until after works like the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* record the baptisms of Viking chieftains. The second characteristic we can see in Scandinavian populations is that their view of conversion did not, apparently, conform to the conversion model that was dominant in the Middle Ages. Far from viewing their christening as being the result of an overpowering, wondrous demonstration of Christianity's truth, Scandinavians tended to view the religious transformation of their societies as being a logical course of action, which their ancestors had chosen after due consideration. They were unashamed to see their forebears as having been baptized for worldly, self-serving ends. A final observation about Viking groups is that for

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<sup>46</sup> Inger Helene Vibe Müller, "Fra ættefellesskap til sognefellesskap," in *Nordisk Hedendom: Et Symposium*, ed. Gro Steinsland, Ulf Drobin, Juha Pentikäinen, Preben Meulengracht Sørensen (Odense: Universitetsforlag, 1991), 368.

<sup>47</sup> Cusack, 175-6.

whatever reason, the evangelization of these groups was intimately tied up with encouraging them to settle and put down roots in a new community. Flodoard's statement in 921, a decade after the founding of Normandy, that the Normans were beginning to convert, indicates that the Scandinavians viewed it as appropriate to take up a new religion in a new homeland. Before the period of colonization began, we see little to no evidence of interest in Christianity among the Vikings. When the Vikings did settle, however, they appear to have given up their old religious beliefs and practices almost immediately.

## Chapter 4

### The Vikings in Ireland

Archaeological evidence strongly suggests that the Vikings in Ireland came probably from the coastal areas of western and southwestern Norway. A particularly large number of Irish goods have been found in graves in Rogaland, Hordaland, and Sognefjord.<sup>1</sup> It is true that some of these goods may have found their way to Norway through trading or plundering in other countries, for instance, in England or Scotland. If this were generally the case, however, we would expect to find a few Irish items mixed with many non-Irish items. Instead, we find an overwhelming number of Irish items, especially in Rogaland and Sognefjord, where grave finds indicate that Vikings raided exclusively in Ireland.<sup>2</sup> As far fewer Viking Age graves have been discovered in Denmark than in Norway, it is difficult to judge whether there was as much direct contact between Ireland and Denmark as between Ireland and Norway. Examples of Insular metalwork akin to that found up and down the coast of Norway have been found in Denmark and Sweden, but only in the commercial centers of Helgö/Birka and Hedeby, suggesting that the metalwork that did find its way to those lands did so through trade, rather than through plundering followed by transfer back to the homeland.<sup>3</sup> This small number of Irish goods can more realistically be considered the result of trade routes than the large number of such goods in southwestern Norway can. Linguistic evidence likewise supports the idea that the Scandinavian presence in Ireland was more Norwegian than Danish. Though Irish Gaelic borrowed far fewer words from Norse than did Scottish Gaelic, Magnus Oftedal argues that those loan words that do exist seem

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<sup>1</sup> Jan Petersen, *British Antiquities of the Viking Period Found in Norway*, vol. 5 of *Viking Antiquities in Great Britain and Ireland*, ed. Haakon Shetelig (Oslo: H. Aschehoug, 1940), 15-79; Egon Wamers, "Some Ecclesiastical and Secular Insular Metalwork Found in Norwegian Viking Graves," *Peritia* 2 (1983): 303.

<sup>2</sup> Egon Wamers, "Insular Finds in Viking Age Scandinavia and the State Formation of Norway," in *Ireland and Scandinavia in the Early Viking Age*, ed. Howard B. Clarke, Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, and Ragnall Ó Floinn (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 199), 57.

<sup>3</sup> Wamers, "Insular finds in Viking Age Scandinavia and the State Formation of Norway", 47-51.

to have been of Norwegian, and more specifically southwestern Norwegian, origin.<sup>4</sup> Likewise, the few runic inscriptions that have been found in Dublin tend to use the Norwegian and Swedish short-twig runes rather than the Danish long-stem runes.<sup>5</sup> Though there is some evidence that some of the Vikings in Ireland came from Denmark – John Sheehan points out that most of the imported objects in Ireland’s early Viking Age silver hoards were from Denmark or the Baltic, for instance – it appears that most of the Scandinavians who went to Ireland came from Norway and especially southwestern Norway.<sup>6</sup>

Although the island of Britain provided a natural barrier between Scandinavia and Ireland, it did not take the Scandinavians long to realize that a large island lay just a little to the west of Britain. While the *Annals of Ulster* and the *Annals of Clonmacnoise* record – in an exceptionally exaggerated way – the attack of 793, it was another two years before the Irish met the Vikings face to face.<sup>7</sup> In 795 the island of Rathlinn, off the coast of Antrim, was harried and its shrines damaged.<sup>8</sup> For about the next forty years the Viking attacks on Ireland, as on other parts of Western Europe, were sporadic and usually confined to the coast. The *Annals of Ulster*, for example, mostly record the plundering of islands or coastal sites, such as *Inis Patraicc* (which Hogan suggests could be either Inchpatrick, county Dublin, or St. Patrick’s Island in the

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<sup>4</sup> Magnus Oftedal, “Scandinavian place-names in Ireland,” in *Proceedings of the Seventh Viking Congress*, ed. Bo Almqvist and David Greene, (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1976), 126.

<sup>5</sup> M. P. Barnes, J. R. Hagland, and R. I. Page, *The Runic Inscriptions of Viking Age Dublin* (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1997), 62: “Most of the inscriptions show a mixture of long-branch and short-twig runes, though there is a single example, an inscribed antler, in long-branch runes alone.”

<sup>6</sup> John Sheehan, “Early Viking Age Silver Hoards from Norway,” in *Ireland and Scandinavia in the Early Viking Age*, ed. Howard B. Clarke, Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, and Ragnall Ó Floinn (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1998), 192.

<sup>7</sup> According to the *Annals of Ulster*, “The devastation of all the islands of Britain by heathens.” The original Latin reads, “Vastatio omnium insularum Britannie a gentilibus” (Seán MacAirt and Gearóid MacNiocaill, eds. and trans., *Annals of Ulster: Text and Translation* (Dublin: Institute for Advanced Studies, 1983), 794 [=793].) The *Annals of Clonmacnoise* say, “All the Islands of Brittain were wasted & much troubled by the Danes; this was their first footing in England” (Denis Murphy, ed., *Annals of Clonmacnoise* (1896; repr. Somerset: Llanerch Publishers, 1993), 791 [=793]).

<sup>8</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 795; John O’Donovan, ed. and trans. *Annala Rioghachta Éireann: Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland by the Four Masters* (Dublin: Hodges, Smith, and Co., 1856) 790 [=793].



Skerries<sup>9</sup>) in 798, Inishmurray in 807, Howth in 821, Bangor in 823 and 824, and Downpatrick and *Inis Daimle* (an island in the river Suir<sup>10</sup>) in 825.<sup>11</sup> For the first three and a half decades of the ninth century, the annals do not mention Viking raids during most years, nor do they describe the Scandinavians' activities in any detail. The Vikings seem to have been interested not in seizing land, but in taking plunder. For the most part the particular type of plunder that they took is not specified, which perhaps indicates that the Viking raids differed little from the raids that the annals describe the Irish perpetrating against one another. An exception to this occurs in 821 when, after noting the harrying of Howth, the annalist adds that "a great prey of women" was taken.<sup>12</sup> This kidnapping of women, presumably for sale as concubines, must have struck the Irish as noteworthy, though it is unclear whether the Irish were struck by how many captives were taken or by the fact that the captives were women. Nonetheless, for the first four decades of the ninth century, the annals describe far more intra-Irish raids than Viking raids and there is little indication that the Scandinavians were attempting to build long-term settlements in Ireland.

This situation, in which the Viking raids were sporadic and of no importance to Irish politics or culture, began to change in 837, when the *Annals of Ulster*, the *Annals of the Four Masters*, and the *Chronicum Scotorum* all describe fleets of sixty Viking ships on both the Boyne and the Liffey. The annals further record that the Vikings heavily defeated the Uí Néill in battle (though they failed to kill the kings), plundered *Magh Life* and *Magh Bregh* – the plains of the Liffey and of Brega, and destroyed all the churches of Loch Erne, Clones, and Devenish.<sup>13</sup> From the 820's, the frequency of Viking raids had been increasing, but the size of the Scandinavian fleets, the intensity of the attack, and the scope and scale of the damage clearly struck the Irish as

<sup>9</sup> Edmund Hogan, *Onomasticon Goedelicum* (1910; repr., Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000), 469.

<sup>10</sup> Hogan, 463.

<sup>11</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 798, 807, 821, 823, 824, 825.

<sup>12</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 821, "praed mor di mnaib do brid ass".

<sup>13</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 837, *Annals of the Four Masters*, 836 [=837], 454-56; William M. Hennessy, ed. and trans., *Chronicum Scotorum: A Chronicle of Irish Affairs* (1866; repr., Vaduz: Kraus Reprint, 1964), 837.

being new and different. The annalists described this event in more detail than they had any previous Viking activity. Two years later the *Annals of the Four Masters* and the *Annals of Clonmacnoise* say that some foreigners “took” Loch Neagh and from there were able to despoil northern Ireland.<sup>14</sup> This suggests that the Vikings were beginning to seize small amounts of territory and establish permanent or semi-permanent bases from which to conduct their activities. Two years after this we read that the foreigners built a *longphort* at *Linn Duachaill* (a site that Hogan was unable to identify),<sup>15</sup> from which they harried the lands and churches of Westmeath and Longford, and another at Dublin, from which they raided Leinster and the Uí Néill.<sup>16</sup>

The establishment of these *longphuirt* in 841 marks the beginning of the annals’ use of a word whose meaning – and what it indicates about the history of the Vikings in Ireland – has been the subject of much debate. The term *longphort* quite literally means “ship camp”, though the archaeological and historical evidence shows that *longphuirt* were much more than just ports. Charles Doherty points out that the meaning of the word *longphort* evolved over time.<sup>17</sup> He argues that at first it referred merely to a military camp and compares it to the term *dúnad*, which was also used in connection with the Vikings. He suggests the possibility that writers used *longphort* for coastal military camps and *dúnad* for inland ones. Mary A. Valante, however, criticizes Doherty’s discussion of the *longphort* on the grounds that it overemphasizes that military aspect of these sites and distinguishes the word *longphort* from the word *dúnad* in a way that the sources do not support.<sup>18</sup> Valante writes that the annalists used *longphort* quite flexibly to refer to everything “from temporary raiding bases, to Scandinavian rural settlements, to way

<sup>14</sup> *Annals of the Four Masters*, 838 [=839]; *Annals of Clonmacnoise*, 836 [=839].

<sup>15</sup> Hogan, 490.

<sup>16</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 841; *Annals of the Four Masters*, 840 [=841]; *Chronicum Scotorum*, 841. The annals say that from *Linn Duachaill* (which Hogan was not able to identify), the Vikings launched raids against *Tethba*, which Hogan does identify as being in counties Westmeath and Longford (Hogan, 638).

<sup>17</sup> Charles Doherty, “The Vikings in Ireland: a Review,” in *Ireland and Scandinavia in the early Viking Age*, ed. Howard B. Clarke, Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, and Ragnall Ó Floinn (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1998), 324–26.

<sup>18</sup> Mary A. Valante, *The Vikings in Ireland: Settlement, Trade, and Urbanization* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2008), 39.

stations between more major sites, to Irish army camps, to settlements which may have been failed attempts at permanent settlements, to the early towns of Dublin and Limerick”.<sup>19</sup>

It is possible that the uniqueness of the *longphuirt* in Ireland has been overplayed. Valante points out that in other western European countries – England and France, for instance – we read that the Vikings began to overwinter in the 830’s, that is, at about the same time that the Irish began to use the word *longphort*.<sup>20</sup> Thus, early Viking settlements in Ireland were probably akin to Viking settlements elsewhere. The mid-ninth-century *Miracles of St-Benoît*, for example, describe an island on the Loire as being used by the Vikings as a port for their ships, a military camp from which to launch raids, and as a temporary prison for captives to be sold as thralls elsewhere.<sup>21</sup> A report from the *Annals of St-Bertin* gives the impression that in the last few decades of the ninth century, Viking settlements in France were becoming semi-permanent and were being used at least partially for peaceful purposes. It states that in 873, the Frankish king Charles allowed a band of Vikings “to stay until February on an island in the Loire, and to hold a market there”.<sup>22</sup> These Frankish reports are similar to what we read of the *longphuirt* in Ireland. The *Annals of Ulster*’s statement in 851 that “*dubgennti* came to Áth Cliath, made a great slaughter of the *finngaill*, and plundered the *longphort*, both people and property” shows that there must have been something at this *longphort* to plunder; that is, the *longphort* must have contained a large amount of wealth, possibly housed in semi-permanent or permanent buildings.<sup>23</sup> In 871, the *Annals of Ulster* say that Amlaíb and Ímar (two Vikings) returned from

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<sup>19</sup> Valante, 38.

<sup>20</sup> Valante, 40.

<sup>21</sup> Poul Holm, “The Slave Trade of Dublin, Ninth to Twelfth Centuries,” *Peritia* 5 (1986), 325.

<sup>22</sup> Félix Grat, Jeanne Vieliard, et Suzanne Clémencet, eds., *Annales de Saint-Bertin* (Paris: Librairie C. Klincksieck, 1964), 873.

<sup>23</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 851. The *dubgennti* and the *finngaill* were competing groups of Vikings in ninth-century Ireland. The use of these names and the history of these two groups will be discussed much more thoroughly on page 120-4.

Scotland to Áth Cliath with many captives, presumably for sale.<sup>24</sup> In different parts of western Europe, therefore, we see the Vikings building camps that could be used for both military and economic purposes and that became increasingly permanent over the course of the ninth century. The only thing unique to the Irish situation was the annalists' coining of a special word for these Viking settlements.

Between 830 and 849 the Vikings set up a number of *longphuirt* in Ireland and from them, harried the countryside intensively. More than half of the recorded raids on Irish churches occurred during these two decades.<sup>25</sup> The more prominent *longphuirt* mentioned in the annals include those at Lough Neagh, Cork, Dublin, Annagassan, *Cael Uisci* (between Warrenpoint and Newry in county Down<sup>26</sup>), and *Caille*.<sup>27</sup> In 845 both the *Annals of Ulster* and the *Chronicum Scotorum* mention a *dún* at Lough Ree which, judging from the annalists' often flexible use of these terms, could probably just as easily have been called a *longphort*.<sup>28</sup> The Viking settlement that archaeologists have discovered at Woodstown could have been a *longphort*, though the annals do not record it. Of the various *longphuirt*, some were likely no more than temporary camps from which to plunder an area intensely for a certain period. Others, however, were clearly much more. Dublin and Annagassan were located along the middle of the eastern seaboard and allowed easy access by river to the wealthiest, most densely populated parts of the country. According to Alfred Smyth, the Norsemen at both these sites maintained contact with Scandinavian settlements in England and Scotland.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, such contact can be inferred from the *Annals of Ulster*'s eventual description of one Viking, Ímar, as "king of all the Scandinavians

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<sup>24</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 871.

<sup>25</sup> Valante, 42.

<sup>26</sup> Hogan, 136.

<sup>27</sup> Hogan identifies a number of sites named *Caille*, but none of them correspond to the *Caille* in the annals. The *Annals of the Four Masters*, however, mention *Caille* in connection with Colooney, which is in Sligo. See the *Annals of the Four Masters*, 844: "The plundering of Colooney by the fleet of the *Caille*".

<sup>28</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 845; *Chronicum Scotorum*, 845.

<sup>29</sup> A. P. Smyth, *Scandinavian York and Dublin* (Dublin: Templekieran Press, 1975), 1:15-22.

of Ireland and Britain”.<sup>30</sup> Through way stations in these countries, goods could travel from Dublin to Scandinavia. The fact that the locations of several of the Vikings’ *longphuirt* allowed their inhabitants both to raid the richest parts of Ireland with ease and to maintain close contact with the rest of the Viking diaspora suggests that these *longphuirt* were founded not just as military camps, but as what Mary Valante calls “gateway communities”, whose original purpose was to funnel Irish goods back to Scandinavia.

The record in 841, found in both the *Annals of Ulster* and the *Chronicum Scotorum*, of the Vikings’ establishment of a new *longphort*, marks the first appearance of the name *Dubhlinn*, meaning “dark pool”.<sup>31</sup> In 849 the *Annals of the Four Masters* began to use it.<sup>32</sup> Because of its later importance, the founding of the Viking settlement at Dublin has been a source of great interest to historians. Unfortunately, the annals do not tell us exactly where the first encampment was, what the political circumstances were of its foundation, or how quickly it became more than just a military camp. Enormous amounts of archaeological research have been dedicated to finding the ninth-century Scandinavian camp, but without result. To complicate our efforts to describe the foundation of Dublin, the written sources make it clear that some sort of Irish settlement, perhaps a monastery, existed very near the spot where the Scandinavians eventually set up camp, though how close these two sites were and what the relationship was between them remains the subject of debate. The most recent studies indicate that the original Viking settlement at Dublin was north of the “dark pool” from which the city takes its name, while the Irish settlement, called Áth Cliath, was south of the pool.<sup>33</sup> Despite the closeness of the two sites, the annals do not use the name *Duiblinn* except in connection with Viking activity. The Viking settlement must have grown, for eventually the annals begin to describe the Vikings as

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<sup>30</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 873.

<sup>31</sup> *Chronicum Scotorum*, 841; *Annals of Ulster*, 841.

<sup>32</sup> *Annals of the Four Masters*, 847 [=849], 476.

<sup>33</sup> Neill, John, “Excavations at Longford Street Little, Dublin: and Archaeological Approach to Dubh Linn,” in *Medieval Dublin 5*, ed. Seán Duffy (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2004), 89.

being from Áth Cliath. Nevertheless, there is no incident involving the Viking settlement for which one set of annals uses the name *Duiblinn*, while another uses the Irish site's name - Áth Cliath. Whatever early Dublin was, ninth-century Irishmen clearly saw it as being very different from the Irish community that preceded it.

Although they have not been able to establish the location of the earliest Viking settlement at Dublin, archaeological excavations have uncovered items that indicate that Dublin soon became, and perhaps always was, more than a mere raiding base. Many weapons have been found, showing that raiding was important to Dublin.<sup>34</sup> Archaeologists have also uncovered craftsmen's tools, such as forge tongs and hammer-heads, that could be used to make weapons or to make less threatening goods. Far more importantly, bronze scales and lead weights show that Dublin was a commercial site.<sup>35</sup> The presence of spindle whorls and a linen smoother indicate that women lived at Dublin.<sup>36</sup> Even if these were Irish women taken as wives or concubines by the Vikings, their presence contributes greatly to the impression that from an early stage, Dublin was thought of as a long-lasting community. It is entirely possible, of course, that these women were Norse, in which case their presence, combined with that of craftsmen and merchants, suggests that Dublin was very deliberately created on a long-term basis in order to facilitate the transfer of products out of Ireland.

Of all the Vikings' *longphuirt*, Dublin emerged rather quickly as one of the most important, if not the most important. It must have grown with remarkable speed, for in 845 the

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<sup>34</sup> Elizabeth O'Brien, "The Location and Context of Viking Burials at Kilmainham and Islandbridge, Dublin," in *Ireland and Scandinavia in the early Viking Age*, ed. Howard B. Clarke, Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, and Ragnall Ó Floinn, (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1998), 213. Also note the number of weapons that were found in what seem to be ninth-century Viking graves at Dublin. See Linzi Simpson, "Viking Warrior Burials in Dublin: Is This the *Longphort*?" in *Medieval Dublin 6*, ed. Seán Duffy (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2005), 13-57; Cathy Daly, "Beyond Valhalla: the Conservation of a Group of Viking Grave-Goods from Dublin," in *Medieval Dublin 6*, ed. Seán Duffy (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2005), 64-74.

<sup>35</sup> O'Brien, 213.

<sup>36</sup> O'Brien, 214.

*Annals of Ulster* say that foreigners from Dublin set up camp at *Clon Andobuir*.<sup>37</sup> In 849 we see a more striking sign of Dublin's rapid growth. In that year, the *Annals of Ulster* tell us "a naval expedition of seven score ships of adherents of the king of the foreigners came to exact obedience from the foreigners who were in Ireland before them, and afterwards they caused confusion in the whole country".<sup>38</sup> This might be viewed as a sign that the Norse in Ireland were becoming too powerful and that some ruler in Scandinavia was worried that they would become independent of his control. It is at least as likely, however, that this ruler was worried that some rival would try to take Dublin away from him. In 851, we read that the *dubgenti*, that is, the "dark gentiles" raided Dublin and Annagassan and slaughtered the *finngaill*, the "white foreigners".<sup>39</sup> Attacks on Dublin by these "dark gentiles", also sometimes called *dubgaill*, or "dark foreigners", continued until 853. In that year, the annals tell us that Amlaíb (apparently an Irish spelling of the Norse name Óláfr, or Olaf) "the son of the king of *Lochlann*", came with a fleet to force Dublin to submit to him.<sup>40</sup> There is no consensus as to what the term *Laithlinn* or *Lochlann* originally meant. By the mid-eleventh century, Irish and Welsh sources clearly use it to mean Norway, but it is not clear that this is how ninth-century Irishmen used it.<sup>41</sup> In any

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<sup>37</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 845.

<sup>38</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 849.

<sup>39</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 851; *Chronicum Scotorum* 851; *Annals of the Four Masters*, 849 [=851]. The *Annals of Ulster* tell us, "Amlaíb, son of the king of Lochlann, came to Ireland, and the foreigners of Ireland submitted to him, and he took tribute from the Irish." The original Irish reads, "Amhlaim m. righ Laithlinde do tuidhecht a nErinn coro giallsat Gaill Erenn dó, & cis o Goidhelaib." For more on the *dubgenti*, *finngaill*, and *dubgaill*, see pages 122-25.

<sup>40</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 853; *Chronicum Scotorum*, 853; Joan Newlon Radner, ed. and trans., *Fragmentary Annals of Ireland*, (Dublin: Institute for Advanced Studies, 1978), 853, *Annals of the Four Masters*, 851 [=853].

<sup>41</sup> Valante, 65. The discussion about the original meaning of *Laithlinn/Lochlann* is ongoing. In 1911 Carl Marstrander argued that Lochlann derived from Rogaland, a region on the western coast of Norway (Carl Marstrander, "Lochlann," *Ériu* 5 (1911): 250-1). Egon Wamers argues that it could not have been the Oslofjord area, as this region was solidly under Danish control in the ninth century, and therefore could not have had any kings sending their sons to other lands (Wamers, "Insular Finds," 71). Wamers does, however, admit that Lochlann could have been either the region of Trondheimsfjord. More specifically, following Andreas Holmsen's and Per Sveaas Andersen's arguments, he suggests that the Irish Laithlind might have come from the Old Norse *Hlaðir* (Lade), the seat of the jarls of Lade who ruled Trøndelag and Hålogaland from the ninth through the eleventh centuries (see: Wamers, "Insular finds," 66; Andreas Holmsen, *Nye studier i gammel historie* (Oslo: Universitetsforlag, 1976), 61-70; Per Sveaas Andersen, *Samlingen av Norge og kristningen av lande, 800-1130* (Oslo: Universitetsforlag, 1977), 2: 58-62). David Greene suggests that it could have been a Viking encampment on the Isle of Mann or in Gaelic-speaking Scotland (David Greene, "The Evidence of Language and Place-Names in

event, his name alone tells us that Olaf could not have been anything except a Scandinavian. He and Ímar, that is, Ívarr, or Ivar, another Viking sometimes identified as his brother, secured the loyalty of the Viking settlements, especially Dublin, and put an end to any hope that the *dubgaill* might take control of these communities.<sup>42</sup> For the next few years, the *dubgaill* remained a threat and tried to establish themselves and Strangford Lough and Carlingford Lough, but were usually defeated.<sup>43</sup> They were also active in Scotland, England, and Wales and the *Annales Cambriae* even use the term “dark foreigners”, though they never use the term “fair foreigners”.<sup>44</sup>

The annals’ descriptions of the conflicts between the *dubgenti*, “dark gentiles” or *dubgaill*, “dark foreigners” and the *finngenti*, “fair foreigners” or *finngaill*, “fair foreigners” has created one of the most persistent sources of debate and confusion in the study of the Vikings in Ireland. What distinguished the “fair foreigners” from the “dark foreigners”? Furthermore, assuming that these groups were both Scandinavians, why would anyone describe some of them as “dark”? Late medieval and early modern Irish writers, such as Mac Firbhisigh and Keating, had no doubt about the answer to the first question: the *finngaill* were Norwegians and the *dubgaill* were Danes. Scholars have been less sure about why the Danes and the Norwegians were designated according to color, but the explanations most commonly put forward are that the words *dub* and *finn* referred to the Vikings’ hair color or to the color of the Vikings’ armor.<sup>45</sup>

These assumptions were so prevalent for so long that they even slipped into Quinn’s *Dictionary*

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Ireland,” in *The Vikings: Proceedings of the Symposium of the Faculty of Arts of Uppsala University, June 6-9, 1977*, ed. Thorsten Andersson and Karl Inger Sandred (Uppsala: University Press, 1978), 120). Peter Sawyer argues that *Lochlann* must have referred to Norwegian settlements in the Scottish Isles (Sawyer, *The Age of the Vikings*, 211). Based on the strong archaeological evidence showing that Irish goods were taken in the ninth and tenth centuries to Norway, I tend to assume that *Laithlinn/Lochlann* was somewhere in Norway, but I cannot prove this.

<sup>42</sup> *Annals of Ulster* 853; *Fragmentary Annals of Ireland*, 849 [=853].

<sup>43</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 852; *Chronicum Scotorum*, 852, *Annals of the Four Masters*, 850 [=852], *Chronicum Scotorum*, 877; *Annals of the Four Masters*, 874 [=877].

<sup>44</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 856; *Chronicum Scotorum*, 856; *Annals of Ulster*, 875; *Annals of Ulster*, 877; John Williams ab Ithel, ed., *Annales Cambriae* (London: Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1860), 13, 14. Interestingly, the *Annales Cambriae* use the Latin *gentilibus nigris* in 853, but in 866 try to transliterate the Irish term by writing *dub gint*.

<sup>45</sup> Alfred P. Smyth, “The Black Foreigners of York and the White foreigners of Dublin,” *Saga-Book of the Viking Society* 19 (1974), 103.



of the Irish Language, in which, under the entry for *genti*, we see *dub-g.* defined as “(lit. black-haired heathens) Danes”, and *finn-g.* defined as “(lit. fair-haired heathens) Norwegians.”<sup>46</sup>

Mac Firbhisigh and Keating did not identify the “dark foreigners” and the “fair foreigners” as, respectively, Danes and Norwegians for no reason. The earliest Irish text to state that the “black foreigners” were Danes is the twelfth-century *Cogadh Gaedhil re Gallaibh*, which states that in 851, “there came after this dark gentile *Danair*...and they endeavored to drive the fair gentiles out of Erin.”<sup>47</sup> Although the *Cogadh* never identifies the “fair foreigners”, it is easy enough to see that if the “dark foreigners” were Danes, then the “fair foreigners” were probably some other Scandinavian ethnic group. The *Cogadh* could have gotten its ethnic identifications from the eleventh-century *Fragmentary Annals*, which describe the events of the early 850’s as a struggle not between the dark and the fair foreigners, but between the *Danair* and the *Lochlannaigh*.<sup>48</sup> The *Fragmentary Annals* are not themselves an original work; they are a compilation, with many additions, of the *Annals of Ulster* and the *Chronicum Scotorum*. In addition to describing the Vikings as “dark foreigners” and “fair foreigners”, the *Annals of Ulster* also occasionally use the terms *Nordmannir* (presumably an Irish version of the Norse word *Norðmann*) and *Danair* (which must have been borrowed from *dönsk*, the Scandinavians’ word for their own language).<sup>49</sup> These two terms were not used simultaneously by the *Annals of Ulster*, so it is unlikely that the annalists using them ever meant to distinguish two different groups. The annalists’ use of these words surely reflects Irish-speakers’ adoption, at different points in time, of words from Old Norse. In addition, the *Annals of Ulster* never suggest that the terms *Nordmannir* and *Danair* correspond to the terms “fair

<sup>46</sup> *Dictionary of the Irish Language: Based Mainly on Old and Middle Irish Materials* (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1983), s.v. “genti”.

<sup>47</sup> James Henthorn Todd, ed. and trans., *Cogadh Gaedhil re Gallaibh* (London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1867), 18-19.

<sup>48</sup> *Fragmentary Annals of Ireland*, 98-100.

<sup>49</sup> The *Annals of Ulster* use the term “*Nordmannir*” for the first time in 856. They use the term “*Danair*” only three times, once each in 986, 987, and 990.

foreigners” and “dark foreigners”. It appears to have been the compiler of the *Fragmentary Annals* who forced these two separate terminologies together, identifying the “dark foreigners” as *Danair* and the “fair foreigners” as *Nordmannir* or *Lochlannaigh*, Norwegians. Clare Downham argues strongly that the compiler made this move in order to make the actions of his favorite king, the ninth-century Cerball mac Dúnlainge, more acceptable to readers familiar with eleventh-century politics.<sup>50</sup> This propagandistic effort would not have caused such confusion had it not been for the *Cogadh Gaedhil re Gallaibh*, which picked up these ethnic identifications and popularized them.

If, however, the “dark” and “fair” foreigners were not separated by ethnicity, then what did distinguish them? Alfred Smyth notes that the words *dub* and *finn* both appear to have had alternative meanings that were gradually forgotten.<sup>51</sup> There are a few compounds in which the root word *finn* seems to mean “old.” In Irish *scél* means “story”, while *finn-scél* means “legend” or “saga,” in other words, an old story. *Focal* means “word”, while *finn-focal* is a term associated in the literature with poetry that appears to mean “wise word” or perhaps “magic word.” If *finn* means “old”, then *dub* must mean “new” or “young.” An example of such a use is found in the Rawlinson collection of Irish genealogies in the Bodleian library. Here we read of a man named “Dub-Chormac” who, as the gloss tells us, “was called by this name for the sake of the memory of the death of his father, who died when he was being born.”<sup>52</sup> The gloss does not tell us what the father’s name was, but presumably it was Cormac. Dub-Chormac could also mean “black Cormac,” but this sort of nickname was quite widespread and would not have called for an explanation, nor does it fit with the gloss’ logic. There are a number of other names in medieval Irish that are best explained by translating *dub* and *finn* as “younger” and “elder”.

<sup>50</sup> Clare Downham, “The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly: Portrayals of Vikings in ‘The Fragmentary Annals of Ireland,’” in *The Medieval Chronicle III*, ed. Erik Kooper (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004), 33.

<sup>51</sup> Smyth, “The Black Foreigners of York and the White Foreigners of Dublin, 107.”

<sup>52</sup> Smyth, “The Black Foreigners of York and the White Foreigners of Dublin”, 111: “Ab hoc nomine vocatus est ideo quia pater eius obit nascente illo propter memoriam mortis patris eius vocatus est Dubchormac.”

These names begin with *dub* or *finn* and continue with a personal name in the genitive dual, such as “Dub-dá-Cholmán” and “Dub-dá-Suibne”, which are quite mysterious unless we take them to mean “the younger of the two Colmán’s” and “the younger of the two Suibnes”. Significantly, the Rawlinson genealogies mention that Dub-dá-Suibne had a grandfather named Suibne.

Following Smyth, if we take the *finngaill* to be the “old foreigners” and the *dubgaill* to be the “young foreigners”, then the conflict between these groups, the arrival of Amlaíb, his demand that Dublin submit to him, the Irish annals’ mentioning of the “king of *Lochlann*” begin to make more sense. The *finngaill* were the group of Scandinavians who had established Dublin and probably some of the other *longphuirt*. In 851 a new group of Vikings, the *dubgaill*, threatened the ability of the *finngaill* to control the lucrative plundering of Ireland. Alarmed by these usurpers’ attacks, and perhaps also by the possibility that the Dubliners might cease to be subservient, the “king of *Lochlann*” – that is, the petty Scandinavian king who had been benefitting from Dublin’s exports – sent a fleet to re-establish his control over Dublin. The very fact that the annals describe Amlaíb as the “son of the king of *Lochlann*” shows that they understood Dublin to be connected with the interests of some external ruler. Amlaíb and Ímar were certainly successful at defeating the usurpers, for though the “dark foreigners” remained pests for several years, they never took control of Dublin. Meanwhile, Amlaíb, Ímar, and another Viking called “Oisle” or “Asl”, so thoroughly dominated Dublin that in 862, the *Annals of Ulster* refer to them as kings.<sup>53</sup>

Though Amlaíb, Ímar, and Oisle must have in some way represented the power of the “fair foreigners”, any further identification is difficult. The *Fragmentary Annals* describe these three men as brothers, but this is unlikely, since no other source confirms this information and

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<sup>53</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 863,

only Amlaíb is ever said to be the son of the king of *Laithlinn/Lochlann*.<sup>54</sup> Whatever their relation, during the 950's and early 960's they successfully defeated numerous challenges to their power and, in forming temporary alliances with various Irish kings, began to play a role in Irish politics. They were repeatedly attacked not only by the "dark foreigners", but by the Irish and by a mysterious group called the *gall-gaedhil*, or "foreigner-Irish". Various suggestions have been made as to who these *gall-gaedhil* were, including that they were people of mixed ancestry, that they were Irish children fostered by Scandinavians, and that they were Irishmen who had abandoned Christianity and joined the heathen Vikings.<sup>55</sup> In any event, they appear only briefly (during the 850's) in the annals and generally fight alongside some other group. In 857 Amlaíb and Ímar defeated Cathal Finn, king of Munster, and his *gall-gaedhil* allies. In 858 we hear of the *gall-gaedhil* for the last time, when Cerball mac Dúnlaing of Ossory with his ally Ímar of Dublin defeated the Cenel Fiachach and the *gall-gaedhil*.<sup>56</sup> By 862 the Irish must have learnt to live with these indefatigable foreigners, for in that year Amlaíb married the daughter of his ally, Aed Finnliath.<sup>57</sup>

By the 860's, Amlaíb, Ímar, and Oisle had apparently become secure enough in their control of Dublin to begin to venture overseas. The *Annals of Ulster* record that Amlaíb and Oisle went to Britain in 866 with many followers.<sup>58</sup> They record Oisle's death in Britain in

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<sup>54</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 853; *Chronicum Scotorum*, 853; *Annals of the Four Masters*, 851 [=853]; *Fragmentary Annals*, 94.

<sup>55</sup> Valante, 913: Valante provides support for the idea that they were Irish children fostered by Scandinavians. In their article, Barra Ó Donnabháin and Benedikt Hallgrímsson consider the possibility that *gall-gaedhil* refers to people of mixed ancestry. See Barra Ó Donnabháin and Benedikt Hallgrímsson, "Dublin: The Biological Identity of the Hiberno-Norse Town," in *Medieval Dublin 2*, ed. Seán Duffy (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001), 66. The *Fragmentary Annals*, meanwhile, condemn the *gall-gaedhil* as Irishmen who had abandoned Christianity. See The *Fragmentary Annals*, 96-8: "Cath do thabhairt d'Aodh, do rígh Ailigh, .i. don rígh as fearr eagng[a]mh 'na aimsir, do loingius na nGall nGaidheal, .i. Scuit íad, & daltaí do Normainnoibh íad, & tan ann adbearar cidh // Normainnigh fríu. Maidhidh forra ré nd-Aodh, & cuirthea a ndeargár na nGall-ghaoidheal, & cinn imdha do bhreith do Aodh leis; & ra dhlighsiot na hEireannaigh an marbhadh soin, uair amhail do nidis na Lochlannaigh, do nidis-siomh."

<sup>56</sup> *Chronicum Scotorum*, 858; *Annals of the Four Masters*, 856 [=858]; *Fragmentary Annals*, 104.

<sup>57</sup> *Fragmentary Annals*, 112.

<sup>58</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 866.

867.<sup>59</sup> Amlaíb, Ímar, and Oisle must also have worked to expand their influence within Ireland, for in 867 we read that Olaf's *dún* at Clondalkin was destroyed.<sup>60</sup> Perhaps this was a different Amlaíb, but the annals never indicate that there were two important Amlaíbs in Ireland at this time. More probably, Amlaíb of Dublin was trying to expand his territory. The *Fragmentary Annals* record that Amlaíb went back to *Lochlann* to help his father in war in 871.<sup>61</sup> With this, he disappears from Irish history, although the *Pictish Chronicle* notes the death of an Amlaib [*sic*] in the land of the Picts *c.* 874.<sup>62</sup> With Amlaíb's disappearance, Ímar was left in charge of Dublin. He died in 873, being remembered by the *Annals of Ulster* and the *Chronicum Scotorum* as the "king of the Norsemen of all Ireland and Britain".<sup>63</sup> He must have spent the two years between Amlaíb's departure and his own death securing the position of his sons in Ireland, for all the leaders of Dublin in the ninth and much of the tenth century were his descendants.<sup>64</sup>

By the late ninth century, we would expect to see the Vikings in Ireland carve out a chunk of land over which one of their chieftains would become king and in which they would till the soil. This is, after all, what other groups of Scandinavians in England and France managed to do after several decades of harrying the native populations of these countries. In Ireland, however, Viking power became concentrated in a few ports of trade. There is some evidence that the Norse in Ireland established rural settlements, but the fact that such evidence is almost entirely archaeological rather than written shows that these settlements never made much of an impression. Excavations at Cloghermore Cave in Kerry have turned up the cremated remains,

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<sup>59</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 867.

<sup>60</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 867; *Annals of the Four Masters*, 865

<sup>61</sup> *Fragmentary Annals*, 144.

<sup>62</sup> William F. Skene, ed., "The Pictish Chronicle," *Chronicles of the Picts, Chronicles of the Scots, and Other Early Memorials of Scottish History* (Edinburgh: H.M. General Register House, 1867), 8. Alfred Smyth argues that this Amlaíb was also Óláfr inn hvíti, "Olaf the White," mentioned in *Landnámabók* (Smyth, *Scandinavian Kings in the British Isles*, 101-5.) Valante strongly disagrees with this proposal (Valante, 53n).

<sup>63</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 873; *Chronicum Scotorum*, 873.

<sup>64</sup> Valante, 74.

most likely from the ninth century, of at least twenty-four people.<sup>65</sup> If cremations in the ninth century were not enough to convince us of a Norse presence, the finding of a Viking silver hoard, ingots, hack silver arm bands, amber, bone combs, and a Norwegian boat-shaped whetstone leave no doubt of the settlers' background.<sup>66</sup> Evidence for another rural Scandinavian settlement is found in the *Book of Ballymote*, in which we read the following quatrain: "The descendents of Brec Bregain from the smooth rock go straight to Tara, a sea across Munster, a flame in burnt places, a foot across Thor's Mound."<sup>67</sup> The place-name *Tulach Tomair*, or "Thor's Mound", could have come about only if there were once practitioners of the Norse religion in the area. As they were heading for Tara, the sons of Brec Bregain must have marched through much of county Meath which, though it is now almost a suburb of Dublin, was at the time far removed from the Viking port. In short, there is evidence for Scandinavian rural settlement in Ireland, but unlike in England or France, the Vikings never succeeded in taking control of enough territory to form a large agricultural colony.

Between 853 and 873, the Vikings became more deeply embedded in the Irish political scene, as various groups of them made alliances with Irish kings. It is important to note that the Norsemen throughout Ireland never united for a common purpose against the Irish. Nor did the Irish up and down the country ever unite against the foreigners. Members of each group formed temporary alliances with members of the other group for their own benefit. Mary Valante argues that the rise of Harald Fairhair in the 850's in Norway probably caused the Norwegian settlements in Ireland, particularly Dublin, to become cut off from the western Norwegian kingdoms to whom they sold goods acquired through plunder.<sup>68</sup> Left adrift, the Norse in Ireland

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<sup>65</sup> Valante, 46.

<sup>66</sup> Valante, 46.

<sup>67</sup> *Book of Ballymote*, facsimile (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy House, 1887), 290 a 12-15. This quatrain reads, "Ua bricc bregain onlicc leabhair / ticc i teamair doraibh / muir dar mumain daig na dubhaigh / traigh dor tualaig tomair."

<sup>68</sup> Valante, 90-1.

were forced to begin to turn to the small Irish kingdoms around them in order to survive both militarily and economically. Whether this explanation is correct, it is true that the annals mention many Irish-Norse alliances in the third quarter of the ninth century. In 850, for instance, the Dubliners supported the king of the Ciannachta's rebellion against his Uí Néill lord.<sup>69</sup> The *Fragmentary Annals* repeatedly describe the *Danair*, presumably the "dark foreigners" acting in concert with the Irish kingdom of Ossory against the Dubliners and the *Lochlannaigh*.<sup>70</sup> Colmán Etchingham found that between 851 and 880, the annals report ninety percent fewer Viking attacks on churches than during the 830's and 840's.<sup>71</sup> It is true that between 851 and 880 the annals report fewer ecclesiastical events in general, but their recording of the happenings at churches that were unrelated to the Vikings declines by not ninety, but sixty percent during this period. It is therefore reasonable to conclude that there was a real drop in the Vikings' harrying of religious establishments, though perhaps not one as dramatic as the annals initially seem to suggest. It is possible that the disruption caused by Harold Fairhair's rise in Norway meant that the Vikings in Ireland lost the secure market that made pillaging worthwhile.

Although alliances between Norse and Irish groups never disappeared, it seems that the Dubliners became less desirable allies during the last couple of decades of the ninth century. By this time, the Dubliners were one of the few groups of Scandinavians left standing. Annagassan appears in the written record for the last time in 852.<sup>72</sup> The "dark foreigner" settlements at Strangford Lough and Carlingford Lough were destroyed in 866.<sup>73</sup> Limerick, which was first

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<sup>69</sup> *Chronicum Scotorum*, 850.

<sup>70</sup> *Fragmentary Annals*, 98 100, 102, 108, 116.

<sup>71</sup> Colmán Etchingham, *Viking Raids on Irish Church Settlements in the Ninth Century* (Maynooth: Maynooth Monographs Series Minor I, 1996), 15-16.

<sup>72</sup> Annals of Ulster, 852. Howard B. Clarke speculates as to what might have happened to Annagassan in "Proto-Towns and Towns in Ireland and Britain," in *Ireland and Scandinavia in the Early Viking Age*, ed. Howard B. Clarke, Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, and Ragnall Ó Floinn (Dublin, Four Courts Press, 1998), 352.

<sup>73</sup> In the year 866, the *Annals of Ulster* record Áed son of Niall's plundering of all of the foreigners' strongholds in Cenél nEógain and Dál Araidi, which surely would have included those at Carlingford and Strangford Loughs.

mentioned in the annals in 845, was destroyed by men from Connacht in 887.<sup>74</sup> The disappearance of these *longphuirt* left Dublin with fewer Norse rivals, but this benefit could not make up for the many problems besetting the Dubliners. Máel Sechnaill's death in 862 allowed old rivalries amongst the Uí Néill to die down. Ímar's death in 873, on the other hand, left a power vacuum in which internal conflict festered. In 893, the *Annals of Ulster* say that there was "great dissension among the foreigners of Dublin".<sup>75</sup> Áed Finnliath, who had long allied himself with Dublin, died in 879.<sup>76</sup> Although his sons continued to support Dublin, none was as powerful as their father had been and none was able to claim overlordship of the north. To make matters worse, during the 890's the kingship of Tara was held by Flann Sinna, the son of Máel Sechnaill, who had always sided with the "dark foreigners" against the Dubliners.<sup>77</sup> Unsurprisingly, this period of declining alliances with the Irish was marked by an uptick in the number of Viking raids mentioned in the annals. The Dubliners' rivalries culminated in 896 in the killing of Ímar's son, Amlaíb.<sup>78</sup> No longer receiving support from either Scandinavia or the Scottish Isles, the Dubliners began to suffer defeats at the hands of the Irish during the 890's.<sup>79</sup> In 896, the Dubliners made a mistake in killing Flannacán, the king of Brega.<sup>80</sup> Six years later, they were expelled "by Máel Finnia son of Flannacán with the men of Brega and by Cearbhall son of Muirecán, with the Leinstermen, and they abandoned a good number of their ships, and escaped half dead after they had been wounded and broken".<sup>81</sup>

Although the *Annals of Ulster* write of the "expulsion of the foreigners from Ireland", Linzi Simpson argues that burial evidence, taken in conjunction with signs of continuing

<sup>74</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 845; *Chronicum Scotorum*, 845; *Chronicum Scotorum*, 887.

<sup>75</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 893.

<sup>76</sup> *Chronicum Scotorum*, 879.

<sup>77</sup> The *Annals of Ulster* records the beginning of Flann Sinna's reign in 879.

<sup>78</sup> *Annals of the Four Masters*, 891.

<sup>79</sup> *Annals of the Four Masters*, 887, 891, 896.

<sup>80</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 896; *Annals of the Four Masters*, 891.

<sup>81</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 902.



habitation, indicate that many Norsemen remained in Dublin between its destruction in 902 and its re-establishment in 917.<sup>82</sup> Patrick Wallace is less sure; he writes that the defeat in 902

appears to have led to the mass defection of a large number of the inhabitants. They appear mainly to have crossed the Irish Sea to Lancashire, the Wirral area of Cheshire, and southern Scotland, with smaller numbers settling in north Wales and Yorkshire. Comparatively few seem to have returned to the original homelands, although some may have been involved in the settlement of Iceland. It is not known whether the settlement at Dublin was totally abandoned, or whether some inhabitants of the *longphort* stayed on or were permitted to stay on. Because of our lack of information on the physical character of the *longphort*...it is impossible to say to what extent, if any, the physical character of the later town was derived from it.<sup>83</sup>

The *Fragmentary Annals* describe how Ingimund, the leader of some of the departing Dubliners, persuaded Æthelflaed to give him and his followers some land near Chester.<sup>84</sup> The fact that very few Dubliners, if any, seem to have gone back to Scandinavia further confirms the impression that at some point during the ninth century, the close connection between Scandinavia and Dublin was broken. As Linzi Simpson's claim that Dublin continued to be inhabited is based on slightly later research than Patrick Wallace's uncertainty on the question, it is most likely that at least a few Norsemen – perhaps those who were too poor to leave – stayed in Dublin.

Nevertheless, the annals are all but silent about Scandinavian activity in Ireland between 902 and 914. Such stereotypical Viking behavior as pillaging and warfare was apparently impossible without good leadership.

In 914, several sources record the arrival of Vikings at Port Láirge, also known in Irish as Loch dá Chaech.<sup>85</sup> Over the next few years, many more Vikings arrived at this site, built a

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<sup>82</sup> Linzi Simpson, "Forty Years A-Digging: A Preliminary Synthesis of Archaeological Investigations in Medieval Dublin," in *Medieval Dublin I*, ed. Seán Duffy (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000), 25.

<sup>83</sup> Patrick T. Wallace, "Archaeology and the Emergence of Dublin as the Principal Town of Ireland," in *Settlement and Society in Medieval Ireland*, ed. John Bradley (Kilkenny: Boethius Press, 1988), 127.

<sup>84</sup> *Fragmentary Annals*, 907.

<sup>85</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 914; *Chronicum Scotorum*, 913; *Annals of the Four Masters*, 910; *Fragmentary Annals*, 914.

*longphort*, and called their settlement Waterford.<sup>86</sup> Leinster and Muster became their prey.<sup>87</sup> In 917, Vikings managed to re-take Dublin.<sup>88</sup> In the same year, the annals record fleets under Sitric and Rægnald, both grandsons of Ímar, attacking the Irish coast, Sitric at *Cenn Fuait* in Leinster and Rægnald at Waterford.<sup>89</sup> While Sitric and Rægnald both left Ireland for Britain, Godfrey, another of Ímar's grandsons, must have assumed leadership of the re-established colony at Dublin.<sup>90</sup> In 921 we read that he dared lead raids as far north as Armagh, where he encountered Ireland's mightiest king at that time, Muirchertach mac Néill.<sup>91</sup> In 922 a band of Vikings led by Tomar, son of Ailche (probably *Elgi* in Old Norse), camped at Lough Ree and pillaged Clonmacnoise.<sup>92</sup> Thus, between 914 and 922 the Norse sites of Waterford, Dublin, and Limerick were re-established.

It did not take long for Limerick and Dublin to begin to fight for supremacy over the Viking groups in Ireland.<sup>93</sup> In 924 Gothfrith "made an expedition from Dublin to Limerick, and a very large company of his followers were left behind with Elgi's son".<sup>94</sup> That is to say, many of Gothfrith's followers were left dead in Limerick. The *Annals of Clonmacnoise* say that Tomar of Limerick went to hell in 922, which presumably means that he died.<sup>95</sup> Comparing when events are reported in the *Annals of Clonmacnoise* with when they are recorded in other annals,

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<sup>86</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 915; *Annals of the Four Masters*, 912. Howard B. Clarke argues that the archaeological record shows that the Viking *longphuirt* at Cork, Limerick, Waterford, and Wexford were far too haphazard and disorganized to count as real towns until at least 980 (Clarke, 364-68).

<sup>87</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 915, 916; *Annals of the Four Masters*, 914.

<sup>88</sup> *Annals of Clonmacnoise*, 915 [=917].

<sup>89</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 917. Smyth discuss Rægnald's career in great depth. See *Scandinavian York and Dublin*, 1:93-116.

<sup>90</sup> For evidence of Rægnald's presence in Britain, see the *Annals of Ulster*, 918, and *ASC F*, 923. Under the year 920, the *Annals of Ulster* record Sitric's departure from Dublin, while in 925 *ASC D* records, "King Æthelstan and Sihtric, king of Northumbria, met at Tamworth on 30 January, and Æthelstan gave him his sister in marriage". In 926 the *ASC*, manuscript *D* records Sitric's death. See *ASC D*, 925, 926.

<sup>91</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 921.

<sup>92</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 922; Seán MacAirt, ed. and trans., *Annals of Inisfallen* (Dublin: Institute for Advanced Studies, 1951), 922; *Chronicum Scotorum*, 921 [=922; *Annals of the Four Masters*, 920[=922].

<sup>93</sup> The details of this rivalry can be read in Downham, *Viking Kings of Ireland and Britain*, 32-35.

<sup>94</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 924.

<sup>95</sup> *Annals of Clonmacnoise*, 922.

we come to the conclusion that Tomar probably died in 927. Gothfrith eventually pushed the Limerick Vikings out of Ossory, leaving Dublin in a stronger position than either Limerick or Waterford.<sup>96</sup> By the time Gothfrith died, in 934, the Dublin Norsemen's supremacy over other Viking groups was undoubted.<sup>97</sup> In 936, 942, and 946 the Dubliners dared plunder as far outside of their usual territory as Clonmacnoise and the Shannon.<sup>98</sup> There seems to have been little the Limerick Vikings could do to stop this intrusion. The economic side of the rivalry that existed between the two towns, however, shows up in the archaeological record. Of the broad band and coiled armrings that archaeologists believe were made in Dublin, more have been found in Norway than in Munster.<sup>99</sup> In the Viking hoards of Munster, archaeologists find silver ornaments of various types that are almost never seen outside of southwestern Ireland.

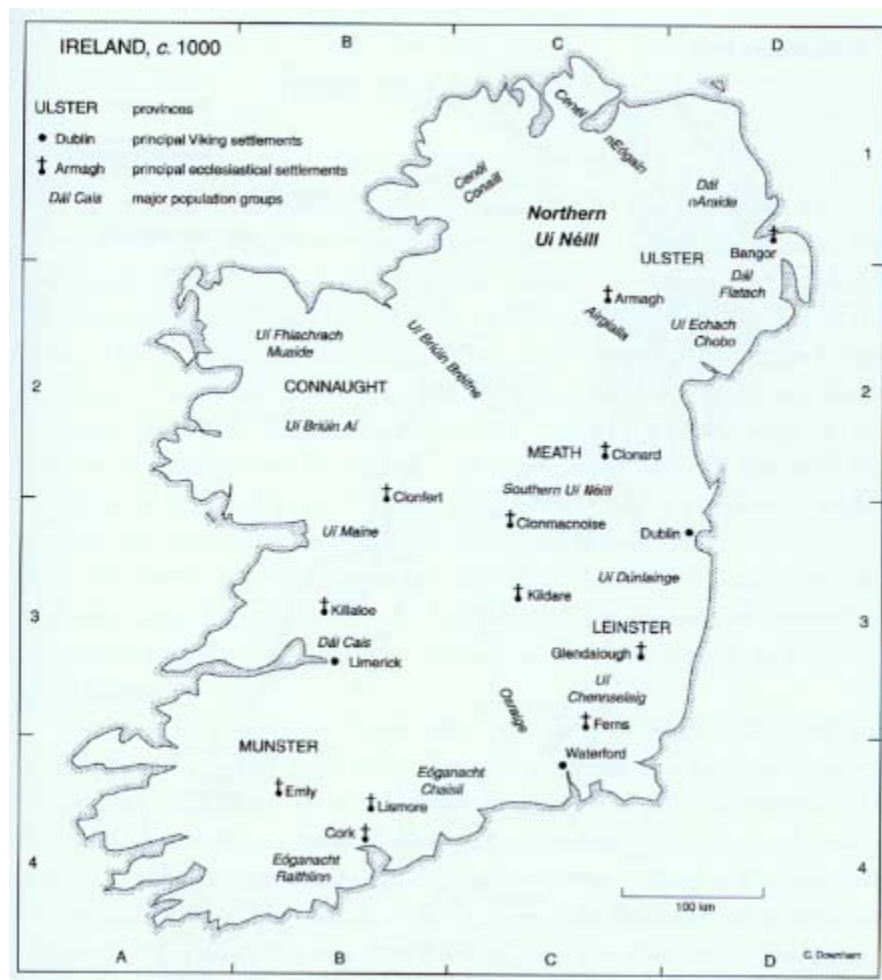
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<sup>96</sup> *Annals of the Four Masters*, 929.

<sup>97</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 934.

<sup>98</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 936; *Chronicum Scotorum*, 933 [=935]; *Annals of the Four Masters*, 934 [=936]; *Annals of Ulster*, 942; *Chronicum Scotorum*, 941 [=942]; *Annals of the Four Masters*, 940 [=942]; *Annals of Ulster*, 946.

<sup>99</sup> John Sheehan, "Viking Age Hoards from Munster: A Regional Tradition?" in *Early Medieval Munster: Archaeology, History, and Society*, ed. Michael A. Monk and John Sheehan (Cork: University Press, 1998), 153.



Map of Ireland Showing the Provinces, the Largest Viking Settlements, Ecclesiastical Sites, and Irish Families<sup>100</sup>

For about forty years after Gothfrith's death, Dublin's position as the mightiest Viking settlement in Ireland and, indeed, as one of the leading forces in Irish politics remained unchallenged. For the next decade, Gothfrith's two sons, Blacaire and Amlaíb, ruled over the Dubliners. In 937, Amlaíb tried to re-take control of Northumbria, but was defeated by the English King Æthelstan at the battle of Brunnanburh and the next year had to return to Dublin.<sup>101</sup> After a couple of years, he returned to Northumbria, allowing Blacaire to take over the

<sup>100</sup> Downham, *Viking Kings of Ireland and Britain*, xxi.

<sup>101</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 937; *ASC E*, 937; *Annals of Ulster*, 938. Alex Woolf review Amlaíb Cúarán's career in "Amlaíb Cúarán and the Gael, 941-81," in *Medieval Ireland 3*, ed. Seán Duffy (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2002), 34-44. Smyth devotes considerable space to him in *Scandinavian York and Dublin*, 2:107-21. Smyth claims that Amlaíb fought at the Battle of Brunanburh, but this suggestion is rejected by Colmán Etchingham in his article "North Wales, Ireland, and the Isles: the Insular Viking Zone," *Peritia* 15 (2001): 166.

leadership of Dublin in 940.<sup>102</sup> Blacaire seems to have been fairly incompetent as a leader; his main contribution to Irish politics was his killing of Muirchertach mac Néill in 943, followed by his plundering of Armagh.<sup>103</sup> Amlaíb, meanwhile, died in northern England in 941 and was succeeded by his cousin, also known, to the perpetual confusion of all annalists and historians since, as Amlaíb. This Amlaíb was the son of Sigtryggr (or Sitric Cáech to the Irish), another of Ímar's grandsons. For reasons that remain unclear, the Irish annals generally refer to him as Amlaíb Cúarán, or Olaf Sandal. According to the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, he managed to remain the king at York for only a brief period, as the Northumbrians expelled him in 944.<sup>104</sup> He reappears in Irish sources in 945 and took Dublin over from Blacaire.<sup>105</sup> By 948, however, the sources again describe Blacaire as Dublin's king. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* records that Amlaíb went back to Northumbria, which he ruled until about 952, though the corruption of the *Chronicle* at this point makes it difficult to be sure of the year.<sup>106</sup> At this point, he must have returned to Dublin, which he ruled until his death in 980. His second expulsion marked the end of the Dublin Vikings' attempts to rule York.

During Amlaíb Cúarán's reign, Dublin asserted itself powerfully against various Irish kingdoms. In 853, Amlaíb allied himself with Tuathal son of Ugaire, the king of northern Leinster, and together they attacked southern Leinster.<sup>107</sup> In 856, they again joined forces in order to kill one of Dublin's greatest threats, Congalach son of Maelmithig, king of the southern Uí Néill.<sup>108</sup> It was not long before Amlaíb and his followers began to engage in an ongoing

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<sup>102</sup> Under the year 940 the *Annals of the Four Masters* describe Blacaire, son of Godfrey, and the foreigners of Dublin committing raids, indicating that Blacaire was, by that point, the Dubliners' leader. In 941 the *Annals of the Four Masters* call Blacaire the lord of the foreigners.

<sup>103</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 943; *Annals of Inisfallen*, 943; *Chronicum Scotorum*, 942 [=942]; *Annals of the Four Masters*, 941 [=943].

<sup>104</sup> *ASC E*, 944.

<sup>105</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 945.

<sup>106</sup> *ASC E*, 949: "Her com Anlaf Cwiran on Norðhymbra land."; Irvine, ed., *MS E*, 952: "Her Norðhymbre fordrifan Anlaf cyning & underfengon Yric Haroldes sunu." The same information is recorded in *ASC F*, 849, 852.

<sup>107</sup> *Annals of the Four Masters*, 851 [=853].

<sup>108</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 956; *Chronicum Scotorum*, 855 [=856].

struggle with the next king of the southern Uí Néill, Domnall Ua Néill. In 969, Sitric mac Amlaíb, Amlaíb's son, accompanied by Murchad mac Finn, king of Leinster, attacked Kells, the southern Uí Néills' principal church.<sup>109</sup> Domnall managed to defeat them, but in 970, Amlaíb Cúarán led another attack on Kells.<sup>110</sup> The war between Domnall and Amlaíb escalated until, in 977, Amlaíb killed two of Domnall's sons.<sup>111</sup> In the midst of this building conflict with Domnall, Amlaíb sought to ensure that no other descendent of Ímar established a rival Scandinavian power base. In 962 one of the sons of a presumably different Amlaíb, accompanied by the *ladgmainn*, harried the region just north of Dublin.<sup>112</sup> As the *ladgmainn* are generally associated in the annals with the Hebrides, it is reasonable to suppose that this son of Amlaíb was trying to challenge Amlaíb Cúarán's might from a base in Scotland. Amlaíb Cúarán, however, defeated this rival and the annals say little more about Olaf Guðrøðsson's sons.<sup>113</sup> Amlaíb Cúarán and his descendents were thus left in a position of clear supremacy over the other Scandinavians in Ireland.

While there is no doubt that Amlaíb Cúarán emerged as one of Ireland's foremost political leaders, his power struggles with other groups and expansion of Dublin's might eventually caused other political leaders to unite against him. In about 975, after his father, Domnall, had retired, Máel Sechnaill II marked his accession to the overkingship of the Southern Uí Néill by attacking Dublin.<sup>114</sup> Ironically, Amlaíb probably helped to secure Máel Sechnaill's high position by killing two of Domnall's other sons, Muirchertach and Congalach, in 977, either of whom could have threatened Máel Sechnaill's position.<sup>115</sup> In 978, the Dubliners showed their

<sup>109</sup> *Annals of the Four Masters*, 967 [=969].

<sup>110</sup> *Chronicum Scotorum*, 970.

<sup>111</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 977.

<sup>112</sup> *Annals of the Four Masters*, 960 [=962].

<sup>113</sup> *Annals of the Four Masters*, 960 [=962].

<sup>114</sup> Whitley Stokes, ed. and trans., "Annals of Tigernach: The Fourth Fragment, A.D. 973-A.D. 1088," *Revue Celtique* 17 (1896): 338; *Chronicum Scotorum*, 973 [=975].

<sup>115</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 977.

strength against that of the Leinstermen when they killed Ugaire son of Tuathal, the overking of Leinster, along with many of his men.<sup>116</sup> As if this were not enough, in 979 the Dubliners captured Domnall Cláen, the new overking of Leinster, and raided the church of Kildare.<sup>117</sup> Unsurprisingly, Domnall Cláen's successor, Braen son of Máel Mórda, allied with Máel Sechnaill against Dublin.

In 980, the Dubliners were defeated in a battle at Tara by both the Southern Uí Néill and the Leinstermen. It is worth noting that although this battle marks one of the few occasions when we see an alliance between different Viking groups, this alliance was not between Dublin and any other Viking settlement within Ireland. Limerick and Waterford stayed out of this conflict. Rather, the Dubliners were joined by the "foreigners of the Isles", who, as they shared the Irish Sea with the Dubliners, might have viewed their economic interests as intertwined with those of this port.<sup>118</sup> The battle at Tara was a severe blow both to Amlaíb Cúarán and to the might of Dublin as the major surviving bastion of Scandinavian might in Ireland. The *Annals of the Four Masters* give a bombastic account of the battle's aftermath, saying that Máel Sechnaill

laid siege to [Dublin] for three days and three nights, and carried thence the hostages of Ireland, and among the rest Domnall Cláen, king of Leinster, and all the hostages of the Uí Néill. Two thousand was the number of the hostages besides jewels and goods, and the freedom of the Uí Néill, from the Shannon to the sea, from tribute and exaction.<sup>119</sup>

The upshot of the battle was that Amlaíb Cúarán was forced into retirement and Dublin became an Uí Néill dependency, ruled by Glún Iairn, Olaf's son and Máel Sechnaill's half-brother.

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<sup>116</sup> *Annals of Clonmacnoise*, 971 [=978]; *Annals of Ulster*, 978.

<sup>117</sup> *Annals of Clonmacnoise*, 972 [979]; *Annals of the Four Masters*, 977 [=979]; *Chronicum Scotorum*, 977 [=979].

<sup>118</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 980: "the foreigners of Dublin and of the Isles" is "Gallaibh Atho Cliath & na nInnsedh." Sawyer discusses this issue in his article "The Vikings and the Irish Sea," in *The Irish Sea Province in Archaeology and History*, ed. Donald Moore (Cardiff: Cambrian Archaeological Association, 1970), 86-92.

<sup>119</sup> *Annals of the Four Masters*, 979 [=980]: "co ttardsat forbair trí lá & trí noidce forra co ttuccsat gialla Ereann ass, im Domnall Claon, rí Laigin, & im aidire Ua Néill arcina. Fice céd lion na nGiall la taob seót & maoinne, & la saoire Ua Néill ó Sionainn co muir ce cáin cen cobach."

The diminishment in the Dubliners' standing is evident from the raids – or lack thereof – that took place over the next few years. The Dubliners, apparently quite subdued, did not dare raid anything until 983, when they harried Glendalough.<sup>120</sup> In 982, Ímar of Waterford raided Kildare, which had previously been within Dublin's sphere of power.<sup>121</sup> The Scandinavians of Waterford, however, were thwarted in their attempt to take as much advantage as possible of Dublin's defeat. In 983, Máel Sechnaill, with the support of Glún Iairn and the Dubliners, heavily defeated Waterford and Domnall Cláen in battle.<sup>122</sup> The power that Máel Sechnaill enjoyed over Dublin's affairs can still be seen in 989, when a drunken Glún Iairn was killed by a servant.<sup>123</sup> Máel Sechnaill's retaliation suggests that the servant was acting on behalf of a rival Dublin faction. Máel Sechnaill besieged Dublin for twenty days, forcing the Dubliners to pledge to pay him an ounce of gold per *garra* every Christmas Eve.<sup>124</sup> Máel Sechnaill could not have made clearer his status as lord over any potential new faction.

Glún Iairn was succeeded by his half-brother, Sitric, the son of Amlaíb Cúarán and Gormflaith. The Irish annals record rather little of his first reign. In 994 Sitric was expelled from Dublin.<sup>125</sup> He was replaced by one Ímar, who James Henthorn Todd argued was Ímar of Waterford, taking advantage of Sitric's expulsion to seize power in Dublin.<sup>126</sup> Whoever he was, Sitric expelled him upon his return in 995.<sup>127</sup> Throughout Sitric's second reign, we can see his steady attempts to reassert Dublin's independence. In 995, Sitric and his nephew attacked the church of Donaghpatrick in county Meath, for which Máel Sechnaill retaliated by coming to Dublin and stealing what were, apparently, some of Dublin's treasures, Thor's ring and Carlus'

<sup>120</sup> "Annals of Tigernach: The Fourth Fragment, A.D. 973-A.D. 1088," 343.

<sup>121</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 982.

<sup>122</sup> *Annals of the Four Masters*, 982 [=983].

<sup>123</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 989.

<sup>124</sup> *Annals of the Four Masters*, 988 [=989]. The word *garra* clearly comes from the Old Norse *garðr*, which means an enclosed piece of land, a yard. See Fritzner, s.v. "garðr".

<sup>125</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 994.

<sup>126</sup> *Annals of the Four Masters*, 994 [=995]; James Henthorn Todd, Appendix D to the *Cogadh Gaedhil re Gallaib* (London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1867), 294.

<sup>127</sup> *Annals of the Four Masters*, 994 [=995].



sword.<sup>128</sup> Sitric went on to attack two of the principal churches within Uí Néill territory, Kells and Clonard.<sup>129</sup> The next year Máel Sechnaill and Brian Boru forced Sitric to surrender hostages as a sign of his recognition of their overlordship.<sup>130</sup> Sitric found an ally in Máel Mórda mac Murchada, king of the Uí Fáeláin of northern Leinster and Sitric's kinsman through his mother. In December of 999, Sitric and Máel Mórda together resisted an invasion of Leinster by Brian at the Battle of *Glen Mama*, near Newcastle Lyons.<sup>131</sup> While the Irish annals and the early twelfth-century *Cogadh Gaedhil re Gallaib* conflict slightly in their descriptions of this battle and its aftermath, what is clear is that in late December 999, Brian defeated Sitric and Máel Mórda in battle. In early January 1000, he burnt *coill tomair*, or Thor's wood, apparently a forest near Dublin. He then captured the town and expelled Sitric.<sup>132</sup> Sitric returned later that year and gave Brian hostages as a sign of his submission.<sup>133</sup>

It is clear from the submission that the rulers of Dublin were forced to give to Irish kings, first to Máel Sechnaill and then to Brian Boru, that Dublin's independence had come to an end in 980, despite Sitric's efforts to re-establish it. Nevertheless, in 1014 Sitric made another push to regain it. The events surrounding the Battle of Clontarf are recorded not only in the Irish annals, but in a number of Old Norse literary works, including *Njáls saga* and *Orkneyinga saga* and *Þorsteins saga Síðu-Hallssonar*, all from the thirteenth century.<sup>134</sup> The *Cogadh Gaedhil re*

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<sup>128</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 995.

<sup>129</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 997.

<sup>130</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 998.

<sup>131</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 999; *Cogadh*, 108-18.

<sup>132</sup> *Cogadh*, 116. Sitric's expulsion can be inferred from the *Annals of Ulster's* statement, in 999, that Brian ravaged Dublin, followed by a statement in 1000 that the foreigners returned to Dublin.

<sup>133</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 1000.

<sup>134</sup> *Njáls saga*, 442-58; *Orkneyinga saga*, 27; "Þorsteins saga Síðu-Hallssonar" in *Austfirðinga Sögur*, ed. Jón Jóhannesson, vol. 11 in ÍF (Reykjavík: Íslenska Fornritafélag, 1950), 301-02. Sophus Bugge famously claimed that all of these Norse accounts of the Battle of Clontarf were drawn from a now-lost *Brjáns saga* (*Norsk sagaskrivning og sagafortælling i Irland* (Oslo: Den Norske Historiske Forening, 1908)). Benjamin Hudson recently challenged Bugge's claim, arguing that the account found in *Njáls saga* was drawn largely from *Orkneyinga saga*. He admits, however, that there does seem to have been an independent story about the battle composed in eleventh-century Ireland or the Hebrides, but he says that this story probably did not focus on King Brian. See Benjamin Hudson, "Brjáns saga: Historicity of Icelandic Stories Discussed," *Medium Aevum* 71:2 (2002): 241-69. A. J. Goedheer

*Gallaib*, a lengthy work of twelfth-century propaganda, gives a detailed and dramatic account of the battle. Despite the obvious biases of many of these works, it is not hard to piece together the basic events leading up to the battle. In 1012 the Northern Uí Néill revolted against Brian's overlordship and were soon joined by Sitric of Dublin and Máel Mórda of Leinster. But the Southern Uí Néill remained loyal to Brian and Máel Sechnaill harried Dublin's territory in 1013. Sitric responded by sending a fleet under his son Oleif (in the *Annals of the Four Masters* this name is spelt Amhlaeibh in Irish) to attack the little Viking settlement at Cork, indicating that he saw the Cork Vikings as Brian's supporters.<sup>135</sup> At this point, both the *Cogadh* and the late thirteenth- or early fourteenth-century *Njáls saga* place immediate blame for the battle on Gormflaith, Sitric's mother and Brian's divorced wife. According to these sources, her anger against her ex-husband led her to incite Máel Mórda (in the *Cogadh*) or Sitric (in *Njáls saga*) to rebel.<sup>136</sup> It is clear, however, that her incitement was hardly necessary for rebellion, for rebellion against Brian was already widespread and in progress. The insecurity of Brian's position can be seen even from the description of those who fought for him at the Battle of Clontarf; with the exception of his own troops from Munster, only a few Connacht princes and some mercenaries fought for Brian.<sup>137</sup> Brian answered Sitric's raid on Cork by sending troops to besiege Dublin. Despite months of trying, the siege failed and Brian's troops went back home.<sup>138</sup>

The outcome of this rising tension came on Good Friday, April 23, 1014.<sup>139</sup> The battle pitted Brian's supporters – the Munstermen, some Connachtmen, and a few mercenaries – against the Leinstermen, Sitric and the Dubliners, and a number of allies whom Sitric had

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discusses the composition of both Norse and Irish accounts of the battle in his book, *Irish and Norse Traditions about the Battle of Clontarf* (Haarlem: Willink, 1938.) Also see Reidar Thoralf Christiansen, *The Vikings and the Viking Wars in Gaelic Tradition* (Oslo: Jacob Dybwad, 1931), 388-99.

<sup>135</sup> *Annals of the Four Masters*, 1012.

<sup>136</sup> *Cogadh*, 142.

<sup>137</sup> *Cogadh*, 154-7.

<sup>138</sup> *Cogadh*, 150.

<sup>139</sup> A good study of the battle and the events surrounding it can be found in Benjamin Hudson, *Viking Pirates and Christian Princes* (Oxford: University Press, 2005), 95-108.

managed to recruit. As in 980, the Dubliners allied not with any Scandinavian group within Ireland, but with Jarl Sigurd the Stout of the Orkneys, one of the mightiest Viking lords in the west. It was almost certainly not a sense of common Scandinavian identity that motivated Sigurd, but the promise of partial control of the Irish Sea trade, as is suggested by the claim in *Njáls saga* that Sigurd was promised marriage to Sitric's mother and the kingship of Ireland.<sup>140</sup> This claim is supported by *Orkneyinga saga*'s statement that Sigurd's son Thorfinn was lord of a region that extended to Dublin.<sup>141</sup> Sitric hunted elsewhere in the northwestern Scandinavian diaspora for allies. The *Cogadh* lists mercenaries who came from Wales, Northumbria, France, and Cornwall.<sup>142</sup> Both *Njáls saga* and the *Cogadh* mention that he recruited a prominent Viking named Brodor, or Bróðir, who in *Njáls saga* came from the Isle of Mann, though the *Cogadh* says that he was one of two earls of the all of the north of England, presumably meaning that he came from York.<sup>143</sup> The list of those fighting for Brian is notable for one absence – that of Máel Sechnaill. No satisfactory excuse for his failure to appear has ever been found and it is likely that while he did not openly rebel against Brian, he was as eager as anyone to be rid of Brian so that he could reclaim the high kingship. These two sides appear to have been reasonably evenly matched and the fighting lasted until well into the afternoon, when, with Jarl Sigurd and Máel Mórda both slain, the men of Leinster, the Orkneys, and Dublin tried to retreat to their ships. The retreat turned into a massive slaughter and for this reason, the *Cogadh* was able to claim that the Brian's forces had won.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Njáls saga* vol. 12 in ÍF (Reykjavik: Íslenska Fornritafélag, 1954), 444: "Mælti hann þat til, at eiga móður hans ok vera síðan konungr í Írlandi, ef þeir felldi Brján."

<sup>141</sup> *Orkneyinga saga*, 81.

<sup>142</sup> *Cogadh*, 152.

<sup>143</sup> *Njáls saga*, 445; *Cogadh*, 150.

<sup>144</sup> *Cogadh*, 198.

It is actually far from clear who really won the Battle of Clontarf. *Orkneyinga saga* says that Brian won the victory but lost his life.<sup>145</sup> The writer of the *Cogadh* was in no doubt that the winner was the Irish, as represented by Brian's side. If so, Brian himself certainly did not benefit from this victory, for according to both the *Cogadh* and Marianus Scottus, he was killed while praying by a Viking who happened to recognize him.<sup>146</sup> Brian's son Murchad was also slain and his troops never managed to capture the town of Dublin. Brian's younger son, Donnchad, eventually had to lead them home.<sup>147</sup> *Njáls saga* presents two conflicting versions of the battle. The first, a long prose account, claims that the Irish won, while the second, a poem called *Darraðarljóð*, celebrates the survival of a young king – evidently Sitric – and claims that a people who had once clung to the coast, but now occupy great swaths of territory, inflicted a great sorrow on the Irish. The poet says, “they will rule the lands, who dwelt before now on the outlying headlands...and the Irish will undergo grief, which will never fade in men's memories...we spoke well of the young king; let us sing with good fortune many songs of victory.”<sup>148</sup> *Darraðarljóð* is noteworthy not only because of its unmistakably heathen ideas and images, but also because it provides few details and is therefore difficult to date.<sup>149</sup> Based on the fact that *Darraðarljóð* describes what was apparently an unmistakable victory for the Norsemen, Russell Poole argues that the poem cannot be depicting the Battle of Clontarf at all; rather, it was composed following Sitric Cáech's defeat of Niall's forces in 919.<sup>150</sup> (He points out, furthermore, that for all its literary merit, *Njáls saga* is generally not regarded as reliable in its

<sup>145</sup> *Orkneyinga saga*, 27.

<sup>146</sup> *Cogadh*, 202 and Marianus Scottus, *Mariani Scotti Chronicon Edente G. Waitz Prof. Publ. Kilonensi*, PL 147, col. 0782B, 1036 [=1014].

<sup>147</sup> *Cogadh*, 196, 212-14.

<sup>148</sup> *Njáls saga*, 454-58: “Þeir munu lýðir/löndum ráða/er útskaga/áðr um byggðu...Ok munu Írar/angr um bíða/pat er aldri mun/ýtum fyrnask...Vel kváðu vér/um konung ungan/sigrljóða fjöld/syngjum heilar.”

<sup>149</sup> Of *Darraðarljóð*, Benjamin Hudson writes, “the atmosphere is almost entirely pagan” (Hudson, *Viking Pirates and Christian Princes*, 107.) The poem's narrators are witches, similar to the norns of Scandinavian mythology, weaving men's fates.

<sup>150</sup> Russell Poole, *Viking Poems on War and Peace* (Toronto: University Press, 1991), 120-24. Benjamin Hudson says that *Darraðarljóð* was composed in the years immediately after the Battle of Clontarf, but unlike Poole, he provides no evidence for his claim. Bizarrely, he cites Poole (*Viking Pirates and Christian Princes*, 103.)

attribution of verses to characters.)<sup>151</sup> If *Darraðarljóð* was indeed composed in the aftermath of Sitric Cáech's triumph, then the very fact that *Njáls saga* could mistakenly assign it to the Battle of Clontarf serves as a reminder that, from a strictly political standpoint, Dublin emerged from the Battle of Clontarf no worse than before. Its king, Sitric, was alive and the town was neither captured nor plundered. Furthermore, with Brian dead, Máel Sechnaill took back his position as high king. There is no reason to think that the yoke of Máel Sechnaill's might was any heavier than Brian's had been; if anything, given the opposition that Brian's rule seems to have aroused from many Irish petty kings and particularly from Sitric, it is likely that Máel Sechnaill was a less domineering high king. Although both Dublin and Sitric suffered certain setbacks over the next few decades, these were due to such factors as plague and a generally bad economy, not to the Battle of Clontarf.

In a way, however, the *Cogadh Gaedhil re Gallaib* was right to claim that the end of Viking power had come, for although the Battle of Clontarf did not *cause* the demise of the Vikings in Ireland, it is clear that by 1014, the existence of a definitively Scandinavian population that travelled, plundering, from place to place, attaching itself no more permanently to Ireland than to anywhere else, was ending. The end of this Viking culture was due as much as anything to intermarriage between the Irish and Norse elites. By the late tenth century, the bloodlines of Dublin's ruling family had become so intertwined with those of the leading Irish families that it is nearly impossible to say who counted as Irish or Norse. Amlaíb Cuarán's successor, Glún Iairn, could claim equal membership to the ruling families of both Dublin and the Uí Néill. His father was Amlaíb Cuarán, which made him the half-brother of Sitric Silkenbeard, who would eventually represent the supposedly Scandinavian forces at the Battle of Clontarf. His mother was Dunflaith, which also made him Máel Sechnaill's half-brother.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Poole, 120.

<sup>152</sup> *Annals of the Four Masters*, 982.

Sitric Silkenbeard's mother was Gormflaith, which made him the nephew of Máel Mórda, Domnall Cláen's rival in Leinster.<sup>153</sup> Whether Scandinavians belonging to less prominent families were also engaging so much intermarriage is difficult to ascertain. There is some evidence that suggests that a distinctly Scandinavian population continued to exist for several generations, despite the fact that it had settled permanently in Ireland. For instance, the annals continue to refer to the people of Dublin as *gall*, or "foreigners", until the Normans invaded in 1169.<sup>154</sup> Perhaps, however, the word *gall* had come to function simply as a name for the Dubliners.

In any event, while a distinctly "foreign" community continued to exist in Dublin for some time, the Viking lifestyle, characterized by rootless plundering, was long gone. Amlaíb Cúarán was the last Dublin king to claim, or even to try, to rule northern England. It is unlikely that late tenth- or early eleventh-century Norsemen from the Dublin area were still emigrating to Iceland, for the *Landnámabók* states that "Iceland was fully settled over a period of sixty years, and has never been more widely settled since".<sup>155</sup> The one element of Viking culture to survive was the fact that the people of Dublin, and presumably those of Limerick and Waterford also, continued to make a living by raiding and trading, rather than by agriculture. John Bradley emphasizes, however, that during the tenth century, the town of Dublin must have come to rely more and more on its rural hinterland for basic provisions.<sup>156</sup> This hinterland, he argues, must have been farmed largely by Hiberno-Scandinavians. In other words, not able to raid or import all of the basic necessities of life, the Scandinavians of Dublin were forced to become more integrated into the Irish landscape. Nevertheless, Mary Valante notes that slaves remained one

<sup>153</sup> James Henthorn Todd, introduction to *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh* (London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1867), cxlviii, note 3.

<sup>154</sup> See, for example, the *Annals of the Four Masters*, 1031: "Ard bricain do arccain do ghallaib Atha cliat."

<sup>155</sup> "Landnámabók," 396: "Svá segja fróðir menn, at landit yrði albyggt á sex tígum vetra, svá at eigi hefir síðan orðit fjölbyggðra."

<sup>156</sup> John Bradley, "The Interpretation of Scandinavian Settlement in Ireland," in *Settlement and Society in Medieval Ireland*, ed. John Bradley (Kilkenny: Boethius Press, 1988), 51-3.

of Ireland's most important exports in the eleventh century, a point that demonstrates that raiding remained an important part of Dublin's economy.<sup>157</sup> This is hardly surprising, for the very fact that the towns continued to exist shows that they had become profitable. In fact, so commercially successful was Dublin, that Sitric established Ireland's first mint in the late 990's or early 1000's.<sup>158</sup> Not only did Sitric further Dublin's commerce, he made that one move that, more than any other, shows that he wanted to bring Dublin into the mainstream of European culture: he went on a pilgrimage to Rome in 1028.<sup>159</sup> In short, the Viking enclaves in Ireland, of which Dublin was by far the most significant, never really came to an end. But with the conversion of their leaders, followed by the establishment of a diocese that was incorporated into the Irish Church in 1152 at the Synod of Kells, the Dubliners were set on the road to assimilation.<sup>160</sup> The rulers of Dublin, no longer trying to win land or power in England, remained in Dublin and became ever more integrated into Irish politics. Thus, the Dubliners were gradually ceasing to be Vikings.

To conclude, we should note that although the Vikings in Ireland began by behaving in exactly the same way as they did in other countries – they harried, they targeted churches and monasteries, they set up camps that became increasingly sophisticated and permanent over time – their history is marked by certain features that sharply differentiate it from the history of the Vikings in England or France. The fact that the Vikings in Ireland never settled on any large tract of land was most likely the deciding feature that caused their history not to go in the same direction as that of the Vikings in other lands. In both England and France, political power was centralized enough that one ruler was able to grant the Vikings huge tracts of land that they could

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<sup>157</sup> Valante, 163.

<sup>158</sup> See the proposed dates that R. H. M. Dolley assigns to some Dublin pennies that he examined: R. H. M. Dolley, "The Dublin Pennies in the Name of Sitric Silkenbeard in the Hermitage Museum at Leningrad," in *Medieval Dublin, The Living City*, ed. Howard Clarke (Blackrock: Irish Academic Press, 1990), 2: 135-44.

<sup>159</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 1028: "Sitriuc m. m. Amlaim, ri Gall, & Flannacan H. Ceallaig, ri Breg, a ndul do Roim."

<sup>160</sup> The see of Dublin was made one of Ireland's four principal sees at the Synod of Kells, which will be discussed more fully on page 184.

farm. Having received this land, the Vikings busied themselves “in ploughing and in making a living for themselves”, as the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* puts it.<sup>161</sup> In other words, they became peasants. Ireland was divided into numerous tiny kingdoms, each ruled by a petty king who was anxious to preserve his own might and increase it at the expense of his neighbors.<sup>162</sup> It is unsurprising, therefore, that none of these kings was willing to set aside a block of land and encourage the Vikings to settle on it. Frankly, none of the Irish kings could have granted the Vikings a plot of land larger than a postage stamp. Not being able to make a living through farming, the Scandinavians in Ireland concentrated on plunder and trade. These two pursuits are actually more closely connected than they at first appear. Dublin began as a military camp and emporium for stolen goods, but obviously the Vikings in Dublin had little to do with most of the wealth they had grabbed besides to trade it. The military camp thus quickly turned into a site at which plundered items could be sold. While it is clear that trade eventually became the Viking towns’ bread and butter, the Irish Vikings continued to supplement their income with plunder long after their agricultural brethren elsewhere had adopted a more peaceful lifestyle.

Not having much land within which to spread out and being forced to earn a living through pillaging and commerce, the Vikings in Ireland became concentrated into a few urban areas. Obviously, this slowed down the process of assimilation. The concentration of Scandinavians in a few locations, and especially in Dublin, can be seen in the survival in Ireland of certain Scandinavian practices that did not last long enough in other countries to be recorded.

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<sup>161</sup> ASC A, 876: “ergende wæron & hiera tilgende.”

<sup>162</sup> Over the course of the ninth and tenth centuries, the institution of kingship in Ireland evolved considerably, such that by the late tenth century, a small number of provincial kings wielded considerable power. In 980, when Domnall ua Néill died, the *Annals of Ulster* used the term *ard rí Erenn*, high king of Ireland, for the first time. Though the petty kings and kingdoms were not abolished, their importance dwindled between the beginning of the ninth century and the beginning of the twelfth. For a detailed description of this process, see Francis John Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings* (London, B. T. Batsford, 1973), 254-74. It should be noted, however, that this process of consolidation took place over the course of the Viking Age, and therefore during the early stages of the Viking period, in the 830’s, for instance, Ireland was still far from having kings who had large amounts of land at their disposal. Even in the early eleventh century, when the position of high king reached its most powerful point in the person of Brian Boru, the high kingship did not imply monarchy. Neither he “nor any other kings exercised governmental authority over the whole island” (Byrne, 270).



For instance, we hear nothing of the Scandinavian assembly called the *thing* in France or England, but we know that the Scandinavians of Dublin held a regular *thing* at a hill that was at the junction of Church Lane and Suffolk Street.<sup>163</sup> Ironically, despite being mostly concentrated into a few port towns, the Vikings in Ireland became far more intertwined in the existing political structure than the Vikings elsewhere. On the continent, the Vikings were a serious problem for the Carolingians, but they never had any chance of seriously competing with the inheritors of Charlemagne's empire. In England, the Vikings destroyed the royal dynasties of Mercia, East Anglia, and Northumbria, inadvertently helping the Wessex kings eventually to become the sole rulers of the whole of England. But while they had a tremendous impact on English politics, they did not become intertwined in the English political system until the early eleventh century, when Sweyn Forkbeard and his son Cnut established an empire over England and much of Scandinavia.<sup>164</sup> The Norsemen of the tenth century briefly took over and ruled parts of England, but found their own power destroyed by Wessex in a matter of decades. In contrast, the Irish political system, because it had so many tiny, competing kingdoms, allowed groups of Vikings to enter the system as sources of military might with whom Irish kings could ally themselves in their quarrels with each other. It was not long before the Irish dynasties began to intermarry with the leaders of the Scandinavian groups. Once that happened, the Vikings at Dublin, Waterford, Limerick, and the smaller port towns became inextricably woven into Irish politics. In short, unlike the Scandinavians who settled in Normandy and England, those in Ireland became concentrated into a few locations where they maintained certain aspects of the Viking lifestyle for generations.

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<sup>163</sup> Charles Haliday, *The Scandinavian Kingdom of Dublin*, ed. John P. Prendergast (Dublin: A. Thom, 1881), 162.

<sup>164</sup> See P. H. Sawyer, "Swein Forkbeard and the Historians," in *Church and Chronicle in the Middle Ages*, ed. Ian Wood and G. A. Loud (London: Hambledon Press, 1991), 27-40; G. N. Garmonsway, *Canute and his Empire* (London: H. K. Lewis, 1964); Timothy Bolton, *The Empire of Cnut the Great : Conquest and the Consolidation of Power in Northern Europe in the Early Eleventh Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2009); M. J. Trow, *Cnut: Emperor of the North* (Stroud: Sutton, 2005).

## Chapter 5

### The Conversion of the Vikings in Ireland

Before beginning any discussion of the Viking impact on the Church in Ireland, it is necessary to discuss those features of the Irish church that distinguished it from the English or Frankish churches and the extent to which they did so. For many years scholarly views on the pre-Norman Irish church were shaped by Kathleen Hughes' *The Church in Early Irish Society*, in which Hughes described a church that, at its beginning in the fifth century, looked like a primitive version of any other local church. It was governed by bishops who ruled over territorially defined dioceses. Because of the peculiar nature of Irish society, however, this entirely conventional system was gradually superseded – though never completely – by one in which real power rested with abbots who governed over monastic *paruchia*e, which were not territorially limited. In addition, Hughes drew attention to the strongly dynastic nature of the Irish church, according to which the right to administer a particular church and collect revenues often belonged to the members of a family, whose claim to this right rested on their kinship with the saint who had founded the church.<sup>1</sup> This model was not seriously challenged until 1984, when Richard Sharpe argued that the theory of two competing systems, one, characterized by territorial bishoprics, which was supplanted by another, characterized by scattered monastic *paruchia*e, had little evidence to support it. Instead, he proposed that the early medieval Irish church was marked by both episcopal and abbatial government and that the relationship between these two systems was marked more by harmony and continuity rather than confrontation.<sup>2</sup>

Since Sharpe's critique, the question of the degree to which the Irish church was governed by abbots who ruled over scattered monasteries, as opposed to geographically limited

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<sup>1</sup> Kathleen Hughes, *The Church in Early Irish Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966), 161.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Sharpe, "Some Problems Concerning the Organization of the Church in Early Medieval Ireland," *Peritia* 3 (1984): 230-70.

bishops, remains a matter of debate. In a recent study, Colmán Etchingham argues that the Irish church was far more akin to the mainstream organizational model found on the continent than previous researchers have suggested.<sup>3</sup> He writes that, according to the annalistic evidence, “it is clear that the episcopal office continued to define the churches of greatest significance throughout the first millennium and was not consigned to the periphery”.<sup>4</sup> He concedes, however, that the Church in Ireland was unique in that, from an early date, the administration of individual churches was the prerogative of *comarbs*, who, though not bishops and often only laymen, inherited rights over their particular church. In his description of the Irish church, Dáibhí Ó Cróinín also emphasizes the strong proprietary principle according to which Irishmen organized their church. This proprietary principle can be seen in the provisions, found in the *additamenta* to the Book of Armagh, which Fith Fio made for the church he had founded at Drumlease:

This is Fith Fio’s declaration (*coibse*) and his testament (*edocht*), (made) between the chancel and the altar two years before his death to the *familia* of Druim Lías and the nobles of Callraige: that there is no family right of inheritance to Druim Lías (for any) except the race of Fith Fio, if there be one of them (available) who is good (*maith*), devout, and conscientious. Should there not be, let there be an investigation whether one (such) can be obtained from among the community of Druim Lías or its church-tenants. If one be not obtained, an outsider (*déorad*) belonging to Patrick’s community is installed in it.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Colmán Etchingham, *Church Organization in Ireland, A.D. 650 to 1000* (Maynooth: Laigin Publications, 1999).

<sup>4</sup> Etchingham, *Church Organization in Ireland, A.D. 650 to 1000*, 457.

<sup>5</sup> Ludwig Bieler, ed. and trans., *The Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh* (Dublin, Institute for Advanced Studies, 1979), 172: “Is sí inso coibse Fétho Fio & a edocht di bliadin re mbas dáu du manchuib Drommo Lías & du maithib Callrigi iter crochaingel & altóir Drommo Lias: nadcon fil finechas for Duimm Leas act cenél Fétho Fio, ma beith nech bes maith diib, bes cráibdech, bes chuibsech din chlaind. Mani pé duécastar dús in étar di muintir Drommo Lías no di a manchib. Mani étar dubber déorad di muintir Pátricc inte.”

Otherwise, however, Ó Cróinín disagrees with Etchingham's depiction of the early Irish church. He argues that the Irish church had a "monastic structure, often ruled by a hereditary succession of abbots. Within this system bishops were always necessary and many monasteries had resident bishops...but the ruler of the community was the abbot".<sup>6</sup> Thus, unlike Etchingham, Ó Cróinín continues to hew to a model of the Irish church that is almost identical to that of Kathleen Hughes.

The debate about how the Irish church was governed remains active and opinions about its structure vary. To say that the Irish Church was more monastic than the Church elsewhere would be untrue, for monasticism was very popular, for instance, in the Frankish Church of the sixth and seventh centuries.<sup>7</sup> It would also be blatantly untrue to say that outside of Ireland, the endowment of monasteries did not confer a certain sense of ownership on laymen.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, one thing we can say for sure is that the Irish Church was marked by an extraordinary sense of proprietary rights based on kinship.<sup>9</sup> If this were not clear enough from Fith Fio's declaration, it can also be seen in the fact that the genealogical tables found in the *Book of Lecan* show that most of the abbots of Iona – Colum Cille's successors – were also his

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<sup>6</sup> Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, *Early Medieval Ireland, 400-1200* (Harlow: Longman Group, Ltd., 1995), 167.

<sup>7</sup> J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 55-61.

<sup>8</sup> For example, the Frank Gammo founded a small nunnery on his property at Limours and placed two of his daughters in it. Later, in a charter dated 697, he took it upon himself to assign control of this nunnery to the larger monastery of St-Germain-des-Prés. Clearly, he assumed without question that the nunnery was his property that he could dispose of at will (Wallace-Hadrill, 61-2.)

<sup>9</sup> It is true that all over Europe, secular leaders often were the *de facto* owners of particular churches. They nominated and supported clergymen and controlled churches' and monasteries' finances. To read more about this issue, see Susan Wood, *The Proprietary Church in the Medieval West* (Oxford: University Press, 2006). That said, the Irish Church was marked by a strong sense, as Fith Fio's declaration shows, that the right to hold a position in a given church was owned by the family of that church's founder. Iona was not alone in the fact that most of its abbots were related to its first abbot. Furthermore, a family's control of a church did not necessarily depend on whether that church lay within their territory. Iona lay outside the territory of the Cenél Conaill, but this clearly did not stop this large family from laying claim to the abbacy of Iona.

kinsmen.<sup>10</sup> As Ó Riain points out, it was because the sense of family ownership over church establishments was so important “that Ireland, alone among the nations of western Christendom, possesses a substantial collection of saints’ pedigrees”.<sup>11</sup> Some churches, like that of Killeevy, in Armagh, had a record of continuous hereditary succession all the way back to their founders.<sup>12</sup> Churches and monasteries outside of Ireland certainly had lay benefactors who expected to have some influence over the ecclesiastical institution that they supported, but in Ireland we see an extraordinary continuity of interest by particular families in particular sites. In addition, we have medieval testimony to the fact that the Irish Church, at least at some times and in some places, allowed abbots and monasteries an unusual degree of administrative control. In his discussion of missionary work done by Columban monks in Northumbria, Bede dwells briefly on the structure of authority at Iona. He writes, “this island always has an abbot for its ruler, who is a priest, to whose authority the whole province, including even the bishops themselves, have to be subject, according to an unusual order that follows the example of their first teacher, who was not a bishop but a priest and monk”.<sup>13</sup> We cannot assume from this one passage that the Irish church was wholly or even primarily organized around monasteries. Nevertheless, although Hughes may have overstated her case, and although Colmán Etchingham might be right in saying that the Irish Church was more like its continental predecessors than has been realized, it still seems most likely that the Irish church had an unusually strong monastic element, whereby ecclesiastical administration was at times controlled by abbots and monasteries in a way that was not true in

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<sup>10</sup> Máire Herbert, *Iona, Kells, and Derry: The History and Hagiography of the Monastic Familia of Columba* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 36-46.

<sup>11</sup> Pádraig Ó Riain, “Conservation in the Vocabulary of the Early Irish Church,” in *Sages, Saints, and Scholars: Celtic Studies in Honour of James Carney*, ed. Donnchadh Ó Corráin, Liam Breatnach, and Kim McCone (Maynooth: An Sagart, 1989), 360.

<sup>12</sup> Ó Cróinín, 163.

<sup>13</sup> *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, 222-4 (book 3, chapter 4): “habere autem solet ipsa insula rectorem semper abbatem presbyterum, cuius iuri et omnis prouincia et ipsi etiam episcopo ordine inusitato debeant esse subiecti, iuxta exemplum primi doctoris illius, qui non episcopus sed presbyter extitit et monachus.”

other countries. Perhaps more importantly, the sense that families owned the right to inherit offices – the position of abbot, for example - at a particular church or monastery appears to have been unusually strong.

As in other parts of Europe, there is no doubt that the Vikings destroyed Christian religious establishments in Ireland. There is debate, however, both as to whether the Vikings did significantly more damage than the native Christian population and as to whether their invasions ever really hindered the practice and preaching of the Christian religion. Following the pattern set by the early eleventh-century *Fragmentary Annals* (but covering the period from 573 to 914, with breaks where sections have been lost) and the early twelfth-century *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaib*, Irish historians have viewed the Vikings as totally destructive fiends whose commitment to heathenism was rivaled only by Irishmen's commitment to Christianity. In 1959, D. A. Binchy argued that the Viking invasions led to a significant disintegration of the traditional Irish social order, such that the laws and reverence for religion that had long restrained the aggression of secular leaders were abandoned.<sup>14</sup> His argument was a tacit admission of a phenomenon that A. T. Lucas emphasized in an article in 1967, namely, that the annals record many Irish kings burning the monasteries and churches of their enemies.<sup>15</sup> Lucas argued that the Irish were just as likely to raid churches and monasteries as the Vikings were and that both groups plundered religious sites for the same reason, that is, because the laity stored property at such places. There is now a tendency in the study of Irish history to doubt how much damage the Vikings did to Irish society or to the state of religion in Ireland. So far, the most prominent

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<sup>14</sup> Daniel A. Binchy, "The Passing of the Old Order," in *Proceedings of the International Congress of Celtic Studies: The Impact of the Scandinavian Invasions on the Celtic-Speaking Peoples – 800-1100*, ed. Brian Ó Cuív (Dublin: Institute for Advanced Studies, 1975), 119-32.

<sup>15</sup> Lucas, 172-229.

criticism of this tendency and of Lucas' article in particular has been written by Alfred P. Smyth.<sup>16</sup>

It is admittedly difficult to determine how severely the Vikings hurt the Irish Church in comparison to the Irish themselves. Lucas was correct in pointing out that the annals record the deliberate burning of religious buildings starting in 615, nearly two centuries before the Vikings appeared.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, not only did Irishmen sometimes burn the churches of rival Irish kingdoms, but they occasionally killed churchmen. As Lucas points out, between 695 and 1162, the annals record 116 churchmen who were slain in situations other than battle.<sup>18</sup> Of these, 67 were killed by Irishmen, 35 by Vikings, and two by Irishmen and Vikings acting together. Nor was the burning of churches and even killing of clerics enough to prevent an Irish king from receiving the highest praise upon his death. During his time as king of Cashel, Feidhlimidh mac Criomthainn burned the monastery of Gallen with its oratory, burned Fore, slew the communities of both Clonmacnoise and Durrow and burned parts of their churches, violently seized the oratory of Kildare, seized the abbacies of Cork and Clonfert, and eventually returned to Clonmacnoise to plunder it.<sup>19</sup> Despite all this, when he died, in 847, the *Annals of Ulster* remembered him as the best of the Irish, a scribe, and an anchorite.<sup>20</sup> It is true that by "best" (*optimus* in the original Latin) the annalist might not have meant morally best. Nevertheless, the tolerance for violence against churches must have been very high in Ireland if even the clerical scribes recording Feidhlimidh's deeds could speak so well of him.<sup>21</sup> Apparently, such violence

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<sup>16</sup> Smyth, "The Effect of Scandinavian Raiders on the English and Irish Churches," 1-38.

<sup>17</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 615.

<sup>18</sup> Lucas, 179.

<sup>19</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 823; *Annals of Ulster*, 830; *Annals of Ulster*, 833; *Annals of Ulster*, 836; *Annals of Inisfallen*, 836; 838; *Annals of the Four Masters*, 844.

<sup>20</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 847.

<sup>21</sup> Byrne discusses Feidhlimidh's character at great length (Byrne, 211-29). He points out that despite Feidhlimidh's on some of Ireland most prominent churches, Feidhlimidh was widely regarded as a saint. The Martyrology of

against one's enemies' churches and monasteries was considered a legitimate part of warfare. It should also be noted that it was not unheard of for clerics to take part in battles. In 757 we read that the abbot of Mungret fell in battle amongst the Munstermen.<sup>22</sup> In 776 the whole community of Durrow took part in a battle between the Munstermen and the Uí Néill.<sup>23</sup> In short, Lucas is correct to point out that Irish society was not as harmonious, nor were the Irish so reverent towards holy places, as has often been claimed.

From the statistics that Lucas collects, it is tempting to conclude that Viking attacks had little effect either on Irish society or on the Church in Ireland. This is certainly Donncha Ó Corráin's conclusion when he writes that in the first twenty-five years of the ninth century, "the raids average out at a fraction over one per year, a rate which, if the annals are at all representative, can have caused no widespread disorder or great distress in Irish society even if we multiply it by a factor of five".<sup>24</sup> Yet it must be noted that both Ó Corráin and Lucas based their statistics on studies of periods of time in which the impact of Scandinavian attacks on Irish churches and monasteries would appear minimal. Ó Corráin's statistics are based only on the first quarter of the eighth century, when the levels of Viking violence were still miniscule compared to what they would become in the 830's. Only a few pages after concluding that the Vikings had a negligible impact on Irish society, Ó Corráin makes a significant caveat, saying that by 845, "it appeared that the country was about to be overrun".<sup>25</sup> Lucas compares rates of

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Donegal even celebrates his feast day on August 28 (Byrne, 229). Byrne notes that Feidhlimidh was a member of the reform-minded Céili Dé order and speculates that he might have started the tradition of ecclesiastical kingship, whereby an Irish king was also a member of a religious order (Byrne, 214.) Byrne also suggests that, as the Céili Dé were often bitterly opposed to the *lucht na sen-chell*, the "folk of the old churches", whom they considered corrupt and decadent, Feidhlimidh's attacks on Clonmacnoise, Durrow, and Kells might have been motivated not by a lack of religion, but by puritan zeal (Byrne, 228-9).

<sup>22</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 757.

<sup>23</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 776.

<sup>24</sup> Donnchadh Ó Corráin, *Ireland before the Normans* (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 1972), 83.

<sup>25</sup> Ó Corráin, *Ireland before the Normans*, 90.



Irish and Scandinavian violence by counting the number of slain churchmen recorded from 695 onwards to 1162. This is a full century before the “foreigners”, as the Irish annals call the Vikings, even appeared in Ireland and it is well over a century before the Viking attacks increased enormously all over northwestern Europe in the second quarter of the ninth century. It is therefore no wonder that he finds that *in total* there were more churchmen killed by Irishmen than by Vikings! A better way to determine what effect the Vikings had on Irish society would be to compare rates of Irish and Scandinavian violence during a period when both were quite active. Even this comparison would not be ideal, since, although the Irish population was surely many times greater than the Scandinavian population in Ireland, we do not know how much greater it was, since we do not know how many Vikings invaded Ireland. In any event, Lucas provides us only with a total number of each group’s victims for the whole period from 695 to 1162. It is therefore hard to know what to make of his study. While we must beware of any romanticizing of the pre-Viking period in Irish history, we must also not become so cynical as to see the Vikings as being – as it is now popular to claim – just one more group whose activities were barely distinguishable from those of the native, Christian population whom they harried. Such a conclusion would beg the question of why, if the Vikings’ activities were so unremarkable, so many writers from across Western Europe did remark upon them repeatedly and at great length?

If we make a list of all the notices of Viking attacks on church establishments recorded by the annals and the *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaib* (for despite his propagandistic intent, there is little doubt that the *Cogadh*’s writer made great use of the annals and must have had access to annals that no longer exist), we find that Viking raids reached a peak in the 830’s, when the

Vikings plundered over fifty church foundations.<sup>26</sup> In the 840's such raids declined slightly, declined dramatically after 850, and then picked up very slightly in the 880's and 890's.<sup>27</sup> The apparently changing rates of Viking violence against churches might be just the result of annalists' differing tendencies to record church events. Nevertheless, even if we take into consideration the number of church happenings in general reported by the annalists, the sharp distinctions between the decades are softened, but never flattened, and occasionally appear even more sharply.<sup>28</sup> Until the 830's the only churches or monasteries raided were those very close to the coast. In the 830's the Vikings began to use Ireland's rivers, thereby reaching sites well inland, especially along the Shannon. Over half of all the ecclesiastical foundations recorded in the annals as being attacked by Vikings lie either in the central eastern part of Ireland – between Glendalough and Dundalk – or in the basin that lies on either side of the Shannon and Brosna rivers in the center of the country.<sup>29</sup> It is not surprising that the Vikings targeted these regions, for they are fertile and could support wealthy religious establishments. It is important to note, however, that the annals pay an inordinate amount of attention to these regions anyway, so it is likely that the Vikings committed many acts of plunder that are not mentioned in the annals. This suspicion is confirmed by the *Cogadh*, which mentions a number of attacks in Munster that

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<sup>26</sup> Máire Ní Mhaonaigh contends that the first part of the *Cogad*, in which the author catalogues Viking raids, has an annalistic style, though she holds that even the later, more descriptive section is also based on annalistic material (Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, "'Cogad Gáedel Re Gallaib' and the Annals: a Comparison," *Ériu* 47 (1996): 102). A. J. Goedheer thought that the writer of the *Cogad* relied on a version of the Annals of Ulster that was a little different from the one that we have, but Ní Mhaonaigh argues that the writer drew on many sets of annals, but that he used the Annals of Inisfallen and texts associated with Clonmacnoise the most (see Goedheer, 32-45 and Ní Mhaonaigh, 101-26). Roger Leech largely agrees with Ní Mhaonaigh (Roger H. Leech, "*Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaib* and the *Annals of Inisfallen*," *North Munster Antiquity Journal* 11 (1968): 13-21). Kathleen Hughes argued that the *Cogad* must have been based on some version of the Chronicle of Ireland, of which the Annals of Ulster preserves the most material (Kathleen Hughes, *Early Christian Ireland: Introduction to the Sources*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed (Cambridge: University Press, 1977), 294-7).

<sup>27</sup> Etchingam, *Viking Raids on Irish Church Settlements in the Ninth Century*, 8.

<sup>28</sup> Etchingam, *Viking Raids on Irish Church Settlements in the Ninth Century*, 11.

<sup>29</sup> Etchingam, *Viking Raids on Irish Church Settlements in the Ninth Century*, 21.

we do not read about in the annals, such as on Cloyne, Skellig Michael, and Innisfallen.<sup>30</sup> The one set of annals to pay attention to the wealthy area along the rivers of southwestern Ireland is the *Fragmentary Annals*. Thus, though the wealth of the eastern and central parts of Ireland makes it likely that the Vikings concentrated their efforts on these regions (and, with the exception of the *Fragmentary Annals*, this is indeed what the annals portray), we should bear in mind that there seem to have been many raids in less fertile areas that went unrecorded by the annalists.

Like the question of how the Irish Church differed from the Church elsewhere (if indeed it did), the question of how the Viking attacks on ecclesiastical foundations were worse than Irish attacks – or even whether they were – remains subject to debate. Lucas' conclusion, that Viking violence differed not at all from what the Irish were already doing to each other, implies that the statements of alarm made by Irish writers were merely the result of bias. That all of the dread of the Vikings expressed by the Irish, as well as by other groups of people who came into contact with them, could be the result of bias, is difficult to believe. Furthermore, it ignores a particularly horrifying phenomenon that the normally laconic Irish annalists repeatedly mention in connection with Viking attacks – the capture of many people, sometimes hundreds at a time, for sale as slaves. While slaves certainly made up a large part of Irish society both before and after the Viking period, we do not read of Irishmen attacking churches for the purpose of capturing people to sell abroad. Based on the fact that the annals record only a few instances of Vikings breaking open shrines and tossing out the relics within, combined with J. A. Graham-Campbell's study showing that the Scandinavians actually brought silver *into* Ireland, a number of researchers have concluded that the theft of ecclesiastical metalwork was *not* the Vikings'

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<sup>30</sup> *Cogadh*, 7, 16.

main goal.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, Lucas emphasized the low bullion-value of the Irish metalwork found in Norwegian graves.<sup>32</sup> Unlike ecclesiastical metalwork, the capture of people to be sold into slavery is mentioned in over half of those annalistic entries that do more than just record the fact that a Viking raid took place.<sup>33</sup> The numbers that the annals record as being captured are sometimes enormous. A raid on Armagh in 869 resulted in ten hundred being carried off or killed.<sup>34</sup> We read of 280 people being taken during a raid on Kildare in 886 and of 710 being taken from Armagh in 895.<sup>35</sup> Other entries in the annals speak vaguely of “great numbers” or a “great prey” of people being captured.<sup>36</sup> The Old Norse sagas make it clear that many Irish slaves were taken to Iceland. As Jónas Kristjánsson says, “the majority of the ‘saga-slaves’ [were] from Ireland.”<sup>37</sup> Thus, if there is one feature of the Viking raids on churches that made them different from Irish raids, it is the capture of sometimes huge numbers of people for sale abroad.

Obviously, the kidnapping of so many people and the constant threat that the Scandinavian raids posed to every individual must have caused great distress to all sorts of groups within Irish society, both religious and secular. At least some of the people taken captive must have been ecclesiastics. As the *Annals of the Four Masters* tells us, the foreigners “made prisoners of many bishops and other wise and learned men, and carried them to their fortress,

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<sup>31</sup> J. A. Graham-Campbell, “The Viking-Age Silver Hoards of Ireland,” in *Proceedings of the Seventh Viking Congress*, ed. Bo Almqvist and David Greene (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1976), 52-3; Etchingham, *Viking Raids on Irish Church Settlements in the Ninth Century*, 40; A. P. Smyth, *Scandinavian Kings in the British Isles, 850-880* (Oxford: University Press, 1977), 154-68; Patrick Wormald, “Viking Studies: Whence and Whither?” in *The Vikings*, ed. R. T. Farrell (London: Phillimore, 1982), 133-4.

<sup>32</sup> Lucas, 209-13.

<sup>33</sup> Etchingham, *Viking Raids on Irish Church Settlements in the Ninth Century*, 40.

<sup>34</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 869: “Orccain Aird Macha o Amhlaim coro loscadh cona derthaigibh; .x.c. etir brith & mharbad & slat mor chena.”

<sup>35</sup> *Chronicum Scotorum*, 886; *Annals of Ulster*, 895.

<sup>36</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 821: “Orggan Etir o genntibh; prēd mor di mnaibh do brid ass;” *Annals of Ulster*, 831: “Cath do madhmaim I nAighnechaib re genntib for muinntir nAird Machae co n-arrgabtha sochaide móra diib.”

<sup>37</sup> Jónas Kristjánsson, “Ireland and the Irish in Icelandic Tradition,” in *Ireland and Scandinavian in the Early Viking Age*, ed. Howard B. Clarke, Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, and Ragnall Ó Floinn (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1998), 263.

after having, moreover, slain many others”.<sup>38</sup> The disappearance of these churchmen must often have resulted in the temporary cessation, in their area, of formal religious teaching and the performance of Christian rituals. The kidnapping of churchmen of some authority would also have caused much confusion amongst the groups that they had led. Furthermore, there is considerable evidence that the Vikings held high-status prisoners for ransom, the payment of which must have often depleted the resources of local churches and lay populations, both of which might also have had their stores of foodstuffs and other necessary provisions emptied by the very raid in which the kidnapping took place. The annals specifically name seven prominent churchmen whom the Vikings captured, but who later turn up in the written record, indicating that ransom had been paid for them.<sup>39</sup> In addition, the annals mention by name four high-status individuals who died while in captivity and the *Cogadh* mentions two more.<sup>40</sup> Presumably, the Irish failed to pay ransom for these men quickly enough. Despite the annals’ incomparably laconic style, therefore, it is clear that slave-raiding was the Vikings’ main purpose in Ireland and that the capture of often huge numbers of people, combined with the need to collect a ransom for those who could be ransomed, must have been a considerable burden for all sectors of Irish society, church and lay alike.

Because of the sporadic and uneven nature of the annals’ recording, it is difficult to determine whether and to what extent the Vikings caused bishops’ offices to go unfilled, leaving

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<sup>38</sup> *Annals of the Four Masters*, 839: “Orgain lugmaid la gallaib loca hEathach, & ro gabsat braigde iomda derpuccoib & do daoineib eacnaide foglamta, & rucsat iatt do com a longport iar marbad sochaide oile leó beós.”

<sup>39</sup> Tuathal mac Feradaig of Durrow and *Rechru* (*Annals of Ulster*, 832, 850); Forannán of Armagh (*Annals of Ulster*, 845, 846, *Annals of Inisfallen*, 845); Martán of Lismore (*Annals of Inisfallen*, 867); Máel Coba mac Crunnmaíl and Mochta of Armagh (*Annals of Ulster*, 879, 888, 893); Suibne mac Duib dá Boirenn of Kildare (*Chronicum Scotorum*, 886, *Annals of the Four Masters*, 903 [=908],); Cummascach of Armagh (*Chronicum Scotorum*, 898, *Annals of Ulster*, 909).

<sup>40</sup> Étgál of Skellig (*Annals of Ulster*, *Annals of Inisfallen*, 824); Dublitter of Odder (*Annals of the Four Masters*, 836 [=837]); Mórán mac Indrechtaig of Clogher (*Annals of Ulster*, 842); Áed mac Cummascaig of Armagh (*Chronicum Scotorum*, 898); Rudgaile mac Trebthaidi (*Cogadh*, 16); Cormac mac Selbaig (*Cogadh*, 15).

communities unable to get new priests when needed. An examination of the annals shows that the annalists' attention to bishops varied considerably from century to century. Between 600 and 740, for instance, the annals record more than two bishops only for Armagh, Clonard, Ferns, and Nendrum.<sup>41</sup> By the ninth century, the annalists had begun to notice bishops far more frequently; over the course of the century, they tell us of 96 bishops attached to 51 churches. They continue to notice bishops with about the same frequency in the tenth century, mentioning 94 bishops attached to 48 churches. Although the annalists began to notice bishops more during the Viking period than they had previously, it is clear that the only bishoprics that they even came close to keeping a continuous record of were those of Armagh, whose bishops were mentioned seven times each in the ninth and tenth centuries, and Clonmacnoise, whose bishops were mentioned at most three times in the ninth century and ten times in the tenth.<sup>42</sup> The bishops even of Emly, one of the most important churches in southern Ireland, are mentioned on only three occasions over two centuries: in 881, 954, and 980.<sup>43</sup> It is hard to argue that these breaks in the annals' records mark periods when the Vikings had temporarily destroyed the line of succession, for the churches whose bishops are mentioned most frequently also happen to have stood in the area in which the annals describe the greatest number of Viking attacks, that is, in the eastern and central part of Ireland. For example, the annals record nine raids and seven bishops for Armagh in the ninth century. It seems, therefore, that the gaps in the annals' records of bishops are due not to

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<sup>41</sup> Etchingham, *Church Organization in Ireland*, 188-90.

<sup>42</sup> Armagh: *Annals of Ulster*, 812, 834, 852, 863, 874, 893, 903, 915, 924, 936, 957, 966, 994, *Chronicum Scotorum*, 836; Clonmacnoise: *Chronicum Scotorum*, 889, 890, 899, 904, *Annals of the Four Masters*, 914 [=919], 918 [=922], 921 [=926], 941 [=942], 948 [=949], 953 [=955], 964 [=966], 969 [=971], 996 [=998].

<sup>43</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 881; *Annals of Inisfallen*, 954, 980. The fact that annals pay more attention to northern and eastern churches (Armagh, Clonard, Ferns, and Nendrum) than to southwestern churches (Emly) supports the argument that many researchers have made, that the earliest versions of the annals were written in the northeast, perhaps at Iona. To read some of these arguments see Hughes, *Early Christian Ireland*, 115-23; A. P. Smyth, "The Earliest Irish Annals: Their First Contemporary Entries and the Earliest Centres of Recording," *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 72 (1972): 33-48; Gearóid Mac Niocaill, *The Medieval Irish Annals* (Dublin: Dublin Historical Institute, 1975), 19-20; Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, "Early Irish Annals from Easter Tables: a Case Restated," *Peritia* 2 (1983): 85-6.

Viking devastation, but to the annalists' lack of interest in churches outside of the central and eastern zones of the country.

When we look at the annals' record of ecclesiastical establishments plundered by the Vikings, it initially seems reasonable to guess that the Vikings did as much damage to the Church in Ireland as they did to the Church in other lands. The fact that even in the midst of repeated Viking attacks, however, the succession of bishops definitely continued at such churches as Armagh and Clonmacnoise, and probably continued at other churches as well, highlights an important difference between Ireland's experience of the Vikings and that of other Western European countries like England and France. Unlike in these other countries, we see little evidence in Ireland of the total destruction of the diocesan structure (such as happened in East Anglia), nor of lengthy periods of discontinuity in which monasteries were abandoned and bishoprics were left empty (such as occurred in Normandy). It might be objected that the building of the monastery of Kells in 807, presumably as a refuge for relics and monks, is certainly an example of institutional discontinuity. It is true that the Ionan community was probably moved to set up a second, inland monastery because of the enormous threat that the Vikings proved themselves to be when they killed 86 monks on Iona in 806.<sup>44</sup> What is surprising, however, is that instead of just being dispersed or fleeing to another monastery, the monks of Iona managed to establish a site of refuge, where they continued Colum Cille's legacy. Furthermore, although Iona ceased to be the principal Columban monastery, the appointment of Diarmait to the abbacy of Iona indicates that the original monastery was not abandoned.<sup>45</sup> This is in marked contrast to what we read about in England and on the continent. The *vita* of St. Odo of Cluny, for instance, tells us that because of Viking violence, the monks at the monastery of St.

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<sup>44</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 806.

<sup>45</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 814.

Martin of Tours abandoned their monastery and returned to live with their kinsmen.<sup>46</sup> In Ireland, by contrast, while there may well have been small monasteries that ceased to exist when their members were forced to flee the Vikings, there is no proof of it. Certainly the larger monasteries survived repeated Viking assaults, even if their members sometimes did not. Even the monastery of Clonmore, whose monks were massacred on Christmas Eve in 836, must have continued as an institution, for we read an *obit* for one of its abbots in 920.<sup>47</sup> Likewise, to the extent that we can trace the episcopal succession, it does not appear that the Vikings in Ireland caused the decades-long breaks in continuity that they caused elsewhere.

The question of why bishoprics and monasteries in Ireland were more likely to survive repeated Viking attacks in Ireland than they were in other countries is, of course, a matter of speculation. It is possible that the strong proprietary streak in the organization of the Irish Church caused the families who became the priests and abbots at particular churches and who collected revenues from those churches to take personal responsibility for replacing clergymen who had been killed or for ransoming them if they were taken hostage. In France and England, when all of the offices of bishop throughout a region fell vacant, it might not have been clear to the local people to which distant authority they should appeal for help. It also must have been difficult for ecclesiastical authorities to convince clergymen who did not have roots in a region that was coming under Viking control to go into that area. In Ireland, by contrast, since ecclesiastical offices were often inherited, it must have been immediately apparent who should replace a clergyman, or at least which family should take responsibility for the replacement. Furthermore, families had a financial reason for making sure that ecclesiastical offices did not gradually slip out of their hands. Another factor that may have served to protect Irish churches

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<sup>46</sup> *Vita Sancti Odonis Abbatis Cluniacensis Secundi*, PL 133, col. 0076C .

<sup>47</sup> *Annals of the Four Masters*, 918 [=920].



and monasteries was, ironically, the extremely fragmented nature of the Irish political system. As Ireland was divided into numerous competing kingdoms, the Irish were able to ally themselves with one king against another. Obviously, once a Viking group had allied itself with a king, they could no longer destroy the churches under his control without consequences. Those churches were safe, at least from that Scandinavian group. On the other hand, the churches under the control of that king's enemies would probably stand at even greater risk than before from Viking attack. Whatever the reason, though the Vikings plundered Irish churches and monasteries with great vigor, they do not seem to have caused the lengthy abandonment of these establishments that they caused elsewhere.<sup>48</sup>

Another difference between the history of the Vikings in Ireland and that of the Vikings in other countries is the fact that there is significant evidence to suggest that the Scandinavians took far longer to convert to Christianity than they did in other countries. Indeed, after noting how long it took the Scandinavians in Ireland to both convert and assimilate into Irish society, Lesley Abrams suggests that the Irish Church might have taken an Old Testament view of the Norsemen, seeing them as being not the chosen people of God and therefore not able to be converted.<sup>49</sup> Alfred Smyth argues that as Amlaíb Cúarán plundered Irish ecclesiastical foundations in the 960's and 970's, he must not have been Christian.<sup>50</sup> The implication of this argument is that as long as the Norse in Ireland continued to raid churches and monasteries, then they must not yet have embraced Christianity. This argument is clearly wrong. For one thing, the Dubliners continued to harry and occasionally to do great damage to churches even after their king, Sitric, had established his Christian bona fides by making a pilgrimage to Rome. For

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<sup>48</sup> See the discussion of the damage that the Vikings did to the Church in England and Normandy on pages 21-30 and 69-72.

<sup>49</sup> Lesley Abrams, "The Conversion of the Scandinavians of Dublin," *Anglo-Norman Studies* 20 (1997): 28.

<sup>50</sup> Smyth, *Scandinavian York and Dublin*, 2:112.

instance, a notice in the *Annals of Ulster* in 1028 that Sitric had gone to Rome is followed in 1031 by a notice that the foreigners of Áth Cliath plundered Ard Breccain (in Meath) and burnt two hundred people in its stone church.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, it is clear from the regular plundering of churches and monasteries by Irish kings that attacks on the ecclesiastical establishments of one's enemies were an accepted part of Irish warfare. A corollary of the statement that an attack on a church was not necessarily a sign of heathenism is that the sparing of a church was no proof of Christianity. Hence, although Gothfrith, grandson of Ímar, spared "the prayer-houses with their complement of *ceili Dé* and sick...and also the monastery" when he invaded Armagh, we cannot assume from this that he was a Christian or even that some of his men were Christian.<sup>52</sup> While Smyth's argument for the heathenness of Amlaíb Cúarán was clearly misguided, however, there are a number of indications that the Scandinavian colonies in Ireland remained heathen much longer than those in England or on the continent.

An entry found in the *Annals of Tigernach* tells us that in revenge for the Dubliners' attack on Domnach Pátraic in 994, "*Tomar's* ring and Carlus' sword were forcibly taken by Máelsechnaill, son of Domnall, from the foreigners of Dublin".<sup>53</sup> Both Carlus' sword and *Tomar's* – or Thor's - ring were probably objects upon which oaths were taken. There is evidence to suggest that medieval Germanic peoples swore oaths of loyalty and obedience to their lords on sword hilts. For instance, the twelfth-century Danish historian Saxo Grammaticus, in his history of the Danes, records, "for at that time those who were about to pledge themselves

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<sup>51</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 1028, 1031.

<sup>52</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 921: "Indredh Aird Macha hi .iiii. Id. Nouembris o Gallaibh Atha Cliath, .i. o Gothbrith oa Imhair, cum suo exercitu...& na taiga aernaighi do anacal lais cona lucht de cheilibh De & di lobraibh, & in ceall olcheana, nisi paucis in ea tectis exhaustis per incuriam."

<sup>53</sup> Stokes, ed., "The Annals of Tigernach: The Fourth Fragment, A.D. 973-1088," 349-50: "Fail Tomair & claidim Carlusa do breith do Mael Sechnaill mac Domnaill areicin o Gallaib Atha cliath."

to the service of kings were wont to promise obedience by touching the hilt of a sword.”<sup>54</sup> In *Beowulf*, King Hrothgar and the young hero Beowulf swear everlasting friendship to each other while holding a sword hilt.<sup>55</sup> As for Thor’s ring, a number of Old Norse works describe oath rings, which appear to have had both a religious and legal function in Scandinavian culture. In the early fourteenth-century *Kjalnesinga saga* we read, “on the altar must be a great ring, made of silver, which the *hofgoði* [temple priest] should have on his hand at every meeting of men, and on it all men should swear oaths at any witness giving”.<sup>56</sup> So important were these rings for swearing oaths that, according to the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, the Danes in England used one when they swore peace with King Alfred.<sup>57</sup> That oath rings could be associated with a particular god is indicated by a passage in the Poetic Edda’s *Atlakviða*, where reference is made to an oath sworn on Ullr’s ring.<sup>58</sup> In the *Landnámabók* Þorarin invalidates a legal case by taking an oath on the “holy ring” in front of Arngrim the *goði*.<sup>59</sup>

It is possible that by the late tenth century, *Tomar*’s ring had lost its religious significance amongst the Dubliners and had become just an inherited antique, used to establish the community’s or the ruling party’s venerability. Yet a ring is not like a sword, which, in addition to being used for oaths of fealty, can be viewed as a symbol of somebody’s prowess in war. It could remain a revered object only if its religious worth were still of fairly recent memory. Both the *Cogadh* and *Njáls saga* state that Brodor, or Bróðir, who killed King Brian at the Battle of

<sup>54</sup> *Saxonis Grammatica Gesta Danorum*, ed. Alfred Holder (Strassburg: K. J. Trübner, 1887), 67 (book 2): “Olim namque se regum clientelae daturi tacto gladii capulo obsequium polliceri solebant.”

<sup>55</sup> *Klaeber’s Beowulf*, ed. R. D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork, and John D. Niles (Toronto: University Press, 2008), 56-8 (lines 1651-1708).

<sup>56</sup> Jóhannes Halldórsson, ed., *Kjalnesinga saga*, vol. 14 in ÍF (Reykjavík: Íslenzka fornritafélag, 1959), 7: “Á þeim stalli skyldi liggja hringr mikill af silfri gerr; hann skyldi hofgoði hafa á hendi til allra mannfunda; þar at skyldu allir menn eiða sverja um kennslamál öll.”

<sup>57</sup> *ASC E*, 876: “sworon on þam halgan beage”.

<sup>58</sup> Ursula Dronke, ed. and trans., *Atlakviða* in *The Poetic Edda* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 1:9.

<sup>59</sup> “Landnámabók,” 114: “Um þá sök var Arnkell goði kvaddr tólftarkvøð, ok bar hann af, því at Þórarinn vann eið at stallahring ok hratt svá málinu.”

Clontarf in 1014, was a heathen, or more precisely an apostate deacon.<sup>60</sup> This bit of information about the Norsemen's religion might be considered a bit of propaganda in both works, in the *Cogadh* designed to emphasize the evilness of the Scandinavians and in *Njáls saga* designed to pin responsibility for Brian's death on a single man, thus exculpating the rest of the Dubliners. Nevertheless, the fact that this information is repeated in two separate works testifies to some tradition that this man was an apostate Christian. Obviously, it would be very hard to apostatize in a devoutly Christian environment and we must therefore suppose that in the early eleventh century, there were still plenty of Scandinavians in the Dublin area who had not converted. This supposition is confirmed by *Njáls saga*'s statement that while Bróðir was an apostate Christian, his foster-brother Óspakr was simply a heathen, who had apparently never been Christian.<sup>61</sup> It is therefore well within the realm of possibility that there were still many people in Dublin in the 990's who took the Thor's ring's religious import seriously.

Another indication that Scandinavian heathenism survived in Ireland longer than it did elsewhere is the fact that, although there exist far fewer place-names of Norse origin in modern Ireland than in Britain or Normandy, medieval Irish sources make reference to a number of sites that they associate with the worship of Thor. Both the *Cogadh* and the *Annals of Inisfallen*, in their descriptions of the Battle of Glen Mama, say that as they marched towards Dublin, Brian

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<sup>60</sup> Brodor (in the *Cogadh*) or Bróðir (in *Njáls saga*) is described in both texts as an anti-Christian, though *Njáls saga* gives us more detail, telling us that he was an apostate. His name obviously means "brother" in Old Norse, and therefore was probably not his real name. Since *Njáls saga* describes him as Óspakr's foster-brother, it is likely that his real name was somehow forgotten, and thus "brother" came to function in both texts as his name. There must be some reality to this person's existence, for even the *Annals of Ulster* say that one "Brotor", chief of the Scandinavian fleet, died at the Battle of Clontarf (see the *Annals of Ulster*, 1014). For the *Cogadh*'s description of his anti-Christianity, see pages 150 and 152: "Ro tocured cucu, em brodor iarla, ocus Amlaib ma cri Locland .i. da iarla cairi, ocus tuascirt saxan uli. Taisig longsi ocus inarbtaig ocus danair iartair eorpa uli in dias sin, can cagill, can aitin, can cadus, can comasci do Dia no da duni, do cill no do nemead, ocus fice cet danar dian, dolig, dibercac, durcraideac, do Anmargacaib allmardaib ingantacaib, aca creic, ocus ica faiclead babein, no ar or ocus ar argat ocus arc ac inmus arcena." For the description of him in *Njáls saga*, see *Njáls saga*, 445-53.

<sup>61</sup> *Njáls saga*, 446: "Óspakr var heiðinn ok allra manna vitrastr...Bróðir hafði verit kristinn maðr ok messudjárn at vígslu, en hann hafði kastat trú sinni ok gorzk guðníðingr ok blótaði heiðnar vættir ok var allra manna fjölkunnigastr."

Boru and the Munstermen burnt *Caill Tomair*, or “Thor’s Forest”.<sup>62</sup> Exactly where this forest was is impossible to know, but clearly it must have been somewhere near Dublin. The *Book of Ballymote* provides evidence for Thor worship outside of Dublin, probably in county Meath. In a tract on different types of poetic meter there is an exemplary quatrain that says that in their march to Tara, the sons of Brec Bregain went past *Tulach Tomair*, or “Thor’s Mound.”<sup>63</sup> The poet neither says where Thor’s Mound was nor explains its name for his audience, apparently assuming that others would know the place he spoke of. Again, it is impossible for us to locate this hill today, but as they were heading for Tara, it is reasonable to suppose that the sons of Brec Bregain were marching through Meath. John Bradley points out that there are indications that parts of Meath came under Dublin control in the tenth century, though it is unclear to what extent these areas were actually settled by Scandinavians.<sup>64</sup> If *Tulach Tomair* was in Meath, it could have been part of the large Norse colony centered on Dublin, though it is possible that it was an independent settlement that had been founded separately. Another quatrain in the *Book of Ballymote* makes it seem all the more likely that Meath had a large population of worshippers of Thor. Though this quatrain is difficult to understand, it clearly contains the phrase “*lai[s]feas odba i tir tomhair*”, “he will burn Odba in Thor’s Land”.<sup>65</sup> In his index of the place-names found

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<sup>62</sup> *Cogadh*, 116; *Annals of Inisfallen*, 1000. In his edition of the *Cogadh*, Todd read *Tomair* as *Comair*, but given how alike *t* and *c* look in the Irish script and considering the fact that the *Annals of Inisfallen* also talk about Brian’s burning of *Caill Tomair*, it is safe to assume that Todd was mistaken. Carl Marstrander makes the same argument (Carl Marstrander, “Thor en Irlande,” *Revue Celtique* 36 (1915-16): 246n).

<sup>63</sup> *Book of Ballymote*, facsimile, (Dublin, Royal House Academy, 1887), 290 a 12-5. This quatrain reads, “Ua bricc bregain onlicc leabhair / ticc i teamair doraibh / muir dar mumain daig na dubhaigh / traigh dor tualaig tomair”. Also see the discussion of this quatrain on page

<sup>64</sup> John Bradley, “The Interpretation of Scandinavian Settlement in Ireland,” in *Settlement and Society Medieval Ireland: Studies presented to F. X. Martin*, ed. James Bradley (Kilkenny: Boethus, 1988), 58.

<sup>65</sup> *Book of Ballymote*, 292 a 8. The text appears to read, “*laifeas odba i tir tomhair*”. I am thankful to Ann Dooley for suggesting the slight emendation that gives us “*laisfeas odba i tir tomhair*”.

in the *Metrical Dindshenchas*, Edward Gwynn identified Odba as probably being near Navan, in Meath.<sup>66</sup>

Clearly, in Ireland we find something that we do not find at all in Normandy and find in only one case (that of Roseberry Topping) in England: place-names that indicate where cults dedicated to Scandinavian gods existed.<sup>67</sup> Unfortunately, these place-names do not allow us to ascertain how long these cults lasted, since a name can continue to be used long after it has lost its original meaning. It is interesting, however, that these names include, under the form *Tomair*, an Irish attempt to write the name “Thor”. Old English and Old Norse were closely related languages and the Anglo-Saxons in the area probably did not have great difficulty understanding or pronouncing Norse names. It must therefore have been easy for the Scandinavians in England to continue to use the name *Óðins bjarg* even after they had assimilated into the English population, both religiously and linguistically. The Irish could surely see just as easily as the English where the Vikings were practicing their religious rituals, but Old Irish is such a different language from Old Norse considerable effort must have been necessary to determine the name of the foreign god being worshipped. The fact that the Irish not only determined the name of the god whom the Scandinavians were worshipping, but also incorporated that god’s name into what they themselves called these sites, testifies to the endurance of the cult of Thor in Ireland. After all, given the linguistic barrier, it must have taken a while for these locations to become so solidly associated with Thor worship that even the much larger Irish community began to name these places after the foreign cult.

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<sup>66</sup> Edward Gwynn, ed. and trans., *The Metrical Dindsenchas* (Dublin: Academy House, 1903-35), 5:199.

<sup>67</sup> See the discussion of Roseberry Topping on page 39.

There is other evidence to suggest that at least some of the Scandinavians in Ireland remained heathens for four generations or more, well into the tenth century. The ruling family of Dublin shows every sign of remaining heathen until some point during Amlaíb Cúarán's career as Dublin's king. Because this family held the throne of York from time to time, there are writings by English clergymen that mention the religious beliefs of at least some of its members. The Rægnald Guthfrithson whom the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* describes as briefly being king of York was almost certainly the son of that Gothfrith, "grandson of Ímar, a most cruel king of the Norsemen", who died in 934.<sup>68</sup> Hence, Rægnald Guthfrithson was part of the dynasty founded by Ímar at Dublin; he was also first cousin to Amlaíb Cúarán, who ruled Dublin for decades. It is worth noting, therefore, that the *Historia de Sancto Cuthberto* refers to Rægnald as *rex paganus* and describes an incident in which he blasphemed Cuthbert and swore upon his gods, Thor and Othin, that he was the enemy of those gathered in Cuthbert's church.<sup>69</sup> Although this scene might strike some as a little fabricated, it is very likely that Rægnald was indeed a *rex paganus*, for his first cousin, Amlaíb Cúarán, was clearly *not* raised as a Christian. As Amlaíb was baptized as an adult in 943 with the English king Edmund standing sponsor, there can be little doubt that his family was Christian neither when he was born, some time before 927, nor during his childhood.<sup>70</sup> Amlaíb and Rægnald were the great-grandsons of that Ímar who arrived in Ireland in 853 and who, upon his death in 873, was called "king of the Norsemen of all Ireland and Britain".<sup>71</sup> They were thus the third generation of their family to be born either in Ireland or northern England and the fourth to live in Ireland. If the ruling family of Dublin had not

<sup>68</sup> ASC D, 941.944; *Annals of Ulster*, 934.

<sup>69</sup> South, ed., *Historia de Sancto Cuthberto*, 60, 62.

<sup>70</sup> Amlaíb's baptism is recorded in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. See ASC D, 943. William of Malmesbury tells us that the child Amlaíb was in York in 927 when his father was killed there. See *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, ed. and trans. R.A.B. Mynors, R.M. Thomson, and M. Winterbottom (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 212-4.

<sup>71</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 873: "Imhar, rex Nordmannorum totius Hibernię & Brittanie, uitam finiuit."

converted by about the year 940, it is likely that many, possibly most, of the Dublin Scandinavians also would have seen no reason to abandon their traditional religion.

The vocabulary of the Irish annals could be argued to support the view that most of the Scandinavians in Ireland, or at least those in Dublin, converted in the 930's or 940's. Until 877, the *Annals of Ulster* routinely use the term *genti*, a word meaning "heathen" taken from the Latin *gentiles*, to refer to the Vikings. They also frequently use *gaill*, meaning "foreigners". In the 870's the term *genti* disappears, but it makes a comeback in 902 and is frequently employed between 913 and 920. *Genti* becomes quite rare in the 920's and appears for the last time in 943. After this point, the *Annals of Ulster* describe the Scandinavians as *gaill*, although in 975, they use the Latin word *gentiles*. There is no reason to suppose that the variation of these words in the *Annals of Ulster* reflects the annalists' attitude towards the Vikings in question; neither term is more or less condemning than the other. Indeed, the two terms seem to be interchangeable. Thus, in 917, we read that Niall son of Áed made war on the *genti* who had recently arrived in Munster and that by the end of the battle, a hundred men had fallen, the majority of them *gaill*.<sup>72</sup> The *Annals of Inisfallen* use both *genti* and *gaill* much less than the *Annals of Ulster*, but of the two, they prefer the word *gaill*, especially in the tenth century. In fact, they describe the Norse as *genti* only twice in the entire course of the tenth century. Both of these occasions are in particularly dramatic entries from the year 943, when the *Annals of Inisfallen* tell us that the *genti* killed Muirchertach son of Niall and Lorcán son of Faelán. Similarly, the *Chronicum Scotorum* prefers the word *gaill* after the 830's, though it continues to use *genti* frequently throughout the ninth century. In the tenth century, it uses *genti* sporadically until 949, when this word appears for the last time.

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<sup>72</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 917.



As we can see, the term *gaill*, “foreigners”, had definitely overtaken *genti*, “heathens”, by the beginning of the tenth century. There is no doubt that the Scandinavians of the early ninth century were heathens, but we must be cautious in assuming that the gradual abandonment of *genti* signals Scandinavian conversion. It might simply have been a matter of fashion in terminology. All of the annals, and especially the *Annals of Ulster*, periodically quit using *genti*, only to bring it back later, implying that the Norse had not undergone any religious shift, but rather that the Irish had two words for the same group of people and neither word had yet achieved total predominance. In some cases, an annalist’s use of *genti* might indicate his attitude towards the Scandinavians; thus, the use of *genti* by the *Annals of Inisfallen* in connection with killings by Scandinavians implies condemnation. The fact that the annalist was condemning in his attitude, however, does not mean that he was incorrect; it might be that, feeling morally outraged, he chose to emphasize the Scandinavians’ lack of Christianity. We know from the fact that Amlaíb Cuarán was not brought up as a Christian in the 920’s and 30’s and was not even baptized until 943 in England, that the ruling family of Dublin must have remained heathen through most or all of the first half of the tenth century. And yet, during this period, the annals had either already quit using *genti* or were using it less and less, a set of circumstances that indicates that the growing popularity of *gaill* says nothing about the Scandinavians’ conversion. The fact that the *Annals of Ulster* uses the Latin *gentiles* for the Scandinavians in 975, despite the fact that the annals had long switched to Irish rather than Latin as their principal language, suggests that the annalist who wrote this entry chose his terminology with particular care. One entry cannot prove that a large percentage of the Norse in Ireland were still heathens in 975, but it is enough to strengthen the suspicion that the annals’ eventual abandonment of the word *genti* cannot be taken as evidence for the conversion of the Norse in Ireland. To sum up, while the annals, with their shifting use of the terms “heathen” and “foreigner”, would be expected to give

us some clue as to when the Scandinavians converted, in truth, the annalists' use of their terminology probably says more about linguistic fashion than about the Norsemen's religious state.

One set of annals that use significantly different vocabulary from the others and that also seem to describe the partial conversion of some groups of Vikings is the *Fragmentary Annals of Ireland*. This work, which is thought to have been compiled in the mid-eleventh century, though the existing text is based on a seventeenth-century transcript, is considerably more descriptive than any of the other collections of annals and contains a number of narrative stories.<sup>73</sup> Unfortunately, the fragments covering the years between *c.* 736 and 848 and between 873 and 906 are missing. The work as a whole cuts off after 914. Although *genti* and *gaill* appear in the *Fragmentary Annals*, these annals prefer to use *Danair*, *Lochlannaig*, and *Nordmanni*, which seem to be ethnic terms. Like the *Cogadh*, the *Fragmentary Annals* use *Danair*, or Danes, to refer to the same group that appears under the names *dubgaill* and *dubgenti* in the *Chronicum Scotorum* and *Annals of Ulster*. While the *Cogadh* renames the *finngaill* and *finngenti* *Nordmannir*, or Norwegians, the *Fragmentary Annals* generally call them *Lochlannaig*, which presumably also means Norwegians.<sup>74</sup> Despite the fact that the *Danair* and *Lochlannaigh* seem to be ethnic, not religious groups, the *Fragmentary Annals* make a sharp moral and religious distinction between the two parties. The *Lochlannaig* appear in the text as thoroughly depraved, irredeemable anti-Christians, while the *Danair*, though not exactly good, are seen to be partial Christians with some moral standards. The *Fragmentary Annals* repeatedly give us information that seems to show that the *Danair* were in the process of conversion. For instance, in the fifth

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<sup>73</sup> Joan Newlon Radner, introduction to *The Fragmentary Annals of Ireland* (Dublin: Institute for Advanced Studies, 1978), vii-viii.

<sup>74</sup> See the discussion of the terms *finngaill* and *dubgaill* on pages 121-25.

year of Máel Sechlainn's reign, that is, in 852, they tell us that the Danair "had a huge ditch full of gold and silver to give to Patrick...and they had kinds of piety – that is, they abstained from meat and from women for a while, for the sake of piety".<sup>75</sup> In contrast to these are the *Lochlannaigh*, one of the leaders of whom, Hona, was a *draoí*, or druid, who "went up onto the rampart with his mouth open, praying to his gods and doing his druidry, and urging his people to worship the gods".<sup>76</sup>

The *Fragmentary Annals'* relabeling of the *dubgaill* and *finngaill* is clearly quite spurious and seems to have been based on a misunderstanding of the word *Danair*, which occurs in the *Annals of Ulster* only in the 980's, the word *Norrdmannir*, which first appears in 856, but is not very common, and the place-name *Lochlann*, which the *Annals of Ulster* first use in 853.<sup>77</sup> The moral and religious distinction that the *Fragmentary Annals* draws between the two groups is even more suspicious. In her study of the terminology that the annals use with regard to the Vikings, Clare Downham points out that the author of the *Fragmentary Annals* seems to have been eager to glorify Cerball mac Dúnlainge, the ninth-century king of Osraige.<sup>78</sup> Since he could not hide this king's periodic collaboration with groups of Vikings, he attempted to make these alliances more palatable to an audience familiar with eleventh-century politics by dividing the Vikings into distinct ethnic groups characterized by different moral qualities. Thus, the *Fragmentary Annals'* statements about the Norsemen's varying religious practices should probably be disregarded, for the religious and moral distinctions that the author of these annals makes appears to have been dictated by his propagandistic goals. Furthermore, even if this

<sup>75</sup> *Fragmentary Annals of Ireland*, 94.

<sup>76</sup> *Fragmentary Annals*, 108: "Ra chúaidh dna an draoí, .i. Hona, & fear ba sine díobh, ar an chaisiol 'sa bhél oslaigthe, og attach a dhée & og den[a]mh a draoigheachta, & 'ga earail ara mhuinntir adradh na ndee."

<sup>77</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 986, 987, 990, 856, 853. For more on the development of the *Fragmentary Annals'* confused terminology, see Smyth, "The Black Foreigners of York and the White foreigners of Dublin," 101-17.

<sup>78</sup> Downham, "The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly," 27-37.

writer's assignment of spiritual qualities along anachronistic ethnic lines were not so dubious in and of itself, we would still have to face the fact that the *Fragmentary Annals* tell us nothing specific enough to contribute to our knowledge of how the Norse in Ireland were converted. They do not mention the names of any specific churches or churchmen. The statements that they make concerning the Vikings' religious practices do not even make sense. They claim that the *Danair* set aside huge amounts of wealth for St. Patrick and sometimes fasted and abstained out of a sense of religious duty, but they do not say that the *Danair* ever sought baptism. Would people who have only recently been introduced to Christianity feel an obligation to fast and abstain without feeling any need to be baptized?<sup>79</sup> I suspect that the author of the *Fragmentary Annals* could not claim that the *Danair* had been baptized, for this was known to be untrue. But in order to justify Cerball mac Dúnlainge's collaboration with some groups of Scandinavians, the writer had to portray these groups as proto-Christians. He therefore imagined a scenario in which the *Danair* engaged in pious practices without actually being Christians. In short, the information that the *Fragmentary Annals* gives us is of questionable accuracy and too vague to be of any use.

Unlike in England, the archaeological evidence that we find in Ireland tells us little to nothing about when or how the Scandinavians there became Christian. A few clearly non-Christian Scandinavian graves have been found in Kilmainham, Islandbridge, Donnybrook, and

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<sup>79</sup> At continental market towns, it was common for Vikings to be "prime-signed," that is, they received a sacramental that made them proto-Christians and allowed them to interact with Christians. Prime-signing is mentioned in the *Vita Anskarii*. According to Rimbert, merchants at Hedeby "libenter quidem signaculum crucis recipiebant, ut catecumini fierent" (*Vita Anskarii*, 53.) E. Molland discusses the practice of prime-signing in his article "Primsigning," *Kulturhistorisk leksikon for nordisk middelalder fra vikingetid til reformationstid* 13 (1968): 439-44. As far as I know, prime-signing was not practiced in Ireland, perhaps because in Ireland, unlike on the continent, the Vikings controlled the places where they did business. Thus, in Ireland there was no formal way of making someone a proto-Christian.

Cloghermore Cave in Kerry, but all of these probably date to somewhere in the ninth century.<sup>80</sup> This is not very helpful – a group of graves that can only be dated to the ninth century does little to clarify our picture of the history of the Vikings in Ireland. We could have guessed on our own that Scandinavians in the ninth century were probably still heathen. There are no Irish counterparts to the gigantic stone crosses with scenes of Scandinavian mythology that we find in England and on the Isle of Mann. Runic inscriptions in a Christian context are quite rare in Ireland and probably too late to help us pin the period of the Scandinavians' religious shift to a particular decade or quarter century. A runic inscription on a cross-shaft from Killaloe, co. Clare reads "Thorgrím put up this cross".<sup>81</sup> This is clearly evidence of Scandinavians who had become Christian, but unfortunately, the most scholars can say about it is that it was carved sometime between the eleventh century and the thirteenth century.<sup>82</sup> In Beginish, co. Clare, we find a runic inscription, probably from the mid- to late-eleventh century, that has a tiny cross carved in the middle of it.<sup>83</sup> As the see of Limerick, the closest Scandinavian town from county Clare, was not founded until 1107, these runic inscriptions indicate that the conversion of the Norse in and around Limerick must have pre-dated the formal creation of a diocese. This is similar to the situation we see in Dublin, where Amlaíb Cúarán was Christian by the time he retired in 980, despite the fact that Dublin did not become a diocese until after Sitric went on his pilgrimage to Rome in 1028. But this insight is all we get from archaeological evidence regarding religious change amongst the Norse in Ireland.

From a survey of the available evidence, we must conclude that the earliest evidence for the conversion of the Norse Dubliners comes in the form of Amlaíb Cúarán's retirement to the

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<sup>80</sup> O'Brien, "The Location and Context of Viking Burials at Kilmainham and Islandbridge, Dublin," 217-21; Valante, 46.

<sup>81</sup> Barnes, Hagland, and Page, 53-6.

<sup>82</sup> Barnes, Hagland, and Page, 53-6.

<sup>83</sup> Barnes, Hagland, and Page, 56-9.

monastery of Iona in 980. Although Amlaíb was baptized in York in 943, the fact that King Edmund stood sponsor for him indicates that his conversion was largely political. In this, his conversion was probably no different from Rollo's. It is difficult to say how ingrained Amlaíb's Christianity became in York; he did not spend nearly as many years there as he did in Ireland, but he spent long enough that it is possible that his Christianity had time to deepen. We must take note, however, that when he chose to retire, Amlaíb did not go back to York; indeed, after being expelled for the second time from York, he does not appear to have ever gone back to York. He retired to the Irish monastery of Iona. Judging from the fact that he spent most of his life in Ireland and from the fact that he retired to the monastery founded by Colum Cille, that his Christianity developed more in Ireland than in England. Obviously, his choice to retire to Iona must have been preceded by at least a few years in which he became familiar with Christian thinking and practice. Baptism might happen suddenly as a result of a political settlement, but retirement to a monastery surely requires some consideration. We cannot date Amlaíb's interest in the cult of Columba to earlier than 952, when he was driven out of York and presumably returned to Ireland.<sup>84</sup> Certainly Amlaíb's interest in the Columban *familia* dated to at least the early 970's, when Amlaíb's principal rival, Domhnall, son of Muirchertach, plundered the shrine of Colum Cille, a church that Amlaíb appears to have built at Achall, in county Meath.<sup>85</sup> At around the same time, in 975, another Scandinavian king, Ímar of Limerick, was captured by Brian Boru from the monastery of Scattery Island, where he was attempting to claim sanctuary.<sup>86</sup> While Ímar's claim to sanctuary on Scattery Island does not prove that he was Christian, it

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<sup>84</sup> ASC E, 952: "Her Norðhymbre fordriðan Anlaf cyning & underfengon Yric Haroldes sunu." (Actually, the earliest evidence we have of Amlaíb's being in Ireland is the record of his sack of Kildare in 964 (*Annals of Ulster*, 964, *Chronicum Scotorum*, 962 [=964])).

<sup>85</sup> *Chronicum Scotorum*, 974. Amlaíb Cúarán's relationship with the shrine of Colum Cille, or *scrín Coluim Cille*, will be discussed in much more thorough detail on pages 199-203.

<sup>86</sup> *Annals of Inisfallen*, 974 [=975]; *Chronicum Scotorum*, 975.

certainly makes it very likely. These two records of Norse leaders at Irish monasteries constitute our earliest substantial evidence that the Scandinavians in Ireland were converting. We should, therefore, look for evidence of evangelical work being done in the second half of the tenth century.

As in England and Normandy, it is likely that a certain amount of conversion amongst the Norse in Ireland occurred simply through intermarriage. But if this process was insufficient to explain how the Scandinavians in England and Normandy became Christian, it is even more so with regards to the Scandinavians in Ireland. There is a fair amount of literary evidence that suggests that Norse continued to be spoken at least in Dublin, and perhaps also in the smaller Scandinavian towns, into the twelfth century. That the Scandinavians were still actively speaking Norse at least into the tenth century, and not just using Norse names and titles, is shown by the change in the way the Irish annals spell the Norse word *jarl*. When they first record this word, in 848, they write *erell*, reflecting an older pronunciation of *jarl*, *erlaR*.<sup>87</sup> In 893 the annals record the same word as *ierll*.<sup>88</sup> After this, through the tenth and eleventh centuries, the annalists write *iarla*, reflecting the word that eventually emerged in Old Norse: *jarl*.<sup>89</sup> Thus, the Irish annals record the transition from the unsyncopated *erell* to the syncopated *jarl*, showing that Norse was still a living language in Ireland at this time. Furthermore, the Irish annalists' ability to carefully render this term suggests that at least some members of the Irish elite could speak, or at least understand, Old Norse. That Norse may have still been a living language in even the twelfth century is suggested by the *Cogadh*'s use of Norse dialogue. At one point in the

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<sup>87</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 848: "Torair erell, tanise righ Laithlinne"; Jan De Vries, *Altnordisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1961), 290.

<sup>88</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 893 "Sichfrith nlerll."

<sup>89</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 918, 932, 1014.

*Cogadh*, for instance, a Scandinavian shouts out “*Faras Domnall*”.<sup>90</sup> *Far as* is clearly an attempt to render into Irish the Norse *hvar es*, or “where is”. Domnall responds by calling the Scandinavian a *sniding*. This is the only Irish attestation of this word, which is clearly a borrowing from the Norse *niðingr*. Later in the story, while three Scandinavians are passing by King Brian, one refers to him as a *cing*, while another calls him a *príst*, both Germanic words meaning “king” and “priest”.<sup>91</sup> The dialogue is surely imaginary, but the very fact that the Irish writer knew this much Old Norse shows that there were still Norse-speakers in early twelfth-century Ireland. Moreover, Sophus Bugge showed decades ago that the now lost *Brjánsaga*, with which the writer of *Njáls saga* must have been familiar, was surely written in Ireland by someone fluent in both Norse and Irish.<sup>92</sup> Donnchadh Ó Corráin argues further that it was probably written in Dublin c. 1100.<sup>93</sup> It is very difficult to see how a language community could be maintained for more than two centuries if all of its members were being forced to wed outside of the community. We must conclude that that the Norse-speaking community at least in Dublin, if not also in the other Norse towns, was large and concentrated enough to have survived from the early ninth century into at least the early twelfth century. This self-reproducing group could theoretically have remained heathen forever. Intermarriage, therefore, is not enough to explain its conversion. It is even possible that, while the Irish and Norse elites were intermarrying well before the latter converted, the assimilation of the Scandinavian masses was the result, not the cause, of their adoption of Christianity.

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<sup>90</sup> *Cogadh*, 174.

<sup>91</sup> *Cogadh*, 202.

<sup>92</sup> Sophus Bugge, *Norsk sagaskrivning og sagafortælling i Irland* (Oslo: Den Norske Historiske Forening, 1908). Bugge spends most of this book discussing *Brjáns saga*. Even though Benjamin Hudson is not fully convinced of the existence of *Brjáns saga*, he agrees that *Njáls saga*’s account of the Battle of Clontarf must have been drawn from an Old Norse work composed in Ireland or the Hebrides in the eleventh-century (Hudson, “*Brjáns saga*,” 241-69).

<sup>93</sup> Donnchadh Ó Corráin, “Viking Ireland – Afterthoughts,” in *Ireland and Scandinavian in the Early Viking Age*, ed. Herbert B. Clarke, Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, and Ragnall Ó Floinn (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1998), 447-52.



When we look around for groups that could have participated in the evangelization of the Norse in Ireland, it is natural to consider England. After all, as England sent many missionaries to Scandinavia, there is no reason why English churchmen could not have made the far shorter journey to Ireland. Considering the strong political connections that existed between Dublin and York and the fact that the Church in York was the only large church in the Danelaw to survive the Scandinavian conquest, it is reasonable to suppose that if any church had the ability and the political motive to evangelize the Norse Dubliners, it would be York. It is true that York was not Dublin's main trading partner, but members of Dublin's leading family spent generations claiming the throne of York. Moreover, at least two Dublin leaders were baptized while they ruled York. After Rægnald was expelled, Sitric Cáech managed to take power in Northumbria. We know from the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* that he and King Æthelstan met at Tamworth in 925 and that Æthelstan gave him his sister in marriage.<sup>94</sup> The *Chronicle* says nothing to indicate that Sitric was baptized, but baptism was a frequent aspect of treaties between Scandinavians and English kings and it would be very odd for one of the most ostentatiously Christian kings of Wessex to give his sister to be wedded to a heathen. In fact, the thirteenth-century chronicler Roger of Wendover tells us that Sitric did accept baptism upon his marriage, but that he had apostatized and cast off his wife before he died the next year.<sup>95</sup> Of the baptism of Sitric's son, Amlaíb Cúarán, we have much more solid evidence. We do not know what happened to young Amlaíb after he fled York following his father's death, but he turns up in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* in 941, when the Northumbrians chose "Anlaf from Ireland" as their king.<sup>96</sup> The next year, we read that that English king Edmund stood sponsor for Amlaíb at baptism and for

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<sup>94</sup> *ASC D*, 925.

<sup>95</sup> *Flores Historiarum*, ed. H.O. Coxe, (London, Sumptibus Societas, 1841-2), 1:385.

<sup>96</sup> *ASC D*, 941.

Rægnald at confirmation.<sup>97</sup> Credit for Amlaíb's baptism must be given to Wulfstan, archbishop of York, for both Symeon of Durham and Roger of Wendover claim that Wulfstan and Oda, the archbishop of Canterbury, were responsible for brokering the peace between Amlaíb and Edmund.<sup>98</sup> Amlaíb's baptism was part of that peace settlement. From the fact that he eventually retired to and died at the monastery of Iona, we know that, unlike his father, Amlaíb did not apostatize, at least not permanently.

Given that Amlaíb was baptized at York, at the instigation of the archbishop of York, and that he was the first king of Dublin to die a Christian, it would not be surprising to find that he brought clergymen from York with him back to Ireland. In doing so, he would have been acting similarly to the three evangelizing kings of Norway, Hákon the Good, Olaf Tryggvason, and Olaf Haraldsson, who all took English priests and bishops with them when they returned to Norway. Amlaíb's relationship with Archbishop Wulfstan, however, appears to have been brief and probably mostly political. Wulfstan must have supported Amlaíb's rule in York even before the latter's christening, for the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, which records Amlaíb's baptism in 943, relates that beforehand, "Edmund besieged King Anlaf and Archbishop Wulfstan in Leicester, and might have captured them had they not escaped from the town by night".<sup>99</sup> Clearly, Wulfstan was not averse to participating in Northumbrian politics and even to being present at military engagements. As Clare Downham suggests, Wulfstan seems to have supported, whenever possible, leaders who contributed to Northumbrian independence.<sup>100</sup> It must not have been long, however, before Wulfstan began to feel that supporting Amlaíb's rule was not the wisest course of action, for the *Chronicle of Æthelweard* claims that Wulfstan ultimately

<sup>97</sup> ASC A, 942.

<sup>98</sup> Symeonis *Monachi Opera Omnia*, 2:93-4; *Flores Historiarum*, 1:395.

<sup>99</sup> ASC D, 943: "Her Eadmund cyning ymbsæt Anlaf cyning & Wulfstan arcebiscop on Legraceastre, & he hy gewyldan meahte, nære þæt hi on niht ut ne ætburston of þære byrig."

<sup>100</sup> Downham, *Viking Kings of Britain and Ireland*, 114.

supported the expulsion of both Amlaíb and Rægnald.<sup>101</sup> This doubtlessly caused a rift between the two men, such that even if Wulfstan had had strong interests in evangelical work (and there is no sign that he did), it is most unlikely that Amlaíb would have recruited priests who owed allegiance to the archbishop of York.

In the end, we must admit that there is simply no sign whatsoever that the Church of York directed evangelical activity towards the Scandinavians of Ireland or towards Dublin in particular. Perhaps this should not be as surprising as it seems at first. The traffic between Dublin and York was always mostly one-way. It was from Dublin to York that the leaders of Dublin fled in 902. After the descendents of Ímar recaptured Dublin in 917, their rule of the Irish town in one form or another was constant and long-lasting. By contrast, their success in maintaining power at York never lasted long and came to a complete end *c.* 952, when Amlaíb Cúarán was expelled for the second time. Moreover, it was Dublin, not York, that emerged as the Vikings' primary emporium in the northwestern Atlantic. Although York was the most important town in northern England, its people were preoccupied by the attempt to remain as independent as possible of both the kings of Wessex and would-be Scandinavian rulers. In addition, the Church of York doubtlessly had its hands full trying to convince the Scandinavian leaders who had taken over the region to leave them and the churches throughout northern England in peace. It is possible that York sent clergymen to Dublin, but despite the close connection between the two towns, there is no evidence that it did so.

While it does not appear that York had a large role in the evangelization of the Irish Scandinavians, we should not discount the English entirely. After all, however the diocese of Dublin emerged, when it finally did so, it was quite isolated from the rest of the Irish Church. It

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<sup>101</sup> *Chronicon Æthelweardi*, 54.

had strong links, however, to the archdiocese of Canterbury. Limerick and Waterford also each had one bishop consecrated at Canterbury. Obviously, this peculiar situation demands an explanation. Perhaps Canterbury sent missionaries to build churches or preach at already existing churches in Dublin and the other Irish Viking towns? This is not at all implausible; after all, English and Norse were similar languages and tenth-century England probably still had a number of Norse-speaking communities. The English churchmen who accompanied Hákon the Good and Olaf Tryggvason to Norway seem to have made themselves understood. Moreover, Dublin's most important trading links were with English ports, especially Chester and Bristol. Coins from all over England – from Chester, London, York, Derby, Norwich, Gloucester, Oxford, Canterbury, Shaftesbury, Barnstable, and Exeter - have been uncovered in Dublin.<sup>102</sup> Given the close mercantile relationship that existed between the Dublin Scandinavians and England, it would not be surprising if English churchmen took a spiritual interest in the Dubliners; given the relative ease of communication, it would not be surprising if they were successful. If Canterbury did send missionaries to build churches or to staff already existing churches in Dublin, then Canterbury would surely make efforts to see that these preachers were replaced by churchmen who also owed allegiance to Canterbury. Thus, the see of Dublin, when it emerged, would naturally look to Canterbury for leadership.

There is no doubt that from at least 1074 (and perhaps from even earlier) until its promotion to the status of an archbishopric in 1152, the see of Dublin was under the control not of Armagh, nor of any other Irish church, but of Canterbury.<sup>103</sup> A list of Dublin's bishops, written in a late fourteenth-century list on folio 209 of the so-called *Black Book of Christ Church*, records one Donatus (presumably a Latin alternative to the Irish name, Dúnán, that

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<sup>102</sup> Valante, 127-8.

<sup>103</sup> J. A. Watt, *The Church and the Two Nations in Medieval Ireland* (Cambridge: University Press, 1970), 217.

appears in the annals) as Dublin's first bishop and as the founder of Holy Trinity, more commonly known as Christ Church cathedral.<sup>104</sup> As Dublin's first cathedral was probably established not long after Sitric Silkenbeard's pilgrimage to Rome in 1028, by the time he died in 1074, Dúnán must have been bishop for about forty years.<sup>105</sup> Aubrey Gwynn argues that Dúnán was surely consecrated at Canterbury, for upon his death, the people of Dublin wrote to Lanfranc, archbishop of Canterbury, asking that he consecrate Patrick, the successor they had chosen to fill the office Dúnán had left empty. Gwynn bases his argument on Lanfranc's letter to Guthric, the king of Dublin, in which Lanfranc says that he has consecrated Patrick *more antecessorum nostrorum*, implying that Patrick was not the first bishop of Dublin that had been consecrated at Canterbury.<sup>106</sup> Some researchers have argued that as the phrase *more antecessorum nostrorum* is in the plural, Lanfranc must have meant to imply not that Canterbury had been responsible for the consecration of Dublin's first bishop, but rather that it had consecrated bishops in general and that those consecrations were legitimate.<sup>107</sup> Even if this interpretation is correct, it is still likely that Dúnán was consecrated at Canterbury, for this would explain why the people of Dublin turned to Canterbury for a replacement.

In any event, there is no doubt that Patrick was consecrated at Canterbury, as were the next three bishops of Dublin. This situation was clearly not to the liking of Ireland's other churches, particularly Armagh. The official acts of the Synod of Ráith Bressail in 1111

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<sup>104</sup> Aubrey Gwynn, "Some Unpublished Texts from the Black Book of Christ Church," *Analecta Hibernicum* 16 (1946): 311. Another Irish bishop to use *Donatus* as a Latin alternative to his Irish name was the ninth-century St. Donatus, bishop of Fiesole. Perhaps it was from this bishop the idea came to refer to Dúnán as Donatus in Latin. Both men could have chosen the name Donatus out of respect for Aelius Donatus, the fourth-century grammarian, whose *Ars grammatica* was so popular all over Europe.

<sup>105</sup> See the *Annals of Ulster*, 1074, for a record of Dúnán's death.

<sup>106</sup> James Ussher, *Whole Works* (Dublin: Hodges and Smith, 1847), 4:490.

<sup>107</sup> Mark Philpott, "Some Interactions between the English and Irish Churches," *Anglo-Norman Studies* 20 (1997): 191.

studiously ignore the very existence of the whole bishopric of Dublin.<sup>108</sup> After Dublin's fifth bishop, Gréne, returned from his consecration, he found that his see had been taken over by Celestine (or Cellach), bishop of Armagh. The *Annals of Ulster* claim that Cellach was the choice of both the "foreigners" and the Irish, but curiously, when Cellach died in 1129, these same annals do not describe him as bishop of Dublin. Apparently, Gréne had managed to gain back control of his church sometime between 1122 and 1129.<sup>109</sup> Nevertheless, Dublin's status as a "foreign" church within Ireland ended during his time in office. Far from being a setback to Dublin, Dublin's incorporation into the rest of the Irish church actually resulted in an increase in its position and independence. At the Synod of Kells in 1152, Dublin was recognized as one of four archiepiscopal sees in Ireland.<sup>110</sup> From this point, Dublin ceased to be a foreign church within Ireland, under the control of Canterbury, and instead became simply a leading Irish church.<sup>111</sup>

Although eleventh- and twelfth-century Dubliners looked to Canterbury for leadership, there is no evidence that they did so because Canterbury had sent them their first priests or had financed the building of their churches. English sources say nothing about any missionary work amongst the Scandinavians of Ireland, but this comes as no surprise, for they also say almost nothing about the English priests who went to Scandinavia.<sup>112</sup> We rely on Scandinavian sources, such as Oddr Snorrason's *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* and Theodoricus monachus' *Historia de antiquitate regum Norwegiensium* and to a lesser extent on Adam of Bremen's *Gesta*

<sup>108</sup> Aubrey Gwynn, *The Irish Church in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*, ed. Gerard O'Brien (Dublin, Four Courts Press, 1992), 185.

<sup>109</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 1121, 1129.

<sup>110</sup> Gwynn, *The Irish Church in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*, 265.

<sup>111</sup> After the Synod of Kells, Dublin seems to have had five suffragan sees: Glendalough, Ferns, Kilkenny, Leighlin, and Kildare. The other three archiepiscopal sees were Cashel, Tuam, and Armagh (Gwynn, 234-65).

<sup>112</sup> The extremely sparse references in English sources to missionary work in Scandinavia can be read about in Lesley Abrams, "The Anglo-Saxons and the Christianization of Scandinavia," *Anglo-Saxon England* 24 (1995): 213-50.

*Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum* for our knowledge of English priests and bishops in Scandinavia.<sup>113</sup> These records of English churchmen are not echoed in any of our earliest sources on the history of the see of Dublin. The *Black Book of Christ Church* is a composite volume containing two separate parts, the “Book of Obits” and the “Martyrology of Christ Church”. Both of the *Black Book*’s two lists of Dublin’s bishops begin with Donatus; they tell us nothing about what came before Donatus.<sup>114</sup> The *Black Book* also contains two different narratives of the origin of the diocese and the building of the cathedral. The earlier and shorter one, found on folio 160, names Donatus as Dublin’s first archbishop and adds that he built a chapel of St. Michael, but credits the twelfth-century archbishop Laurence with the building of the cathedral.<sup>115</sup> The second, longer, and much more amusing narrative, probably from the end of the fourteenth century, is found on folio 231. It claims that the arches of the cathedral were built by the Danes before St. Patrick came to Ireland and then helpfully informs us that “at that time, Christ Church had not been founded or built as it is now”.<sup>116</sup> More usefully, it adds that Sitric “king of Dublin, son of Amláib, count of Dublin” gave Donatus a place to build a church of the Holy Trinity. It then moves on to the period after the invasion of the Anglo-Normans, in the late twelfth century. Thus, the earliest surviving texts that say anything about the beginning of the see of Dublin start with Bishop Donatus/Dúnán. If he was indeed consecrated at

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<sup>113</sup> Theodoricus monachus tells us that Olaf Tryggvason “hastened to make ready his ships and took with him churchmen – Bishop Sigeweard, who was ordained for the specific purpose of preaching the word of god to the heathen, and several others whom he was able to have with him”. See *Historia de antiquitate regum Norwagiensium*, 11. Oddr Snorrason also discusses Olaf Tryggvason’s importation of English bishops. See *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, ed. Finnur Jónsson (Copenhagen: G.E.C. Gads Forlag, 1932), 91-2, 98, 140-1, 246. Adam of Bremen names four English clerics working in Scandinavia: Siegfried, Grimkil, Rudolf, and Bernhard. See *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum*, 94.

<sup>114</sup> The first list is in an early fourteenth-century hand and is found on folio 78. The second, found on folio 209, is in a late fourteenth-century hand. See: Gwynn, *The Irish Church in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*, 50-1. The two lists can be read in Gwynn, “Some Unpublished Texts from the Black Book of Christ Church”, 310 and 311.

<sup>115</sup> Gwynn, “Some Unpublished Texts from the Black Book of Christ Church”, 308.

<sup>116</sup> Gwynn, “Some Unpublished Texts from the Black Book of Christ Church”, 308-9.

Canterbury, then the Dublin-Canterbury connection must date to *c.* 1030, but there is no indication that it goes back further.

One might argue that despite the lack of any record of it, the English must have played a leading role in evangelizing the Scandinavians of Dublin, for otherwise it is inexplicable how the see of Dublin would have been, definitely from the time of its second bishop, and perhaps from the time of its first, so obviously under Canterbury's jurisdiction. Moreover, two of the other Norse towns in Ireland, Waterford and Limerick, had a strong connection with Canterbury at an early stage in their history. Malchus, Waterford's first bishop, professed obedience to Anselm of Canterbury in 1097, though no other Waterford bishop followed his example. Limerick's first bishop, Gilbert, was not consecrated at Canterbury, but his successor, Patrick, was in 1140.<sup>117</sup> Actually, there is a ready political explanation for how Canterbury came to be consecrating bishops for these towns. Throughout Sitric Silkenbeard's reign, he constantly tried to keep himself and Dublin from falling too much under any Irish king's power. Furthermore, a number of sources suggest political and economic cooperation between Sitric and Cnut the Great, the king of England and Denmark, during the early eleventh century. The Icelandic poet Óttarr svarti and the Danish historian Sveinn Aggeson portray Cnut as king of the Irish, which could mean that Cnut acted as an overlord of Dublin.<sup>118</sup> If Sitric did indeed ally himself with Cnut in order to avoid subservience to an Irish king much closer to home, then after his pilgrimage to Rome, he would also probably have had a bishop for his new see of Dublin consecrated at Canterbury, rather than at an Irish church.

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<sup>117</sup> See Ussher, 4:119-20, for records of both of these bishop's professions of obedience to Canterbury.

<sup>118</sup> Óttarr svarti and Sveinn Aggeson will be discussed more on page 188.



There is evidence of Danish interest in the Irish Sea region from at least the late tenth century. Adam of Bremen, for instance, tells us that after being exiled from Denmark, Cnut's father, Sveinn Haraldsson (or Sweyn Forkbeard), was helped by a *rex Scothorum*.<sup>119</sup> Exactly which king this was or whether he was from Ireland or Scotland is unimportant, for it is clear that Sveinn Haraldsson must have been somewhere in the Irish Sea. Indeed, Cnut's father must have been the *Sweyn filius Haraldi*, whom the *Annales Cambriae* describe harrying the Isle of Mann c. 995.<sup>120</sup> Ademar of Chabannes tells us that a raid on St-Michel en l'Herm was committed c.1018 by "an endless multitude of Norsemen from the Danish and *Iresca* regions".<sup>121</sup> Benjamin Hudson argues that Ademar's word *iresca* must be an attempt to reproduce the Norse word *irsk*, meaning Irish.<sup>122</sup> In addition to these signs of Danish activity in the Irish Sea region, there are hints that Sitric sought allies among other Scandinavian leaders, including Cnut. Both *Njáls saga* and *Orkneyinga saga* portray Sitric, before the Battle of Clontarf, looking for supporters amongst the Scandinavians living everywhere from the Orkneys to northern England to the Isle of Mann. In addition, three charters from Crediton possibly serve as evidence that Sitric spent time at Cnut's court. These three charters have been dated to c. 1027, 1031, and 1033.<sup>123</sup> To each of these charters, one "Sihtric dux" served as a witness. From the fact that he cannot be identified in English sources from the period, it is likely that he was some sort of visiting noble. The title *dux* rather than *rex* might be considered a barrier to identifying this

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<sup>119</sup> *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum*, 78.

<sup>120</sup> *Annales Cambriae*, 21.

<sup>121</sup> *Ademari Cabannensis Chronicon*, ed. P. Bourgain (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 1999), 172: "infinita multitudo Normannorum ex Danamarcha et Iresca regione".

<sup>122</sup> Benjamin Hudson, "Knútr and Viking Dublin," *Scandinavian Studies* 66, no. 3 (1994), 320.

<sup>123</sup> The first two charters are Sawyer nos. 962 and 963. They are found in John Mitchell Kemble, *Codex Diplomaticus Aevi Saxonici* (London: History Society, 1839-48), 34, 36. The third charter is Sawyer no. 971 and is printed in James B. Davidson, "Some Anglo-Saxon Charters at Exeter," *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* 39 (1883): 289-92.

Sitric with Sitric Silkenbeard, but the writers of these charters probably considered it inappropriate to assign kingly status to a ruler so obviously subordinate to Cnut.

That Sitric and Cnut cooperated often enough for Cnut to claim to be a kind of overlord of Dublin is indicated by some verses composed by an eleventh-century Icelandic poet, Óttarr svarti, who, after working at the court of Óláfr Haraldsson in Norway, took up work at the court of Óláfr's archenemy, Cnut. His "Knútsdrápa", recorded in *Knýtlinga saga*, helps to fill out the details of Cnut's reign in England from 1015 to 1016.<sup>124</sup> Óttarr tells us, "I will greet the king of the Danes, the Irish, the English, and the Islanders; so his praise may travel through all the lands under heaven".<sup>125</sup> A twelfth-century Danish history by Sveinn Aggeson also lists the Irish among Cnut's clients.<sup>126</sup> There were at least two reasons why Cnut would take an interest in Dublin. The first was mercantile. Dublin was, after all, "not only the largest market town in the Irish Sea, but one with a fleet that could patrol the western coasts of Britain".<sup>127</sup> Moreover, Dublin did a huge amount of business with towns in England. Equally important, however, must have been Cnut's need to keep a close watch on any other rising Scandinavian kingdoms. After all, before he returned to claim the throne of Norway, Olaf Tryggvason spent some time in Dublin, where he married Amlaíb Cúarán's daughter and seems to have launched raids against England.<sup>128</sup> Cnut's son Svein, through whom Cnut ruled Norway, certainly lost no time in

<sup>124</sup> Russell Poole, "Óttarr svarti," in *Medieval Scandinavia*, ed. Phillip Pulsiano (New York: Garland Publishing, 1993), 459.

<sup>125</sup> Finnúr Jónsson, ed., *Den norskislandske Skjaldedigtning* (Copenhagen: Gyldendalske boghandel, 1910-15), 4:275: "Skal sva kvedja konung Dana, Ira ok Engla ok Eybua, at has fari med himinkauptum, londum ollum lof vidara."

<sup>126</sup> *Ex Suenonis Aggonis Gestis Regum Danorum*, vol. 29 of *Monumenta Germaniae Historica: Scriptorum*, ed. G. Waitz (Leipzig: Verlag Karl W. Hiersemann, 1925), 33.

<sup>127</sup> Hudson, "Knútr and Viking Dublin", 323.

<sup>128</sup> Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla*, 1:267-9. *Heimskringla* claims that Olaf Tryggvason married Amlaíb Cúarán's sister, but given how old this would have made her, it is much more likely that she was Amlaíb Cúarán's daughter. That Olaf Tryggvason was raiding England during this period can be inferred from the fact that peasants come to him to try to get back their livestock.

getting rid of Tryggvi, a contender for the Norwegian throne, who also happened to be Sitric Silkenbeard's nephew.<sup>129</sup> Though there is no evidence that Sitric supported his nephew, Cnut was surely wise to work with Sitric, grant him his patronage when necessary, and thereby watch to see that he did not become a rival for the loyalty of Scandinavians throughout the northern Atlantic diaspora.

Considering the fact that Cnut made his pilgrimage to Rome in 1027 and Sitric made his in 1028, it is possible that it was Cnut who inspired Sitric. If Sitric did indeed choose to have a bishop consecrated at Canterbury, he probably did not find it difficult to convince the churchmen in Canterbury to accept a new diocese under their authority. The archbishop of Canterbury through much of Cnut's reign, from 1028 to 1038, was Æthelnoth the Good, who seems to have been eager to support new dioceses. We know that he consecrated bishops for work in Scandinavia, for Adam of Bremen complains about his consecration of Bishop Gerbrand of Zealand for this purpose. Adam also gives us the names of four specific clergymen whom St. Olaf brought with him from England to Norway and suggests (though he is somewhat vague on this point) that many bishops all over Scandinavia and the islands of the north Atlantic were consecrated in England.<sup>130</sup> Furthermore, the churchmen of Canterbury might have been eager to expand their influence and prestige; the consecration of other sees' bishops was one way to do this. (By the time Patrick was consecrated as bishop of Dublin in 1074, the oath he took referred to Lanfranc as "primate of Britain and archbishop of the holy church of Canterbury."<sup>131</sup> Both Malchus, Waterford's first bishop, and Patrick, Limerick's second bishop, professed canonical

<sup>129</sup> Oscar Albert Johnsen and Jón Helgason, eds., *Den Saga Óláfs Hins Helga, Den Store Saga om Olav den Hellige* (Oslo: Jacob Dybwad, 1941), 1:610-12.

<sup>130</sup> *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum*, 94, 215.

<sup>131</sup> Ussher, 4:564: "Propterea ego Patricius, ad regendam Dublinam metropolem Hibewrniae electus antistes, tibi, reverende pater Lanfrance, Britanniarum primas et sanctae Dorobernensis ecclesiae archiepiscopo, professionis meae chartam porrigo."

submission to the archbishop of Canterbury, calling him *totius Britanniae primas*.<sup>132</sup>) Thus, if Sitric asked Archbishop Æthelnoth to consecrate a bishop for a new see in Dublin, it is likely that he would have gotten a positive response. It is therefore perfectly plausible that, seeing Cnut make go on a pilgrimage to Rome, Sitric decided to do the same and to ask that a diocese be set up in the growing town that he ruled. Wishing to establish his independence from the Irish bishops (especially that of Armagh) and the kings with whom they associated, he asked that the new bishop of Dublin be consecrated at Canterbury. Such a sequence of events explains why we see no evidence of missionaries from Canterbury in Dublin in the late tenth or early eleventh centuries, yet when the see of Dublin appears, it is without doubt under Canterbury's authority.

The fact that Canterbury was also responsible for the consecration of Waterford's first bishop and Limerick's second could be used to argue that, since these were both Norse towns, Canterbury must have had some interest in evangelizing the Norsemen of these towns. Waterford and Limerick became dioceses much later than Dublin—Waterford in 1097 and Limerick in 1107. The decision by local political leaders to request that Canterbury consecrate bishops for these towns seems to have been motivated by the same forces that drove Sitric to ask for a bishop who could be consecrated outside of Ireland. That is to say, like Sitric, leaders in southern Ireland in the 1090's and 1140's (when Limerick's second bishop was consecrated at Canterbury), wished to avoid domination by other Irish churches, particularly the church of Armagh. The request that Canterbury consecrate Malchus to be Waterford's first bishop came in 1096, surprisingly, from prominent Irish, not Norse, leaders. Muirchertach ua Briain, Muirchertach's brother, Idunan, bishop of Meath, Samuel, bishop of Dublin, Ferdomnach, bishop of Leinster, and "Dofnald" (whom Aubrey Gwynn identifies as Domnall ua h-Enna,

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<sup>132</sup> Watt, 218.

bishop of Munster and the most important prelate in southern Ireland) wrote a letter asking that the archbishop of Canterbury consecrate their nominee.<sup>133</sup> What is significant about this list of signatories is that they all came from the south of Ireland, and were therefore surely eager to avoid interference from the church of Armagh as much as possible. As for Limerick, we do not know where its first bishop, Gilbert, was consecrated. All we can say for certain is that in 1107 Gilbert sent a letter to Anselm, archbishop of Canterbury, in which he called himself the bishop of Limerick and Anselm sent a letter back congratulating Gilbert on his recent consecration.<sup>134</sup> Patrick, Limerick's second bishop, was consecrated at Canterbury, though who requested Canterbury to perform this consecration is unclear. Like Malchus of Waterford and the bishops of Dublin, he swore an oath of canonical obedience to *totius Britanniae primas* - the archbishop of Canterbury.<sup>135</sup> If a number of secular and ecclesiastical leaders from southern Ireland were willing to ask Canterbury to consecrate a bishop for Waterford, it is likely that they would do the same for Limerick. In turning to Canterbury, they would have avoided giving any other Irish church, most importantly Armagh, extra prestige. Thus, the fact that Waterford and Limerick each had a bishop consecrated at Dublin probably had nothing to do with any initiative on Canterbury's part to convert the Scandinavians of Ireland. Rather, like Sitric, the leaders of southern Ireland wished to avoid domination by another Irish church.

One might argue that if Dúnán was not, in fact, consecrated in Canterbury, all of these considerations about Sitric's and Cnut's political connections and Archbishop Æthelnoth are

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<sup>133</sup> See Aubrey Gwynn, *The Irish Church in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*, ed. Gerard O'Brien (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1992), 100 for the identification of Bishop Dofnald. Muirchertach's letter was copied by Eadmar in his *Historia Novorum*. See *Eadmar's Historia Novorum Liber Secundus*, PL 159, col. 0395B-0396A.

<sup>134</sup> These letters can be read in *Anselmi Opera Omnia*, ed. Franciscus Salesius Schmitt (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1946-61), 5:374-75 (letters 428 and 429).

<sup>135</sup> These bishops' professions can be read in Ussher, 4:565-6. The oaths taken by Bishops Patrick, Samuel, and Gregory of Dublin, Bishop Malchus of Waterford, and Bishop Patrick of Limerick, all contained the phrase *totius Britanniae primas*.

irrelevant. Not so! Over the course of the eleventh century, the conditions that influenced Sitric's and Æthelnoth's behavior continued, such that it is likely that their successors would have behaved in much the same way. By the time Diarmat mac Máel na mBó died in 1072, Dublin's importance had increased to the point where all claimants to Ireland's high kingship vied to control the town and its wealth.<sup>136</sup> Over the course of the year 1075 three different kings briefly held Dublin.<sup>137</sup> When Dúnán died in 1074, Dublin was held by Gofraidh, probably the son of Ragnall (or in English, Rægnald).<sup>138</sup> From the fact that Lanfranc, upon consecrating Patrick as Dublin's new bishop, sends a letter to Gofraidh (or as Lanfranc writes, Guthric), it is clear that it must have been Gofraidh who requested the consecration. Given the fierce competition that was building over Dublin, Gofraidh would naturally have been reluctant to hand over control of the church in Dublin to one of the larger Irish churches. As for Canterbury, during the 1070's Lanfranc was trying to establish Canterbury's right to demand an oath of obedience from the archbishop of York. In 1072 Anselm wrote to Pope Alexander II that from extracts taken from the writings of Bede, "it was shown that from the time of the blessed Augustine, first archbishop of Canterbury down to the time of Bede himself, that is to say, about 140 years, my predecessors have exercised primacy over the church of York over the whole of the island called Britain, as well as over Ireland and pastoral care over all."<sup>139</sup> As J. A. Watt points out, Lanfranc was not really interested in exercising primacy over Ireland, but, since "the

<sup>136</sup> Seán Duffy, "Pre-Norman Dublin: Capital of Ireland?" *History Ireland* 1 (1993): 14-5.

<sup>137</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 1075; *Annals of Inisfallen*, 1075.

<sup>138</sup> In 1075 the *Annals of Ulster* and the *Annals of Inisfallen* refer to Gofraidh as the king of Áth Cliath, while in 1072 the *Chronicon Scotorum* calls him the king of the foreigners and the *Annals of Inisfallen* again call him the king of Áth Cliath.

<sup>139</sup> *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum*, ed. and trans. R. A. B. Mynors, R. M. Thomson, and M. Winterbottom, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), 29:2: "In concilio quod Angliae per vestram auctoritatem coactus est ubi querelae Thomae archiepiscopi prolatae et ventilatae sunt allata est ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum historia, quam Eboracensis ecclesiae presbyter, et Anglorum doctor, Beda composuit; lectae sententiae, quibus pace omnium demonstratum est a tempore beati Augustini, primi Doroberensis archiepiscopi, usque ad ipsius Bedae ultimam aetatem, quod fere centum et xl annorum spatio terminator, antecessores meos super Eboracensem ecclesiam, totamque insulam quam Britanniam vocant, necnon et Hiberniam, primatum gessisse, curam pastorem omnibus impendisse."

more geographically extensive his primacy, the more impressive its solidarity,” Lanfranc included Ireland in the list of places he should exercise primacy over.<sup>140</sup> In short, even if his predecessor were not responsible for consecrating Dublin’s first bishop, Lanfranc would have been only too eager to consecrate its second. Of course, whether Canterbury began to consecrate Dublin’s bishops *c.* 1030 or in 1074 does not change the fact that Canterbury’s interactions with the Church in Dublin were limited to the consecration of bishops. There is no sign that it was involved in the sort of evangelical work that would have influenced, for instance, Amlaíb Cúarán.

Given that the *Black Book*’s two lists of bishops and two narratives of the founding of the cathedral have so far failed to take our knowledge of the Dubliners’ Christianity any further back than Bishop Dúnán (and cannot even tell us where he was consecrated), perhaps we should turn to some other written records bound in this volume. Within the section of the *Black Book* called the Martyrology is a feast on July 31 of the relics of the saints that had been in Christ Church’s possession since Dúnán’s time.<sup>141</sup> It is worth noting that only the last two of the eighteen relics listed – those of St. Patrick and Laurence O’Toole – are Irish and that there are no relics of any English saints. The preamble to the relic list states that the relics had been assembled in Dúnán’s time and an examination of the list of relics shows that, with the exception of the relics of St. Patrick and Laurence O’Toole, this is actually quite likely. The inclusion of the relics of St. Heribert, archbishop of Cologne, and of King Olaf Haraldsson of Norway, who died in 1030, shows that the relics could not have been collected before 1031, when King Olaf’s remains were enshrined in Nidaros. The relic list’s failure to record the relics of St. Wulfstan, who died in

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<sup>140</sup> Watt, 221.

<sup>141</sup> *The Book of Obits and Martyrology of the Cathedral Church of the Holy Trinity, commonly called Christ Church, Dublin* (Dublin: Irish Archaeological Society at the University Press, 1844), 141.

1095, show that the list must have been made *before* the end of the eleventh century, for a later relic list in the same manuscript shows that the cathedral at some point acquired a relic of this saint. The relics named on this list must have been collected, therefore, at some point between 1031 and 1095 and the relics of St. Patrick and Laurence O'Toole must have been added later. That these two saints' relics were not part of the original collection is suggested by the fact that their entries are written in different handwriting and have a slightly different formula than that of the other sixteen saints' relics. There is no way to prove at exactly what point between 1031 and 1095 these relics were collected, but two factors make it likely that it was when Sitric was still king, that is, in the 1030's. The first factor is the inclusion of the relics of Olaf. As Sitric's father and son bore the name Olaf (Amlaíb), such relics could have been particularly valuable to him, both politically and religiously. The second factor is the inclusion of relics of St. David. The Norse of Ireland and Wales had particularly close economic connections in the early eleventh century and Sitric may have gone to Wales after his expulsion from Dublin in 1036.<sup>142</sup> Thus, there is every reason to think that the relics listed under July 31 in the Martyrology were acquired when Dúnán took up his post as the first bishop of Dublin.

The reason this collection of relics is so important is because if it really arrived in Dublin at about the same time as Bishop Dúnán (and this seems to have been the case), then whichever church sent it might well have done so as part of an evangelical campaign to the Norse in Ireland. The relics appear to have been assembled not in Ireland, but in Cologne, at one of the two churches there – Groß St. Martin or St. Pantaleon - known to have been under the control of Irish monks. Five of the eighteen relics named had so strong a link with Cologne that it is hard to see how they could have come from anywhere else. These relics include one of St. Pinnosa

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<sup>142</sup> Raghnaill Ó Floinn, "The Foundation Relics of Christ Church Cathedral," *Medieval Dublin 7*, ed. Seán Duffy (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2006), 96.



(one of the 11,000 virgins of Ursula, Cologne's principal saint), one of Heribert (the archbishop of Cologne who died in 1021), the staff and chains of St. Peter (which Archbishop Bruno had acquired for Cologne cathedral in the mid-tenth century), and a sandal belonging to St. Sylvester (whose cult was strongly promoted by Gerbert of Aurillac, the tutor of Otto II).<sup>143</sup> That a group of relics assembled in Cologne would have been brought to Ireland is not as improbable as it initially sounds. During the late tenth and early eleventh century Irish churchmen held prominent positions in some of Cologne's churches. Between 1019 and 1042 the church of St. Pantaleon was governed by an Irish abbot, Elias (presumably Ailill in Irish).<sup>144</sup> Abbot Elias was among the revered Heribert's closest associates and was the one called to the archbishop's bedside in 1021 to administer the last rites. Elias also governed the church of Groß St. Martin, which, according to Marianus Scotus, had been placed under Irish control in the 970s.<sup>145</sup> Considering this relic collection's strong associations with Cologne, combined with the fact that an Irish abbot was in charge of two of Cologne's churches in the early eleventh century, it seems highly probable that Irish churchmen in Cologne sent these relics to Dublin in order to promote the new diocese of Dublin.

Not only did the relics listed in the Martyrology probably come from Cologne, but the Martyrology itself, though written in the thirteenth century, appears to have been based on a martyrology that had started its existence in Metz and had received significant additions in Cologne before being taken to Dublin. The martyrology that survives in the *Black Book* includes many Irish and English feasts that must have been added in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries,

<sup>143</sup> For information about Archbishop Bruno's acquisition of St. Peter's staff, see Peter Lasko, *Ars Sacra, 800-1200* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 95. For information about Gerbert of Aurillac, who eventually became Pope Sylvester II, see the *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Sylvester II."

<sup>144</sup> Hans Joachim Kracht, *Geschichte der Benediktinerabtei St Pantaleon in Köln, 965-1250* (Siegburg: Verlag Franz Schmitt, 1975), 56.

<sup>145</sup> "Mariani Scotti Chronicon," PL 147, col. 0780C-D.

presumably to meet the needs of the Irish and Anglo-Norman communities living in Dublin.<sup>146</sup> Once we get rid of these saints and compare the saints that are left with those found in Ado's martyrology (upon which all later martyrologies were based), the large number of saints that were important to the church of Metz suggests that that is where the *Black Book's* martyrology originated, a little after 1005.<sup>147</sup> As it happens, Irish influence in Metz was particularly keen during the second half of the tenth century. The Scottish-born, Irish-educated St. Cathróe had undertaken the reformation of the Benedictine monastery of St-Félix (later St-Clémens).<sup>148</sup> Cathróe was followed by the Irish abbot "Fingenius" (Fíngen), whom the bishop of Metz later appointed to the headship of the Benedictine monastery of St-Symphorien. It is also possible that one of Otto III's diplomas decreed that St-Symphorien was to be under Irish control for as long as possible, but this diploma might have been forged.<sup>149</sup> A considerable number of saints important to Cologne show that the martyrology must have been transferred to that church.<sup>150</sup> As the martyrology does not mention Archbishop Heribert, who died in 1021, the Cologne additions must have been made before that year. Pádraig Ó Riain argues, based on internal textual evidence, that the martyrology must have had additions made to it not just in Cologne, but specifically in one of the two churches in Cologne under Irish control.<sup>151</sup> Thus, not only Dublin's first relics, but also its first martyrology, must have been brought from Cologne around the same time that the see of Dublin was created.

<sup>146</sup> Pádraig Ó Riain, "Dublin's Oldest Book? A List of Saints 'Made in Germany,'" in *Medieval Dublin 5*, ed. Seán Duffy (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2004), 54-8.

<sup>147</sup> Ó Riain, "Dublin's Oldest Book?" 60.

<sup>148</sup> D. N. Dumville, "St. Cathróe of Metz and the Hagiography of Exoticism," in *Studies in Irish Hagiography: Saints and Scholars*, ed. John Carey, Máire Herbert, and Pádraig Ó Riain (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001), 173.

<sup>149</sup> Dumville, "St. Cathróe of Metz," 181n.

<sup>150</sup> The Irish saints that must have been added in Cologne include Comgall, Boethini, Blan, Ultan, Barr, and Finnian. See *The Book of Obits and Martyrology of the Cathedral Church of the Holy Trinity, commonly called Christ Church, Dublin*, 114, 124, 144, 153, 161, 187.

<sup>151</sup> Ó Riain, "Dublin's Oldest Book?" 67.

Given that the diocese's first relics and first martyrology appeared in Dublin at about the same time that its first bishop arrived, it is possible that, if Dúnán did not come from Canterbury, he could have been an Irish churchman in Cologne. Ragnall Ó Floinn suggests that when Sitric was making his way towards Rome in 1028, he may have stopped in Cologne and decided to ask the authorities in Rome for one of the Irish ecclesiastics in Cologne to be sent to a new bishopric in Dublin.<sup>152</sup> Eleventh-century Irish sources record a number of Irishmen going to Cologne. Donnchad mac Gilla Mochonna, abbot of Dunshaughlin, died in Cologne in 1027.<sup>153</sup> Bróen, once a king of Leinster and one of Sitric's rivals, retired to Cologne and died there in 1052.<sup>154</sup> It might have been through these Irish clerics in Cologne that the Irish got the scattered bits of information about the events in the empire that they recorded in the annals, such as the death of Henry II and the accession of Conrad in 1023 and the battle between Conrad and Otto in 1038.<sup>155</sup> In making a brief stop in Cologne, Sitric would have been, once again, copying Cnut, since the *Vita Heriberti* records that Cnut stopped in Cologne on his way either to or from Rome.<sup>156</sup>

Thus, there are at least two potential answers to the question of which church was responsible for helping to set up the diocese of Dublin: Canterbury and Cologne. The support for each church's claims is strong. While Lanfranc's phrase *more antecessorum nostrorum* might have been just part of an attempt to claim primacy over all of Britain and Ireland, it is hard to see why the people of Dublin would ask Canterbury to consecrate a new bishop for them in 1074 if their first bishop had come from Cologne. Furthermore, there is no doubt that Canterbury consecrated many bishops who were sent abroad to minister to Scandinavian communities. On the other hand, the relics and martyrology that Cologne sent to Dublin were

<sup>152</sup> Ó Floinn, "The Foundation Relics of Christ Church Cathedral", 102.

<sup>153</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 1027.

<sup>154</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 1052.

<sup>155</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 1023, 1038.

<sup>156</sup> Ó Floinn, "The Foundation Relics of Christ Church Cathedral", 101.

significant gifts. Would churchmen really send such treasures to a diocese that they had nothing to do with and no control over and that only just barely existed? It seems much more plausible that the reason these relics and martyrology arrived in Dublin at about the same time as Bishop Dúnán is because they arrived *with* Bishop Dúnán. If Dúnán did come from Cologne, however, we are faced with a troubling question: why would Sitric, presumably wishing to preserve his independence from the surrounding Irish kingdoms and churches, nominate an Irishman, who probably did not come from Dublin, to be consecrated as bishop of Dublin? One potential answer is that they viewed Bishop Dúnán and his new diocese as a means of bringing continental reforms into Ireland. It is possible that Sitric viewed the Irishmen in Cologne as sufficiently far away from Irish politics – both ecclesiastical and secular – as to be unlikely to threaten Dublin’s independence. Of course, this is all speculation. It is impossible to say for certain whether Canterbury or Cologne sent Dublin its first bishop.

Unfortunately, Cologne presents us with the same problem that Canterbury does, namely, that there is no indication that its churchmen had anything to do with the Scandinavians in Ireland before the diocese of Dublin was created. Churchmen from Cologne do not appear to have had anything to do with Amlaíb Cúarán’s decision to retire to Iona in 980. Considering the fact that his monastic retirement constitutes our earliest substantial evidence for Scandinavian conversion in Ireland, perhaps we should look more closely at the his relationship, or more generally the Dubliners’ relationship, with the Columban churches. There were, after all, several Columban churches in the Dublin hinterland. The island of Iona sits at the northeastern corner of the Irish Sea and not only was it one of the first Irish sites that the Vikings plundered in the early ninth century, but the mercantile traffic in the Irish Sea must have brought both the Dubliners and the Scandinavians of the Hebrides into frequent contact with the Ionan monks.

From the annals we can see that Amlaíb's relationship with the Columban churches went back at least a decade before his retirement to Iona. In 968, we read that Kells "was plundered by Amlaíb Cúarán, with Foreigners and Lagenians, and he carried off a great prey of cows, and lost a great number of his people".<sup>157</sup> Clearly, this is not what one would expect to see in a man who was to eventually retire to Kells' mother-house. Yet Amlaíb's attack was not the first that Kells had suffered from the Vikings. In 951, Gothfrith mac Sitriuc, Olaf's brother, plundered Kells along with some other nearby churches.<sup>158</sup> We read further that Sitric mac Amlaíb, that is, Sitric Silkenbeard, Amlaíb's son, accompanied by Murchad mac Finn, king of Leinster, attacked Kells in 969, a year before Amlaíb himself, also in alliance with the Leinstermen, plundered it. They were defeated by Domnall ua Neill.<sup>159</sup> The *Chronicum Scotorum* uses the word *dargain* to in both 951 and 968, while the *Annals of the Four Masters* use *orgain*, both forms of the verb *oirgid*, which the Dictionary of the Irish Language defines as "destroys, slays, despoils."<sup>160</sup> Colmán Etchingham notes that *oirgid* is one of the commonest verbs that the annals use to report Viking attacks, second only to *inn-reith*.<sup>161</sup> There is thus nothing in the annals' record of these plundering to suggest that there was anything unusual about them. Yet an examination of the circumstances surrounding the attacks in 968 and 969 suggests a that the Dubliners were driven by a tangle of political and religious motives.

There seem to be two potential explanations for these attacks, both of which could be correct. The first is that control of Kells, perhaps because of its nearness to Tara, was part of a struggle for control of Brega, the wealthy plain that stretched out from Dublin into what is now

<sup>157</sup> *Chronicum Scotorum*, 968: "Cenannus dargain dAmlaib Carain go ngalloib ocus go laignib, go rub boruma mór les, ocus co ffarccaib sochaide dia muitir."

<sup>158</sup> *Chronicum Scotorum*, 950 [=951]: "Gotfrit mac Sitriucca do gabáil Ata cliat, ocus dargain cenannsa agus Domnaig Padraig, ocus Aird Breacain, ocus Tuilén, ocus Disirt Ciarain, ocus Cille Scire."

<sup>159</sup> *Annals of the Four Masters*, 967 [=969]: "Orgain Cenannsa lá Sitriucc."

<sup>160</sup> *Dictionary of the Irish Language*, s.v. "oirgid."

<sup>161</sup> Etchingham, *Viking Raids on Irish Church Settlements in the Ninth Century*, 36.

counties Meath and Louth. The second possibility is that Amlaíb and the Dubliners were laying claim to the churches in Colum Cille's *paruchia*. There were many Columban establishments in Brega that the Scandinavians, if they were trying to take over the plain of Brega, must have encountered. Examples include not only Donaghpatrick, Ardbraccen, Dulane, and Kilskeer, the four churches associated with Kells that Gothfrith attacked in 951, but also churches like the ones at Swords and on Lambay Island, which were so close to Dublin that they must have long been within the Norsemen's sphere of influence. In fact, medieval sources mention both churches in connection with the Vikings. In chapters 7 and 19, the *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh* records *Sord Coluim Cilli* in lists of churches that the Vikings raided around the years 825 and 841.<sup>162</sup> The *Annals of Ulster* record the foundation of the church on Lambay Island in 635 and the *Annals of the Four Masters* say that the foreigners, that is, the Norsemen, plundered it in 1038.<sup>163</sup> There were yet more Columban churches in Brega that the Vikings came into contact with not long after they first began to camp out at Dublin. The *Annals of Ulster* say that they accompanied the king of Uí Cianachta in his destruction of the church at Trevet in 850.<sup>164</sup> According to the *Cogadh*, they also plundered Monasterboice in the early 840's.<sup>165</sup> Other examples of Columban foundations not far from Dublin include Clonmore, Cluain Fota Báetáin (in county Westmeath), Tagony (in county Dublin), Glass Noínden (also in county Dublin), and Cell Maige (in county Meath).<sup>166</sup> In short, by the time Amlaíb began his Irish career in the 940's, Dublin and the Brega were already well stocked with Columban establishments.

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<sup>162</sup> *Cogadh*, 6, 18.

<sup>163</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 635; *Annals of the Four Masters*, 1038.

<sup>164</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 850.

<sup>165</sup> *Cogadh*, 18.

<sup>166</sup> *Monasticon Hibernicum, Early Christian Ecclesiastical Settlement 5<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, compiled by Ailbhe MacShamhráin, Nora White, and Aidan Breen, NUI Maynooth, <http://monasticon.celt.dias.ie/index.php> (accessed July 1, 2010).

Clearly, these two explanations for the Dubliners' activities in the second half of the tenth century are not mutually exclusive; in fact, they could be related to each other. In seeking to control the Irish Sea region, the region immediately surrounding Dublin, and the plain of Brega, the Dubliners would have been brought into contact with many Columban churches and monasteries. The establishment of their right to plunder these foundations and to take revenue from them would in turn become part of their efforts to control these areas. These explanations for Amlaíb's and the Dubliners' behavior are very worldly, but there is reason to think that their actions came to have a religious side. The peculiar case of the church of *Scrín Coluim Cille* provides an example of how political and religious motives were likely interwoven. This church, whose name means "shrine of Colum Cille", stood atop a hill at Achall, a site less than ten kilometers from Tara. In the *Metrical Dindshenchas*, we find a poem that professes to have been written by Cinaeth ua hArtacáin, who, according to the *Annals of Ulster*, died in 975.<sup>167</sup> The poem describes Achall and concludes by saying, "Amlaíb of Áth Cliath the hundred-strong/ who assumed the kingship in Bend Etair/ I bore off from him as price of my song/ a horse of the horses of Achall."<sup>168</sup> The statement that Amlaíb had assumed the kingship in Bend Etair, that is, Howth Hill, confirms the suspicion that he was trying to expand his power over Brega. In fact, the poet's claim that Amlaíb gave him a horse from Achall could suggest that he was already acting as king over the area.

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<sup>167</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 975.

<sup>168</sup> Gwynn, Edward, ed. and trans., *The Metrical Dindshenchas*, (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1903-35), 1:52-3: "Amlaib Atha Cliath cetaig/ rogab rigi i mBeind Etair/ tallus luag mo duane de/ ech d'echaib ana Aichle." Máire Ní Mhaonaigh briefly discusses this poem in her article "Friend and Foe: Vikings in Ninth- and Tenth-Century Irish Literature," in *Ireland and Scandinavia in the Early Viking Age*, ed. Howard B. Clarke, Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, and Ragnall Ó Floinn (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1998), 399-400. Charles Doherty also discusses this poem as part of a larger study of Amlaíb Cúarán and the conversion of the Norse in Ireland in "The Vikings In Ireland: a Review," in *Ireland and Scandinavia in the Early Viking Age*, ed. Howard B. Clarke, Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, and Ragnall Ó Floinn (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1998), 297-8.

The idea that Amlaíb would commission a poem about this site is most interesting, for it raises the question of what his relationship was with *Scrín Coluim Cille*. The first record of this church's existence occurs in 974, when the *Chronicum Scotorum* says that it was plundered by the son of Domnall, the son of Muirchertach.<sup>169</sup> That is, it was attacked by the son of Amlaíb's long-time enemy, Domnall ua Neill. Domnall himself raided it in 976.<sup>170</sup> It was, perhaps, in retaliation for these raids that in 977 Amlaíb killed Domnall's two sons.<sup>171</sup> The fact that Amlaíb commissioned a poem about Achall suggests that he had made some sort of special claim to the site; Domnall's and his son's attacks on the church at Achall do nothing but strengthen this suggestion. The labeling of this church as a *scrín*, an Irish word borrowed from the Latin *scrinium*, meaning shrine, was surely not an accident. There is little doubt that the word *scrín* could be used in place of the Latin word *arca* to indicate the box where a saint's bodily remains were kept. A demonstration of this is found in the *Annals of Ulster* under the year 800, where a mixed Latin-Irish entry says, *positio reliquiarum Conlaid hi scrin*, "the placing of Conláed's relics in a *scrín*". The very next year, the same annals have a wholly Latin entry that reads *positio reliquiarum Ronaen filii Berich in arca*, "the placing of Rónán son of Berach's relics in an *arca*". Thus, the logical conclusion is that a church at Achall called *Scrín Coluim Cille* must have contained some of Colum Cille's earthly remains. The question is, who put them there?

It is possible that in his raid on Kells in 970, Amlaíb stole some of Colum Cille's relics that were being kept there, as opposed to on Iona, for safety. In 878, the *Annals of Ulster* tell us that "the shrine of Colum Cille and his other halidoms arrived in Ireland, having been taken in

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<sup>169</sup> *Chronicum Scotorum*, 974.

<sup>170</sup> *Chronicum Scotorum*, 976.

<sup>171</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 977; *Annals of Inisfallen*, 977.



flight to escape the foreigners”.<sup>172</sup> There is no way to prove exactly where in Ireland Colum Cille’s relics were taken, though Kells is a likely choice. Because Kells began to be built in 807, historians have long concluded that it was founded as a refuge for the Ionan community, which had suffered deadly Viking attacks in 802 and 806. We know that relics and precious objects were kept at Kells, for the *Annals of the Four Masters* record in 1006 that “the Great Gospel of Colum Cille was stolen at night from the western *erdomh* [or sacristy] of the great church of Kells. This was the principal relic of the western world”.<sup>173</sup> Thus, a combination of pieces of information – the poem’s indication that Amlaíb had laid claim to Achall, the naming of the church at Achall “Colum Cille’s shrine”, Domnall ua Neill’s two attacks on this church in only three years, and, last but not least, the fact that we read nothing of this church before 974 – leads to the suspicion that Amlaíb built this church and placed some relics stolen from Kells in it. Such an action would have done much more than merely assert his control over the region; it would have established Amlaíb, rather than Domnall, as the leading secular ruler within the Columban *familia*.

Against this argument is the fact that none of the annals say anything about Amlaíb’s theft of any relics. They mention his raid on Kells, but nothing more. We must bear in mind, however, that the annals talk only occasionally about the movement of relics. It is noteworthy that only the *Annals of the Four Masters*, by far the most detailed of any of the annals, bother to mention the theft of the “Great Gospel” in 1006. The annalists were not, however, *completely* averse to discussing the movement of relics. In 818 the *Chronicum Scotorum* says that Artri, the abbot of Armagh, took the *scrín Padraig* to Connacht and that Diarmaid, abbot of Iona, went to

<sup>172</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 878: “Scrín Coluim Cille & a minna olchena du tiachtain dochum nErenn for teicheadh ria Gallaibh.” The word *halidoms* is used to translate the Irish *minna*, a word that seems to refer to holy objects that had belonged to the saint.

<sup>173</sup> *Annals of the Four Masters*, 1006: “Soiscéel mór Cholaim Chille do dubgoid irin oidce asin erdom iartarach an doimliacc móir Chinannsa. Primmind iartair domhain.”

Scotland with the *scrín Coluim Cille*.<sup>174</sup> In 849 we read that Indrechtach, the abbot of Iona, came to Ireland with Colum Cille's *mindra*, which were probably not the remains of a saint, but holy objects that had belonged to a saint.<sup>175</sup> Thus, perhaps all we can say is that the annals were inconsistent in their record of the movements of relics. There is also a big difference between recording that an abbot had taken some relics on tour and recording that some foreigners had stolen these relics. Irish annalists were perhaps embarrassed to admit that relics had fallen into the hands of a man whom they repeatedly called the "king of the foreigners". In short, though we must admit that the annals say nothing of a theft by Amlaíb of some of Colum Cille's relics, we should not view this lack as proof that he did not do so.

When we consider that it is most likely that Amlaíb Cuarán built the church called *Scrín Coluim Cille* for the purpose of housing relics that he had taken from Kells, his and his kinsmen's raids on Columban foundations appear in a new light. It is true that holy relics can serve worldly ends – they can be used to raise revenue or establish one's right to rule – yet Amlaíb's treatment of relics was clearly quite distinct from that of earlier Scandinavians who captured relics and church treasures and held them for ransom, knowing that Christians would pay to get them back. Amlaíb did not want merely to hold Columban relics for ransom; his building of a church shows that he wanted to set himself up as the leading secular ruler associated with Colum Cille and his churches. A few conclusions follow from this hypothesis. The first is that Amlaíb Cuarán must have been thoroughly Christian by at least the 970's.<sup>176</sup> The building of the *Scrín Coluim Cille* and the placing of relics in it could hardly have had the effect of associating Amlaíb with the saint if Amlaíb were not himself Christian. The second

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<sup>174</sup> *Chronicum Scotorum*, 818.

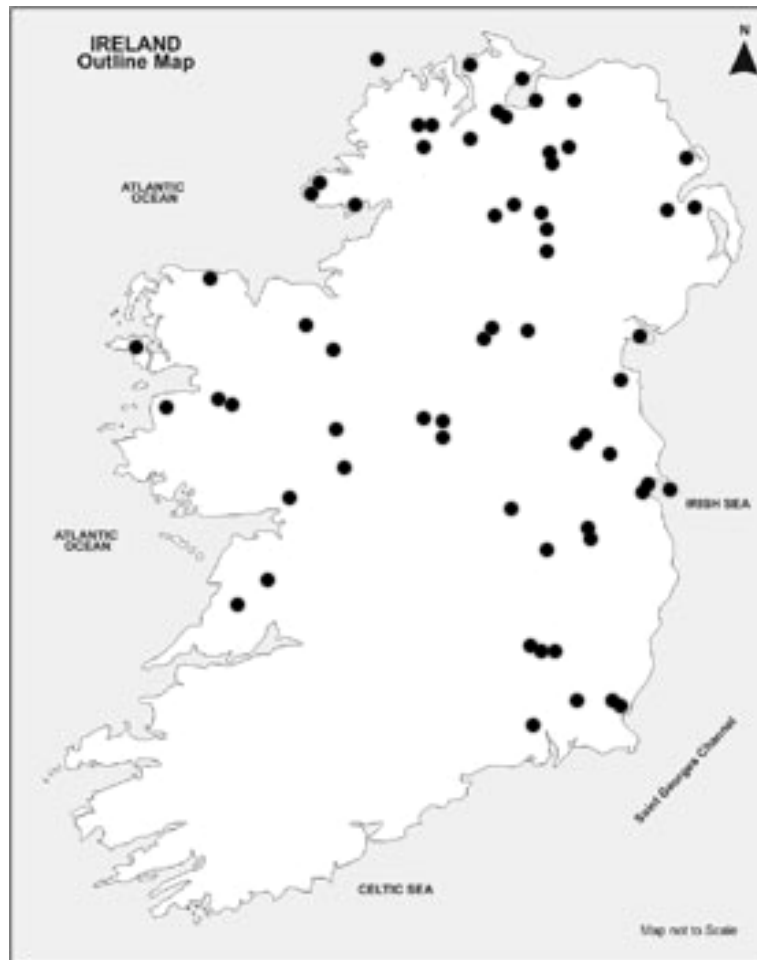
<sup>175</sup> Ragnall Ó Floinn, "Insignia Columbae I," in *Studies in the Cult of Saint Columba*, ed. Cormac Bourke (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1997), 138.

<sup>176</sup> See the discussion of the *Scrín Coluim Cille*'s first appearance and Amlaíb's connection to it on page 202.

conclusion is that, as there must have been some reason why Amlaíb sought a connection with the Columban churches, it is likely that these churches had become particularly important to Amlaíb, to the Dubliners, or to both. It is, perhaps, splitting hairs to ask whether these churches had come to play a large role in Amlaíb's spiritual life or in that of the Scandinavians in the area. Obviously, if the churchmen from Columban foundations had become important in Dublin, they probably would have come to have a great deal of influence over Amlaíb. The reverse is also true. It is unlikely that Gothfrith mac Sitriuc's raid on Kells in 951 was motivated by any peculiar interest in the Columban *paruchia*, for the other churches names in this raid – Domnach Pátraic, Ard Breacán, Tuileáin, and Cell Scíre – sat close to Kells, but were not associated with Colum Cille.<sup>177</sup> As Amlaíb Cuarán went to the trouble of building a church, presumably to hold Columban relics, in 974, it is reasonable to suppose that the connection between Amlaíb (or the Dubliners in general) and the Columban clergy began in the late 950's or 960's.

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<sup>177</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 951. These churches' associations can be learned from the Monasticon Hibernicum database.



Locations of Ecclesiastical Sites with a Columban Connection (excluding Iona)<sup>178</sup>

Although the annals say little about the movement of relics, they do make it clear that from the beginning of the Viking Age in the late eighth century to its end in the eleventh century, the monastery on Iona and the Columban churches saw their position within the Irish Church and their relationship with Irish political leaders undergo many changes. At the beginning of the Viking Age, the Columban community experienced some serious setbacks.<sup>179</sup> After Donnchad

<sup>178</sup> The outline of this map comes from Maps of the World, "Ireland: Outline Map," Map XL, <http://www.mapsofworld.com/ireland/ireland-outline-map.html> (accessed August 21, 2010). The dots represent places that the Monasticon Hibernicum website identifies as having an association, either documented or according to folk tradition, with the Columban *paruchia*.

<sup>179</sup> To read more about Iona's declining fortunes at the beginning of the Viking Age, read Herbert, *Iona Kells, and Derry*, 55-75. To read more about the Vikings' impact on Iona, see P. H. Sawyer, "The Vikings and the Irish Sea," in *The Irish Sea Province in Archaeology and History*, ed. Donald Moore (Cardiff: Cambrian Archaeological Association, 1970), 86-92 and James Graham-Campbell, "The Irish Sea Vikings: Raiders and Settlers," in *The Middle*

Midi's death in 797, Áed Oirdnide of Cenél nEogain succeeded to the overkingship of the Uí Néill, at which point he divided Mide between the sons of the late King Donnchad.<sup>180</sup> Mide, one of the most important sources of support for Colum Cille's community, was thereby severely weakened. At the same time, since the Cenél nEogain had taken possession of the high kingship, it was the community of Armagh that began to receive the backing of Ireland's mightiest ruler.<sup>181</sup> As if this were not enough, it was at this time that Iona suffered deadly Viking attacks. Presumably in response to the Viking raids of 802 and 806, the Columban community began to build a new monastery at Kells in 807.<sup>182</sup>

Although the long-term effect of the building of Kells was to deprive the original foundation on Iona of its high standing within both the Irish Church and the world of Irish politics, this change did not become apparent for some time. From the Vikings' killing of the monk Blamac after he refused to reveal where some relics were hidden, it is clear that even after Kells was built, many monks and many, perhaps all, of the community's relics were still on Iona.<sup>183</sup> In 831 and 849 we read that the abbot of Iona travelled to Ireland with Colum Cille's halidoms, showing that the abbots were managing to continue their tradition of making a religious tour of Ireland.<sup>184</sup> Nevertheless, the alliance between Armagh and the high king that had begun during Áed Oirdnide's reign was bearing fruit: there are signs that Irish kings were increasingly recognizing Armagh's claims to primacy. In 823, for instance, King Feidlimid mac Cremthain, with Artri, bishop of Armagh, imposed the *lex Patricii* on Munster.<sup>185</sup> During the

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*Ages in the North-West*, ed. Tom Scott and Pat Starkey (Oxford: Leopard's Head Press in conjunction with the Liverpool Centre for Medieval Studies, 1995), 59-83.

<sup>180</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 797; *Annals of the Four Masters*, 797 [=803].

<sup>181</sup> Herbert, *Iona, Kells, and Derry*, 67.

<sup>182</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 802, 806, 807.

<sup>183</sup> John Colgan, *Acta Sanctorum Hiberniae* (1645; repr. Dublin: Stationery Office), 1948, 128-9.

<sup>184</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 831, 849. The word that the annals use is *minda*, which I have translated as halidoms.

<sup>185</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 823.

ninth century, with the Vikings coming to control the Irish Sea, Kenneth mac Alpin, king of Dál Riata, joined his kingdom to that of the Picts.<sup>186</sup> Kenneth chose Dunkeld as his main ecclesiastical center and moved some Columban relics there, thus shifting both secular and religious power within Scotland from the west to the east.<sup>187</sup> From this point on, the Scottish Columban churches became only nominally connected to Iona.

An important departure from tradition that demonstrated how much power and status Iona had lost occurred in 891, when Máel Brigte, the abbot of Armagh, became *comarba Patraic ocus Coluim Cille*.<sup>188</sup> Not only did Máel Brigte's tenure place the Columban family effectively under Armagh's power, but there is no sign that Máel Brigte actually lived on Iona. Viking activity in the Irish Sea, the rise of Armagh, the shifts in secular power in both Scotland and Ireland – all these factors were progressively isolating Iona from Ireland. While the combined rule of the Patrician and Columban families did not last, the transfer of the position of *comarb* from Iona to Ireland (probably to Kells) did. This can be seen from the fact that Cáencomhrac, abbot of Iona, died in 947, during the abbacy of Robartach, *comarba Coluim Cille ocus Adomnain*, who died in 954.<sup>189</sup> Ironically, Richard Sharpe argues that it was not until Kells was built and became the residence of the *comarb* of Colum Cille that the Columban churches adopted the *paruchia* structure that already characterized Armagh and Kildare.<sup>190</sup> Whether this is true or not, it does not change the fact that by the early tenth century, Kells was becoming a wealthy monastery and the seat of authority among the Columban churches. The attacks on the

<sup>186</sup> Skene, ed., "The Pictish Chronicle," 8.

<sup>187</sup> The account of the transfer of relics is found in the Poppleton MS, printed in Marjorie Ogilvie Anderson, *Kings and Kingship in Early Scotland* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1973), 249-50. A mention of the building of the new church and the transfer of relics is also found in The Pictish Chronicle. See Skene, ed., "The Pictish Chronicle," 8.

<sup>188</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 927.

<sup>189</sup> *Annals of the Four Masters*, 945 [=947]; *Annals of Ulster*, 954.

<sup>190</sup> Sharpe, 245.

monastery of Kells by both Vikings and Irish kings in 904, 920, and 951 demonstrate its increasing size and wealth.<sup>191</sup> When Gothfrith attacked Kells in 951, “three thousand men or more were taken captive and a great spoil of cattle and horses and gold and silver was taken away”.<sup>192</sup> In 989, with the appointment of Dub-dá-Leithe to the headship of the Columban churches, the position of *comarb* of Colum Cille was again claimed by someone who was already *comarb* of Patrick.<sup>193</sup> Within the Columban *paruchia*, therefore, it was Kells that was gaining power, while within the Irish Church as a whole, it was Armagh. Iona was slipping out of the picture.

A few entries in the annals indicate that while Iona was losing the interest of Irish leaders, it was making up for it amongst the Norse. In 980, the annals record the death of Muigrón, *comarb* of Colum Cille. What is interesting is that instead of calling Muigrón the “*comarb* of Colum Cille and Adomnan”, a term they used for the abbot of Iona in 954, or just the “*comarb* of Colum Cille”, which they use in 959 and again in 989, they refer to him as “*comarb* of Colum Cille in both Ireland and Scotland”.<sup>194</sup> This particular description is unprecedented and suggests some sort of contrast with previous and later abbots. One explanation for this peculiar description is that before he retired to Iona, Amlaíb sent some of the relics that he had stolen from Kells there. Indeed, his relinquishment of such relics could have served as payment for his stay at Iona. If he did send relics to Iona, he would have restored some of the standing that Iona had lost, perhaps encouraging Muigrón to return to the island. Máire Herbert argues that there is no evidence that Muigrón actually lived on Iona, but she offers no other explanation for why the *Annals of Ulster* so specifically named him the *comarb* of Colum Cille on both sides

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<sup>191</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 904, 920, 951.

<sup>192</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 951.

<sup>193</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 989.

<sup>194</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 954, 959, 980, 989.

of the Irish Sea.<sup>195</sup> Even if Muirón did not live on Iona, some sort of change must have occurred during his time as *comarb* for the annalist to so distinguish him from his predecessors.

Curiously, the *Annals of Ulster* also associate Amlaíb Cuarán with both the eastern and western sides of the Irish Sea. In reporting Máel Sechnaill's defeat of Amlaíb, they say that the Battle of Tara was won "by Máel Sechnaill son of Domnall against the foreigners of Áth Cliath and the Isles".<sup>196</sup> The statement that Muirón was *comarb* in both Ireland and Scotland raises the question of who in Scotland was recognizing him as such. One suggestion is that the replacement of certain relics to Iona prompted the Scottish Columban churches to recognize Muirón as Colum Cille's successor. Another suggestion that could be simultaneously correct is that Iona and Colum Cille had become the focus of religious devotions for Scandinavians living on both sides of the Irish Sea, in Dublin and on the Isles. If this were the case, it would have been the Scandinavians on the Isles who, in recognizing Muirón, would have caused the Irish annalists to describe him as *comarb* in Ireland and Scotland.

A series of curious entries in the annals makes it seem more likely that the monastery of Iona had become a site of great interest to the Scandinavians, not just in Dublin, but throughout the region of the Irish Sea. The abbot of Iona, who died just two years before Amlaíb Cuarán retired to the monastery, was named Fiachra ua hArtacáin.<sup>197</sup> With this name, he must have been a kinsman of the poet Cinaeth ua hArtacáin, who composed the poem celebrating Amlaíb as the *de facto* ruler of Achall, where *Scrín Coluim Cille* was built. This relationship was surely no coincidence; the fact that the abbot of Iona was related to the poet whom Amlaíb patronized suggests that Amlaíb had had some influence over the selection of the abbot. The idea that Iona

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<sup>195</sup> Herbert, 82-3.

<sup>196</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 980; *Annals of Inisfallen*, 980: quote *Annals of Ulster*.

<sup>197</sup> *Annals of the Four Masters*, 976 [=978].



was coming strongly under the influence of Dublin is suggested by some violent events that occurred in the 980's. In 986, we read, "the *Danair* arrived on the coast of Dál Riata" and "Iona of Colum Cille was plundered by the *Danair* on Christmas night, and they killed the abbot and fifteen of the elders of the monastery".<sup>198</sup> These plunderers' luck did not last, however, for the following year, we read of "a great slaughter of the *Danair* who plundered Iona, and three score and three hundred of them were slain".<sup>199</sup> In the same year, we read that Maelciaráin ua Maighne, *comarb* of Colum Cille, was killed in Dublin by the *Danair*.<sup>200</sup>

The fact that the annals use the word *Danair* indicates that they were not talking about the Dublin Scandinavians, for they routinely refer to the Dubliners as the *gall* or the *gall* of Áth Cliath.<sup>201</sup> In fact, the record in 986 of the arrival of the *Danair* is the first time that Irish sources use this word. The *Annals of Ulster* use it only two more times: once more in 986 and then in 987. Considering how limited the *Annals of Ulster*'s use of this term in conjunction with their reference, both before and after 986 and 987, to the Dubliners as *gall*, it seems that the *Danair* must have been some rival group of Scandinavians. As 360 of them were killed in 987, it must have been a very large rival group that attacked Iona. The killing of the abbot of Iona and the *comarb* of Colum Cille in Dublin, both in 986, is striking. It is difficult to know whether these were the same man. On the one hand, the entry in the *Annals of Ulster* clearly implies that the *Danair* killed the abbot during their attack on the monastery, while the *Chronicum Scotorum* clearly says that the *Danair* killed the *comarb* in Dublin.<sup>202</sup> Thus, there were two men, both of whom the *Danair* killed in the same year. On the other hand, it seems very odd that the *Annals*

<sup>198</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 986; *Annals of the Four Masters*, 985 [=986]. Also see the *Annals of Inisfallen*, 986.

<sup>199</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 987; *Annals of the Four Masters*, 986 [=987].

<sup>200</sup> *Chronicum Scotorum*, 984 [=986]; *Annals of Clonmacnoise*, 980 [=986].

<sup>201</sup> See, for example, the *Annals of Ulster*, 989, in which Glún Iarn is called the *ri gall*.

<sup>202</sup> The entry in the *Annals of Ulster*, 986, reads, "Í Coluim Cille do arcain do Danaraibh aidhchi Notlaic coro marbsat in apaidh ocus .xu. uiros do sruithibh na cille." The entry in the *Chronicum Scotorum*, 984 [=986], reads, "Maolciaráinn .h. Maigne, comarba Coluim Cille, do dul derg martra las na Danaroib a nAth Clíath."

of *Ulster* would not make any mention of the death of the *comarb* of Colum Cille and only slightly less odd that the *Chronicum Scotorum* would not record such a violent attack on the monastery of Iona. The fact that the *comarb* of Colum Cille was in Dublin at all suggests that the Columban clergy were working in Dublin. Whether the *comarb* was also the abbot, the *Annals of Ulster* leave no doubt that the *Danair* attacked the monastery of Iona, while the *Chronicum Scotorum*, *Annals of Clonmacnoise*, and *Annals of the Four Masters* make it clear that they killed the *comarb* in Dublin. We must conclude that different groups of Scandinavians in the region were competing over control of the Columban *familia*.

A couple of entries in the annals suggest that the Irish highking, Máel Sechnaill, responded to the Dubliners' increasing power over the Columban *familia* with a strong assertion of his own rights over the churches in the Dublin region and the Columban *comarbs*hip. In 989, "Dub dá Leithe, *comarb* of Patrick, took the *comarbs*hip of Colum Cille by the counsel of the men of Ireland and Scotland".<sup>203</sup> Considering the ties that had strengthened during the tenth century between Armagh and the position of highking, this takeover of the Columban *comarbs*hip by the head of Patrick's *familia* could not have been accomplished without the Máel Sechnaill's involvement. As the highking still had enough power over Dublin in 989 to force it to pay him an ounce of gold per *garrda*, it is likely that the Dubliners had no choice but to accept the subjugation of Iona to Armagh.<sup>204</sup> It is even possible that the imposition of the Patrician *comarb* onto the Columban *familia* was part of Máel Sechnaill's assertion of his power over Dublin in response to the killing, in the same year, of Glún Iarn, the puppet ruler of Dublin. Furthermore, Máel Sechnaill's attacks on certain churches in the Dublin area suggest that these churches were under the protection of Dubliners' protection. In 994 Máel Sechnaill burnt Sord

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<sup>203</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 989.

<sup>204</sup> *Annals of the Four Masters*, 988 [=989].

of Colum Cille, a church in the strongly Norse area just north of Dublin called Fingal.<sup>205</sup> Thus, Máel Sechnaill's actions against the Columban *familia*, always somehow mixed up with his actions against the Dubliners, lead to the conclusion that there was a strong connection between the Columban *familia* and the Norsemen of the area.

The church of Sord was not the first church that seems to have been attacked because it was associated with the Norsemen of Dublin. In 968 the *Annals of the Four Masters* record, "the plundering of Lughmhadh and Druim Inesclainn by Muircheartach, son of Domhnall, King of Aileach, and son of the King of Ireland, against the foreigners, in which many were slain" and "the plundering of Mainistir-Buithe by Domhnall, King of Ireland, against the foreigners; and three hundred of them were burned by him in one house".<sup>206</sup> The annalist's choice of words, "against the foreigners", makes it clear that the plundering of these churches was perceived as being a way of attacking the foreigners' interests. Both Lughmhadh and Druim Inesclainn were in county Louth and were associated with Armagh. In 968, when they were attacked "against the foreigners", Amlaíb Cuarán was still a rising leader in Irish politics who would eventually, in 980, make a bid for the highkingship of Ireland. It is therefore not surprising that the Dubliners would have sought to control churches associated with Armagh. Mainistir-Buithe, or Monasterboice, was also in Louth, but judging from a passage in the *Betha Coluim Cille* in which Colum Cille finds Buite's grave and lays out the boundaries of Buite's church, it is clear that the Columban *familia* laid claim to Monasterboice.<sup>207</sup> While the Dubliners' control of Lughmhadh and Druim Inesclainn might have been purely economic and political, the other

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<sup>205</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, 994.

<sup>206</sup> *Annals of the Four Masters*, 968.

<sup>207</sup> Máire Herbert provides a revision of the *Betha Coluim Cille* that is found in the fifteenth-century *An Leabhar Breac*. She prints it along with her translation in *Iona, Kells, and Derry*, 218-65. The passage about Monasterboice is in chapter 41 on page 233.

signs of the Dubliners' interest in Iona suggest that it was this interest that lay behind their claim to Monasterboice.

Although the evidence is circumstantial, it appears most likely that the Norsemen in Dublin were evangelized through the efforts of Columban churchmen, especially those who remained on Iona even after the building of the new monastery at Kells. It consists mostly of Amlaíb Cuarán's apparent building of the *Scrín Coluim Cille* and his retirement to Iona, the attacks of the *Danair* on Iona and on Colum Cille's *comarb* in Dublin, and Máel Sechnaill's efforts to re-establish control over the Columban *familia*. Curiously, there is some metalwork that supports the idea that the Norse in Dublin had some influence within the Columban *familia*. Ragnall Ó Floinn points out that some of the strongest Scandinavian influences in Irish art are seen in the so-called *Cathach* group.<sup>208</sup> All the known examples in this group, with the exception of the Innisfallen crozier, come from the north and east of Ireland. They are characterized by the type of flat-banded interlace that, as archaeological excavations have shown, was very much a part of Dublin wood-carving. In her discussion of the *Cathach* group (which was named after the fragment of a psalter owned by Colum Cille and called the *Cathach*, or Battler), Françoise Henry notes that the *Cathach*'s *cumdach*, or reliquary box, was almost certainly produced at Kells.<sup>209</sup> She speculates that some sort of workshop existed at the monastery of Kells and that it was at this monastery that the objects of the *Cathach* group were produced. Most interestingly, Henry writes that on the *cumdach* is an inscription that tells us that it was made by Sitric Mac Meic Aeda.<sup>210</sup> Sitric, of course, is a Scandinavian name. This,

<sup>208</sup> Ragnall Ó Floinn, "Schools of Metalworking in Eleventh- and Twelfth-Century Ireland," in *Ireland and Insular Art A.D. 500-1200*, ed. Michael Ryan (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1987), 181.

<sup>209</sup> Françoise Henry, *Irish Art in the Romanesque Period* (London: Methuen and Co., 1970), 88-9.

<sup>210</sup> Henry, 89. The inscription reads, "[OR]OIT DO [CH]ATHBARR UA DOMNAILL LAS INDERNAD IN CUMTACHAS'A ACUS DO SITTRIUC MAC MEIC AEDA DO RIGNE ACUS DO DOMNALL MAC ROBARTAIG DO COMARBA CANANSA LAS

combined with the *Cathach* group's Scandinavian features and Dublin parallels, suggests that the objects in the *Cathach* group were made at Kells by craftsmen from Dublin. If the Columban churchmen had played a strong role in converted the Norse Dubliners, it is not surprising that Dublin craftsmen would go to Kells to make reliquaries to hold Colum Cille's relics and halidoms.

One might ask why the Ionan monks' would choose to evangelize the Scandinavians of Dublin. It is actually not difficult to propose explanations for the Ionan monks' interest in the Dublin. Having lost their previously strong position in both Ireland and Scotland, the members of Colum Cille's community on Iona might naturally begin to look more and more to the Scandinavians in both Dublin and on the Isles as a potential source of support. As Iona was positioned right in the middle of one of the Vikings' main highways, by the late tenth century, the monks must have long since become accustomed to the Scandinavians' presence and language. Furthermore, the frequency of tales in Scandinavian literature in which holy people, living on islands, serve to convert Norsemen emphasizes the fact that monks living on Iona and on other islands in the Irish Sea must have made a big impression on the Vikings.<sup>211</sup> Thus, the evidence for Columban missionary work in the Viking town of Dublin is not overwhelming, but it is certainly more than the evidence that clergymen from York, Cologne, or Canterbury did any such evangelization.

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INDERNAD," or "Pray for Cathbarr Ua Domnaill who caused this shrine to be made; for Sitric Mac Meic Aeda who made it, and for Domnall Mac Robartaig *coarb* of Kells who caused this shrine to be made."

<sup>211</sup> Examples of such tales include the legend of St. Sunniva (found in Latin in the *Breviarium Nidrosiense* and in Norse in the *Saga Óláfs Tryggvasonar* and in the *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*) and the story (found in the *Saga Óláfs Tryggvasonar*) of Óláfs Tryggvason's conversion on an island near Ireland. See Stephan Borgehammer, ed., "Den latinska Sunnivallegenden: en edition," in *Selja – heilig stad i 1000 år*, ed. Magnus Rindal (Oslo: Universitetsforlag, 1997), 293-97; *Saga Óláfs Tryggvasonar*, ed. Finnúr Jónsson (Copenhagen, G.E.C. Gads Forlag, 1932), 100-03; Ólafur Halldórsson, ed., *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* (Copenhagen, Ejnar Munksgaard, 1958), 1: 244-253.

While the Columban *familia* might have played a leading role in evangelizing the Norse Dubliners, it is less likely to have had a large part in converting the people of Ireland's other main Viking towns, namely, Limerick and Waterford. These towns lay considerably further away from Iona or Kells than Dublin did and a survey of Columban sites reveals that the majority of them were in the northern and eastern parts of the island.<sup>212</sup> There was only one – “Cell Cholumcille” – in what is now county Waterford and none at all in modern county Limerick. If the conversion of the Norsemen in these towns was anything like that of Amlaíb Cúarán, however, it must have pre-dated the establishment of formal bishoprics in these towns and have been brought about through the efforts of Irish, not foreign, missionary work. A few bits of information suggest that this was the case. John Bradley notes that Ireland's Viking towns, including Waterford, Wexford, Limerick, and Cork, each had several churches just outside their walls. He argues that the location of these churches – just beyond the town's walls – indicates that they were built not before, but during the Viking period, presumably in an attempt to evangelize the townsmen.<sup>213</sup> The two eleventh-century and apparently Christian runic engravings from county Clare must have been carved before a diocese was set up in Limerick in 1107, indicating that missionary work began before the town of Limerick became a diocese. Ímar of Limerick's attempt to claim sanctuary on Scattery Island in 975, just five years before Amlaíb retired to Iona, suggests that the rulers of Ireland's largest two Viking towns became Christian at around the same time. Thus, contrary to Lesley Abrams' suggestion that the Irish might have viewed the Norsemen as just irredeemable, it is most likely that it was Irish

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<sup>212</sup> Monasticon Hibernicum, *Early Christian Ecclesiastical Settlement 5<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, NUI Maynooth, <http://monasticon.celt.dias.ie/search.php?foundation=&docassoc=&lineage=&tradassoc=colum+cille&townland=&parish=&deanery=&diocese=&barony=&county=&province=&sources=&recordedhistory=&clericalstatus=&gender=&successionrecord=&medievaldedic=&familiallinks=&folktradition=&fieldremains=&artifacts=&bibliography=&addendum=&fieldmatch=all&submit=Advanced+Search#results> (accessed on July 27, 2010).

<sup>213</sup> John Bradley, “The Topographical Development of Scandinavian Dublin,” in *Dublin, City and County: From Prehistory to Present*, ed. F. H. A. Aalen and Kevin Walsh (Templeogue: Geography Publications, 1992), 52.

churchmen, especially those belonging to the Columban *paruchia*, who converted the Vikings in Ireland.

There is even less evidence regarding the conversion of the Norsemen in Ireland than that of the conversion of the Norsemen in England and in the lands of the Franks. What little evidence there is can be misleading. Canterbury's consecration of bishops for the Hiberno-Norse towns of Dublin, Limerick, and Waterford suggests that Canterbury suggests that Canterbury had sent missionaries to these towns. Similarly, the fact that Dublin's earliest relics and martyrology came from Cologne could imply that Irishmen at Cologne's churches evangelized the Norsemen of Dublin, though perhaps not those of Ireland's other Norse towns. Finally, Amlaib Cúarán's christening at York raises the possibility that the Dubliners were converted by churchmen brought by Amlaib from York. Yet, there is no evidence whatsoever that clergymen from any of these places evangelized Ireland's Scandinavian population. The little evidence that exists points to a connection between Iona and Dublin. It is possible that, if the members of the Columban *paruchia* took an interest in the Norsemen of Dublin, they also took an interest in the Scandinavians who had settled on the eastern side of the Irish Sea, on Scotland's Western Isles. Perhaps an examination of the conversion of the Scandinavians in northwestern Scotland would shed some light on the relationship between the Ionan monks and the Dubliners.

## Conclusion

The conversion of the Vikings in Ireland clearly differed from that of the Vikings in England and Normandy in a number of ways. Most remarkable of the Irish Scandinavians' conversion was the sheer length of time it took. The Scandinavians who settled in both England and Normandy abandoned shifted their religious practices and beliefs within, at most, a couple generations. The ruling families amongst the Norsemen in both countries converted even faster. Rollo was born and presumably raised in Scandinavia, yet the dynasty that he established in Normandy began with his baptism. His christening may have been politically motivated, but it was lasting; Rollo and his successors contributed in material ways to the rebuilding of the Church in Normandy and all died as Christians. In England, the Viking leader Guthrum accepted baptism in 878, a year after the Scandinavians dealt out the land of Mercia and a year before they dealt out the land of East Anglia. Again, however politically motivated this conversion may have been, it was lasting. In Ireland, by contrast, the leading family of Dublin took four generations – from Ímar who arrived in Ireland in 853 and died in 873 to Amlaíb Cúarán who died in 980 – to convert. This is quite surprising, considering the fact that the first recorded marriage between the Irish and Norse nobility took place in 862. Despite evidence of Norse-Irish interaction, however, it is clear that, at least in Dublin, some Scandinavians remained so unassimilated that they continued to speak Norse into the twelfth century. This delay in assimilation indicates that intermarriage could have played only a very small role in converting the Norse in Ireland. Indeed, amongst the Irish Scandinavians, it must have been intermarriage that was brought about by conversion, not conversion that was brought about by intermarriage.

A second and quite significant difference between Norsemen in Ireland and in other Western European lands can be seen in the process by which they were evangelized. In England and Normandy, this process was closely tied to the re-establishment of a formal ecclesiastical



structure in the areas that the Vikings had conquered. While the church hierarchy of Northumbria was never destroyed, that of East Anglia disappeared entirely. Much of our knowledge of the spread of Christianity amongst the Scandinavians of this area consists of the building of churches by the King Æthelstan and ealdorman Æthelstan, accompanied by Bishop Theodred of London's creation of a new diocese for East Anglia. Likewise, in Normandy, the missionary process appears to have had two main requirements: getting Rollo and his successors to provide for the re-building of churches and monasteries and convincing bishops to agree to take up residence in their sees in wild parts of Normandy, such as Coutances. In both these lands, missionary work went hand in hand with the re-establishment of an organized ecclesiastical structure. In Ireland, by contrast, we hear little about the re-building of ecclesiastical sites and still less of the need to convince clergymen to take up posts in Norse-dominated regions. In Ireland, by contrast, there was no need to re-introduce the formal, organized practice of Christianity into an area because it had never left. Thus, the Ionan monks who worked amongst the Dubliners did so not as part of any attempt to re-introduce the Church structure into the Irish Sea region, but simply because they and the Dubliners were both in the same area and the Irish highkings were increasingly sidelining Iona in favor of Armagh. Ironically, because the conversion of the Dubliners (and presumably also that of the Norsemen of the smaller towns) was not associated with the expansion of the Church's formal structure and hierarchy, by the time these towns did see fit to get their own bishops, the dioceses that they set up were not dependent on the surrounding churches. Most notably, by the time the Dubliners decided to establish their own see, c. 1030, they were already familiar enough with Christianity to be able to look around for a bishop, relics, and religious books outside of Ireland.

The uniqueness of the Irish Vikings' religious history came about not because the Scandinavians who settled in Ireland were inherently more recalcitrant or committed to heathenism than those who went to France and England, but rather because Ireland's political structure differed significantly from those found in England and on the continent. The organization of the Church, being everywhere inescapably influenced by the political and social structure, was also different in Ireland. First, the remarkably slow assimilation of the Norsemen in Ireland was a result of the fact that they became concentrated into small port towns where they had as much contact with Vikings sailing and trading throughout the north Atlantic as they did with the local Irish. This situation was, in turn, the result of the incredible fragmentation of worldly power in Ireland. In both England and France, there was a ruler powerful enough to hand over whole stretches of countryside in which the Norsemen were invited to settle, farm, and integrate into the local peasantry. As no Irish king could do this, the Vikings in Ireland focused their energy on exporting Irish goods and people from ports to the rest of the Scandinavian diaspora.

More important than Ireland's political organization was the organization of its Church. Though the nature of the Irish Church remains a source of debate, it is clear that the Irish took an even more proprietary view of ecclesiastical establishments than other groups did. The ownership of religious sites by families doubtlessly helped to preserve the Church in Ireland, for it allowed the responsibility for restoring these sites and replacing churchmen to be clearly assigned to a particular family. This family, in turn, had a material interest in the upkeep of a church and in the filling of offices at that church. Also very important was the existence of non-territorial monastic *paruchia*. While territorially-based bishoprics did exist in Ireland, they existed in conjunction with religious communities that were associated not with a particular

territory, but with a saint and that saint's legacy. As the Columban *paruchia*, for example, was not assigned to any clearly delimited area, it was possible for both Irish and Viking leaders to set up Columban foundations quite far inland. Furthermore, since ownership of this *paruchia* depended not so much on possession of a block of land as on access to a saint's legacy, Amlaíb Cuarán, by taking Columban relics and building his own church for them, was able to become one of – if not *the* – leading secular ruler associated with the Columbans.

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