

Viking identities in Ireland: it's not all black and white¹

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There has been recent debate about the meaning of the labels *Finn* ('white/fair') and *Dub* ('black/dark') assigned to different viking groups in ninth- and tenth-century Ireland. In the mid-1970s Alfred Smyth argued that these terms could be appropriately translated as 'old' and 'new', in contrast to previous scholarship where the contrasting colours of viking groups had been linked with their physical appearance (for example, hair, weaponry or dress).² Smyth favoured the received view that *Dub* described Danes and that *Finn* described Norwegians. Nevertheless, his exploration of the origin of these terms was significant for analyses which followed. David Dumville has argued in an earlier volume in this series that these labels did not identify separate Danish and Norwegian groups active in Ireland, but linked them to 'new' and 'old' groups that ruled Dublin in the ninth century.³ Colmán Etchingham has recently put forward a counter-argument favouring the translation of *Dubgaill* as Danes and *Finnngaill* as Norwegians.⁴ This paper is written to reconsider the case that the label 'dark foreigners' can be equated with the followers and descendants of Ólafr and Ívarr who ruled at Dublin from the mid-ninth century.

Terms describing 'dark' vikings can be found in Irish and Welsh chronicles. The use of colour terms to describe viking groups is, however, restricted to the description of a small number of events. There are fourteen events recorded in Irish chronicles (Annals of Ulster; *Chronicon Scotorum*; Annals of Clonmacnoise and Annals of the Four Masters) where these terms are used.⁵ In Welsh chronicles

1 I should like to thank Finn Rindahl for reading and commenting on a draft of this paper. The term viking means different things to different people. Advocates of 'Viking' as an ethnic label consistently use upper-case 'V' and that has been the prevailing usage in popular culture. Those who treat 'viking' as an occupational term (translated into medieval Latin as *pirata*, 'pirate') use a lower-case initial. In this article I use 'viking' as a cultural label. Vikings participated in a cultural phenomenon linked with Scandinavia, but they were not members of a single ethnic group. The choice to avoid a capital 'v' merely signals a rejection of 'Viking' as an ethnic category. 2 Alfred Smyth, 'The Black foreigners of York and the White foreigners of Dublin', *Saga-book of the Viking Society*, 19 (1974–77), 101–17. 3 David Dumville, 'Old Dubliners and New Dubliners in Ireland and Britain: a Viking Age story' in Seán Duffy (ed.), *Medieval Dublin VI* (Dublin, 2005), pp 78–93. 4 Colmán Etchingham, 'Laithlinn, "Fair Foreigners" and "Dark Foreigners": the identity and provenance of Vikings in ninth-century Ireland' in John Sheehan and Donnchadh Ó Corráin (eds), *The Viking Age: Ireland and the West. Proceedings of the Fifteenth Viking Congress* (Dublin, 2010), pp 80–9. 5 Corresponding to the years 851, 852, 856, 867, 870, 875, 877x2, 893, 917, 918, 921, 927 and 940.

(conventionally labelled *Annales Cambriae*, *Brenhinedd y Saesson* and *Brut y Tywysogyon*), the term ‘dark’ is used to describe vikings on five occasions and ‘fair’ vikings do not appear at all.⁶ It is therefore difficult to use these colour terms as a basis for defining a wide range of groups or individuals as ‘Danish’ or ‘Norwegian’, despite the efforts of a number of commentators to do so. The desire to define groups according to national categories appears to reflect anachronistic national concerns, not the preoccupation of chroniclers in the ninth and early tenth centuries.

The argument has been presented elsewhere that national distinctions of ‘Danes’ and ‘Norwegians’ held little significance in describing vikings in the ninth century.⁷ The first record of the names Denmark (‘the borderland/march of the Danes’) and Norway (‘the North way’) is found in the English translation of the history of Orosius, dating to the 890s.⁸ Kings of Denmark, Norway and Sweden in the ninth century did not rule areas coextensive with the late medieval states, and parts of Scandinavia lay outside their direct control. Perhaps the most centralized kingdom of Scandinavia in this period was Denmark; however, the historical evidence suggests that division rather than unity prevailed there from the mid-ninth century until the reign of Harald Blátönn.⁹ Unification in Scandinavia, as elsewhere, was more of a process than an event.¹⁰ Recent work on material culture by Johan Callmer, Fredrik Svanberg and Søren Sindbæk has indicated that within Scandinavia local identities would have been adhered to more strongly than any sense of national identity.¹¹ It is therefore doubtful that vikings would have primarily identified themselves as being Danes, Norwegians or Swedes. Furthermore, the attested coalescence and division of viking armies in England and the Continent suggests that vikings from different areas allied together for campaign purposes. This would have complicated any attempt to divide vikings into groups of different national origin outside Scandinavia.¹² Nevertheless, the terms *dub* and *finn* have been used by historians to evaluate events in ninth-

6 Corresponding to the years 853, 867, 892, 987 and 989. 7 Janet Nelson, ‘The Frankish Empire’ in Peter Sawyer (ed.), *The Oxford illustrated history of the Vikings* (Oxford, 1997), pp 19–47 at pp 20, 23, 35; Clare Downham, ‘“Hiberno-Norwegians” and “Anglo-Danes”: anachronistic ethnicities and Viking Age England’, *Medieval Scandinavia*, 19 (2009), 139–69. 8 Janet Bately (ed.), *The Old English Orosius*, Early English Texts Society (Oxford, 1980), pp 13–16. 9 Else Roesdahl, ‘The emergence of Denmark and the reign of Harald Bluetooth’ in S. Brink and N. Price (eds), *The Viking world* (London, 2008), pp 652–4. 10 T.L. Thurston, ‘Historians, prehistorians and the tyranny of the historical record: Danish state formation through documents and archaeological data’, *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory*, 4 (1997), 239–63. 11 J. Callmer, ‘Territory and dominion in the Late Iron Age in southern Scandinavia’ in K. Jennbert et al. (eds), *Regions and reflections in honour of Märta Strömberg* (Lund, 1991), pp 257–73; S.M. Sindbæk, ‘The lands of *Denemearce*: cultural differences and social networks of the Viking Age in South Scandinavia’, *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia*, 4 (2008), 169–208; F. Svanberg, *Decolonizing the Viking Age*, 2 vols (Lund, 2003). 12 Nelson, ‘Frankish Empire’, pp 35–6.

and early tenth-century Ireland as a battleground between Danish and Norwegian factions.

The concern of historians to assign the viking colonization of different areas of Europe to different Scandinavian national groups has been a widespread phenomenon. So, for example, the migration to Russia has been perceived as a Swedish venture and the English 'Danelaw' is linked to Danes. This pattern in historiography developed with the growth of national consciousness, and a concern to categorize the achievement and heritage of different peoples. In areas where two Scandinavian national groups were perceived as being active, their mutual exclusivity was emphasized with political tensions and even outright hostility being assumed between them. Yet this paradigm of national segregation can be questioned as an oversimplification of patterns of migration and political allegiance.¹³

In Ireland, the ninth-century rivalry between *Finnгаill* (fair foreigners) and *Dubgaill* (dark foreigners) has been interpreted as the clash of two Scandinavian nations. Nevertheless, ambiguities and contradictions in the evidence mean that historians have not been in agreement as to which national group prevailed. In 1891, Heinrich Zimmer argued that it was the Danes.¹⁴ Alexander Bugge responded in 1900, arguing that the vikings in Ireland and their kings were Norwegians.¹⁵ Bugge's view has prevailed as most scholars have regarded the vikings of Ireland as being of Norwegian stock. Nevertheless, debates about the origin of Dublin's royal dynasty have continued. Alfred Smyth argued that after a brief period of warfare, Norwegians seized Dublin in 853, but after the death of their leader Ólafr, the descendants of Ívarr (whom Smyth identified as Danes) took control.¹⁶ In contrast, Donnchadh Ó Corráin has argued that the royal dynasty came from Norway via the Scottish islands.¹⁷

It is worth noting that in the Middle Ages there were different traditions as to where leaders of vikings in Ireland came from. According to the twelfth century *Historia Gruffudd vab Kenan*, the royal dynasty of Dublin was descended from Haraldr hárfagri ('Finehair') of Norway.¹⁸ In the eleventh-century saga embedded in 'The Fragmentary Annals of Ireland', Ívarr and Ólafr are presented as sons of a Norwegian king Guðrøðr.¹⁹ Ívarr and Ólafr are

13 Svanberg, *Decolonizing the Viking Age*; Clare Downham, 'Viking identities: an overview of recent scholarship', *History Compass* (forthcoming). 14 H. Zimmer, 'Keltische Beiträge, III: Weitere nordgermanische Einflüsse in der ältesten Überlieferung der irischen Heldensage', *Zeitschrift für deutsches Alterthum*, 35 (1891), 1–176. 15 Alexander Bugge, *Contributions to the history of the Norsemen in Ireland*, Videnskabselskabets Skrifter, II, Historisk-filosofisk Klasse, nos 4–6 (3 pts, Oslo 1900). 16 Alfred Smyth, *Scandinavian kings in the British Isles, 850–880* (Oxford, 1977). 17 Donnchadh Ó Corráin, 'The Vikings in Scotland and Ireland in the ninth century', *Peritia*, 12 (1998), 296–339. 18 Paul Russell (ed. and trans.), *Vita Griffini Filii Conani: The medieval Latin Life of Gruffudd ap Cynan* (Cardiff, 2005), §4, pp 54–5. 19 J.N. Radner (ed.), *Fragmentary annals of Ireland* (Dublin, 1978), §§ 239, 347, pp 94–7, 126–7. Íslendingabók and Landnámabók connected a king Ólafr inn hvíti of Dublin with the Norwegian house of Vestfold. He is often linked with Ólafr who

again presented as brothers in a legendary account concerning the foundation of viking towns recorded by Gerald of Wales.²⁰ The reference to an Ívarr son of Rögnvaldr of Møre who travelled west with Haraldr hárfagri in the thirteenth century *Orkneyinga Saga* may also present an origin legend for Ívarr whose descendants ruled at Dublin.²¹ In later accounts of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* and *Páttr af Ragnarssona*, Ívarr was assigned a Danish pedigree. Since the late nineteenth century, this identification has found most favour with historians, despite the late and legendary nature of the sources.²² All of these genealogical claims may be viewed as dubious attempts to fit Ívarr within a bigger historical scheme of Viking Age events.²³ This would add lustre to the peoples from which he was allegedly descended, and to those who claimed descent from him. In a comparable way, conflicting pedigrees exist for other founder figures in viking colonies. For example, Rollo of Normandy is identified as a Norwegian by the author of *Orkneyinga saga*, but as a Dane by Dudo of St Quentin.²⁴

Since the eleventh century, commentators have sought to identify different viking groups retrospectively according to their national origins. This move was perhaps influenced by contemporary concerns as the kingdoms of Norway and Denmark became more centralized and rivalries heightened between them. However, the fact remains that in the ninth and early tenth centuries no unambiguous national identifications of Dane or Norwegian are made in Irish sources. The colour terms *dub* and *finn* could just as well refer to groups under different political leadership. The earliest surviving source to interpret 'dark' vikings as Danes and 'fair' vikings as Norwegians is the saga embedded in the 'Fragmentary Annals of Ireland'.²⁵ The saga has been dated to the second or third quarter of the eleventh century.²⁶ In this text, the presentation of different viking groups appears to have been manipulated to heighten the reputation of a ninth-century king of Osraige, who is the hero of the narration. As relations

was active in Ireland 853–71. However, the chronology of this association is problematic: Smyth, *Scandinavian kings*, pp 102–4; Ó Corráin, 'Vikings in Scotland', pp 297–9. 20 J.J. O'Meara (ed.), 'Giraldus Cambrensis in Topographia Hiberniae: text of the first recension', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, 52C (1948–50), 113–79 at 175; J.J. O'Meara (trans.), *Gerald of Wales, The history and topography of Ireland* (London, 1982), III.43, p. 122. 21 Finnogi Guðmundsson (ed.), *Orkneyinga Saga*, Íslensk Fornrit 34 (Reykjavík, 1965), §4, pp 7–8; Herman Pálsson and Paul Edwards (trans.), *Orkneyinga Saga: The history of the earls of Orkney* (London, 1981), pp 26–7. 22 James Henthorn Todd (ed.), *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh: The war of the Gaedhil with the Gaill*, Rolls Series (London, 1867), pp liii–lvi; For source analysis, see Rory McTurk, *Studies in Ragnars saga loðbrókar and its major Scandinavian analogues* (Oxford, 1991). 23 Elizabeth Ashman Rowe, 'Helpful Danes and pagan Irishmen: saga fantasies of the Viking Age in the British Isles', *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia*, 5 (2009), 1–21. 24 Guðmundsson (ed.), *Orkneyinga Saga*, §4, p. 7; Pálsson and Edwards (trans.), *Orkneyinga Saga*, p. 26; Jules Lair (ed.), *De Moribus et actibus primorum Normanniae ducum* (Caen, 1865), pp 141–2; Eric Christiansen (trans.), *Dudo of St Quentin, History of the Normans* (Woodbridge, 1998), p. 26. 25 Radner (ed.), *Fragmentary annals*, §§ 233–35, pp 88–94. 26 Radner (ed.), *Fragmentary annals*, pp xxii–xxvi.



between Denmark and Norway were strained at the time when the saga was composed, it may have seemed quite natural to identify rival viking groups as Norwegians and Danes.²⁷ These distinctions were used by some later commentators, but other descriptions contradict them. Thus, in Gaelic poetry of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the term ‘fair foreigner’ is used of the ‘Old’ English and sometimes Hebrideans, rather than Norwegians; while ‘dark foreigner’ described the English brought to Ireland by the Tudor conquest, not the Danes.²⁸

The interpretation advanced by Alfred Smyth that ‘dark’ refers to ‘new’ groups and ‘fair’ refers to ‘old’ is also attested in the seventeenth-century Annals of Clonmacnoise. Under the year 922 (for which the correct year is 927), the death of ‘Sittrick o’Himer, prince of the new and old Danes’ is recorded, where other chronicles record the death of ‘Sigtryggr, king of the dark and fair foreigners’.²⁹ This definition is very late. Colmán Etchingham has challenged the notion that Irish *dub* can carry the meaning ‘new’. However, the colour coding of old and new is found more widely, perhaps because older was considered to be more eminent.³⁰ Wherever viking groups came from in the ninth century, it appears that they are being identified in the use of colour terms, by their respective arrival in the Irish Sea, thus reflecting local concerns, not Scandinavian political labels.

27 Clare Downham, ‘The good, the bad and the ugly: portrayals of vikings in “The Fragmentary Annals of Ireland”’, *The medieval chronicle*, 3 (2005), 28–40. ‘The Fragmentary Annals’ survive in a single manuscript of the seventeenth century. The text is copied from a transcription of an earlier manuscript made by Dubhaltach Mac Fhirbhisigh. The same definition of dark and light foreigners as the ‘Fragmentary Annals’ was adopted in Mac Fhirbhisigh’s *Leabhar Mór na nGenealach: The Great Book of Irish Genealogies*, ed. Nollaig Ó Muraíle, 5 vols (Dublin, 2003), § 1364.3, III.714–15. Cf. Nollaig Ó Muraíle, *The celebrated antiquary Dubhaltach mac Fhirbisigh (c.1600–1671). His lineage, life and learning* (Maynooth, 1996), pp 88–93. A lost version of the ‘Fragmentary Annals’ was used in the compilation of the Annals of the Four Masters, but the interpretation of *Dubgail* as Danes and *Finnagail* as Norwegians did not carry over into that text. C. Downham, ‘The career of Cearbhall of Osraige’, *Ossory, Laois and Leinster*, 1 (2004), 1–18. 28 Wilson McLeod, ‘*Rí Innsi Gall, Rí Fionnghall, Ceanas nan Gàidheal*: sovereignty and rhetoric in the late Medieval Hebrides’, *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies*, 43 (2002), 25–48 at 37–9; M. Pía Coira, “A kingdom apart by itself, like a little world ...”: Geoffrey Keating and the construction of Irish national history’, *Journal of Celtic Studies*, 5 (2011), 2. In post-twelfth-century manuscripts of *Cogadh Gaedhel re Galliaibh*, the term ‘azure’ (*gormglas*) foreigners is substituted for ‘Norwegians’ (*Lochlannachaibh*): Todd (ed. and trans.), *Cogadh*, §1, pp 2–3. 29 Denis Murphy (ed.), *Annals of Clonmacnoise, being annals of Ireland from the earliest times to AD1408* (Dublin, 1896), s.a. 922 [=927]; , Seán Mac Airt and Gearóid Mac Niocaill (eds), *Annals of Ulster* (Dublin, 1983), s.a. 927.2. 30 Coira, ‘A kingdom apart’, pp 17–25; Etchingham, ‘Laithlinn’, p. 85. Etchingham’s suggestion that ‘dark foreigners’ were viewed as worse than ‘fair foreigners’ conflicts with their presentation in the Fragmentary Annals, where the identification with Danes and Norwegians is put forward (with ‘Danes’ being shown in a more positive light than ‘Norwegians’). In other words, Etchingham is adopting part of the picture presented there, but rejecting the rest.



Colmán Etchingham has followed Alfred Smyth in asserting that vikings from *Laithlinn* (a word distinct from later *Lochlann* meaning Norway or Scandinavia) were the ‘old/fair foreigners’ in Ireland before the ‘new/dark foreigners’ arrived.³¹ There has been some disagreement between scholars over the location of *Laithlinn*, which is sparsely recorded in Irish texts. Donnchadh Ó Corrain has linked *Laithlinn* with the Scottish islands, whereas Anders Ahlqvist has identified *Laithlinn* with Dublin.³² Colmán Etchingham has followed a hypothesis put forward by Egon Wamers that *Laith* may be derived from Hlaðir in Norway.³³ Etchingham’s further suggestion that the Irish word *linn* (‘pool’) might be used to describe the impressive ‘waterway of Trondheim fjord’ is questionable (*loch* would seem more appropriate).³⁴ Due to the lack of evidence, it is difficult to draw a conclusion on the whereabouts of *Laithlinn*. Nevertheless, references to *Laithlinn* in Irish chronicles are remarkable for their association with titles that demonstrate Irish knowledge of its political organization. Under the year 848, Tomrar is referred to as *erell* (‘jarl’) of *Laithlinn* (the first record of that title in Irish sources) and ‘heir to the king of *Laithlinn*’. Under 853, Óláfr is called ‘a son of the king’ of *Laithlinn*. This suggests that wherever *Laithlinn* was deemed to be, it was a well-defined kingdom rather than a vague geographical area.

The equation of *Laithlinn* with *Finguaill* in ninth-century Ireland can be questioned. Vikings had been active in Ireland since the 790s, but the first reference to people from *Laithlinn* comes under the year 848. This begs the question whether vikings from *Laithlinn* were the ‘new’ or ‘dark’ arrivals in a mid-ninth-century context. The sequence of references to *Laithlinn* and dark/fair vikings in the Annals of Ulster for the years 848–53 is as follows:³⁵

AU 848.5 *Bellum re nOlcobur, ri Muman, & re Lorggan m. Cellaig co Laighniu for gennti ecc Sciath Nechtain in quo ceciderunt Tomrair erell, tanise righ Laithlinne, & da cet dec imbi* (‘A battle was won by Ólchobar king of Munster and Lorcán m. Cellaig with the Leinstermen against the heathens at Sciath Nechtain in which fell Þórir the earl (*jarl*), heir-designate of the king of *Laithlinn* and 1200 about him’).

31 *Lochlann* can be identified as Norway. However, the meaning of the term could encompass all of Scandinavia in the late Middle Ages. Thus, Dubhaltach Mac Fhirbhisigh identified *Dubhlochlannaigh* as Danes: Ó Muraile (ed.), *Leabhar Mór na nGenealach*, §1364.3, III.714–15. 32 Anders Ahlqvist, ‘*Is acher in gaith ... úa Lothind*’ in J.F. Nagy and L.E. Jones (eds), *Heroic poets and poetic heroes in the Celtic tradition: CSANA Yearbook 3–4* (Dublin, 2005), pp 19–27. 33 E. Wamers, ‘Insular finds in Viking Age Scandinavia and the state formation of Norway’ in H.B. Clarke et al. (eds), *Ireland and Scandinavia in the Early Viking Age* (Dublin, 1998), pp 37–72 at p. 66 n. 84. 34 Ó Corrain, ‘Vikings in Scotland’; Colmán Etchingham, ‘The location of historical *Laithlinn/Lochla(i)nn*: Scotland or Scandinavia?’ in Micheál Ó Flaithearta (ed.), *Proceedings of the Seventh Symposium of Societas Celtologica Nordica* (Uppsala, 2007), pp 11–31 at pp 27–8. 35 Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill (eds), *Annals of Ulster*.

AU 849.6 *Muirff. Jecht .uii.xx. long di muinntir righ Gall du thiachtain du tabairt greamma forsna Gaillu ro badur ara ciunn co commascasat hErinn n-uile iarum* ('A sea-going expedition of 140 ships of the people of the king of the Foreigners came to exercise authority over the Foreigners who were in Ireland before them and they upset all Ireland afterwards').

AU 851.3 *Tetact Dubgennti du Ath Cliath co ralsat ár mór du Fhinngallaibh 7 coro [sh]latsat in longport eitir doine 7 moine. Slat do Dubhgenntib oc Lind Duachail 7 ar mor diib* ('The Dark Heathens came to Áth Cliath, and inflicted a great slaughter on the Fair Foreigners, and they pillaged the base, both people and possessions. An attack by the Dark Heathens on Linn Duachaill and a great slaughter of them').

AU 852.3 *Lucht ocht .xxit long di Fhindgentibh do-roachtadur du cath fri Dubgennti do Shnamh Aighnech; .iii. laa 7 .iii. aithchi oc cathugud doaib act is re nDuibhgennti ro mmeabaidh co farggabsat a ceile a llonga leu. Stain fugitiuus euasit 7 Iercne decollatus iacuit* ('The crew of eight score ships of Fair Heathens came to battle against Dark Heathens at Snám Eidhneach; they battled for three days and three nights but the Dark Foreigners prevailed, and the others left their ships to them. Steinn escaped fleeing, and Iarnkné lay beheaded').

AU 853.2 *Amhlaim m. righ Laithlinde do tuidhecht a nErinn coro giallsat Gaill Erenn dó & cis o Goidhelaib* ('Óláfr son of the king of *Laithlind* came to Ireland and the Foreigners of Ireland gave him hostages and he got tribute from the Irish').

One can read the Irish chronicles from 848–53 two ways; firstly, that the people of *Laithlinn* were the first vikings in Ireland, then the *Dubgaill* come along, then the people of *Laithlinn* reasserted themselves. This is the view favoured by Etchingham and Smyth. Or secondly, if we identify people of *Laithlinn* with *Dubgaill* then we have an account of the *Dubgaill*/people of *Laithlinn* progressively asserting themselves over vikings who were in Ireland before them. This would be a simpler reading of the evidence.

ÍVARR AND HIS ASSOCIATES

There has been a tendency in the historiography to analyze the deeds of vikings in Ireland and Britain in isolation; nevertheless, vikings could easily pass across the seaways between the islands. There has been some debate as to whether some of the figures who appear in Irish sources in the ninth century are the same as individuals who appear in a British context, in particular King

Ívarr and his associates Óláfr, Ásl and Hálfðan. It is relevant in this respect to note that the label 'dark' foreigner was used to describe some vikings active in Britain as well as in Ireland. The identification of Ívarr and his close associates is key to any interpretation of the terms 'fair' and 'dark' as applied to different viking groups.

At Ívarr's death in 873, he is commemorated as 'king of the Northmen of all Ireland and Britain' in Irish chronicles.³⁶ His career in Ireland can be traced from chronicles between 857 and 863 and then there is a gap until 870.³⁷ It cannot be proven that he was the same Ívarr who assisted in the capture of York in 867.³⁸ Nevertheless, the Annals of Ulster demonstrate Irish interest in the event, reporting that a battle was won by the 'dark' foreigners there.³⁹ In England, Ívarr was held responsible for the martyrdom of Edmund of East Anglia in 869 and the 'Chronicle of Aethelweard' attributes his death to the same year.⁴⁰ However, Ívarr's disappearance from England and assumptions about the nature of divine retribution may have led to a mistaken conclusion being drawn. Ívarr appears leading a viking army in Strathclyde in 870, which arrived in Dublin in 871.⁴¹ The interlocking chronology of Ívarr's deeds in Britain and Ireland and the title assigned to him at his death provide a strong case that we are dealing with the same individual.

Ívarr's ally Óláfr is mentioned in Irish chronicles from 853 to 871. He is called the 'son of the king of *Laithlinn*'.⁴² Colmán Etchingham has tentatively identified him as a brother of Ívarr and as a 'fair foreigner'.⁴³ The claim of fraternity rests on evidence dating from the eleventh century, and is not secure.⁴⁴ Óláfr is not explicitly identified as either a *Finn gall* or a *Dub gall* in contemporary Irish sources. Óláfr campaigned in Ireland with Ívarr between 857 and 863 and later sailed to Pictland, returning to Ireland in 867. He joined Ívarr for the sack of Dumbarton Rock in Strathclyde in 870. Once Ívarr had returned to Dublin in 871, Óláfr sailed back to Pictland, where he was killed in 874. His death is recorded in the 'Chronicle of the kings of Alba'.⁴⁵ Óláfr is closely linked with Ásl, who campaigned with Ívarr in 863 and who travelled to Pictland with Óláfr in 866. Ásl did not achieve the fame of Ívarr or Óláfr and was murdered 'by his brothers' in 867.⁴⁶ During the period of Óláfr's hegemony in Ireland, the continued activity of 'dark foreigners' is witnessed in

36 Ibid., s.a. 873.3. 37 Downham, *Viking kings*, pp 257–9. 38 Dorothy Whitelock et al. (trans.), *Anglo-Saxon chronicle* (London, 1961), s.a. 866. 39 Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill (eds), *Annals of Ulster*, s.a. 867.7. 40 Alistair Campbell (ed. and trans.), *Chronicon Aethelweardi. The chronicle of Aethelweard* (Edinburgh, 1962), IV.2, pp 36–7. 41 Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill (eds), *Annals of Ulster*, s.a. 870.6, 871.2. 42 Downham, *Viking kings*, pp 238–40. 43 Etchingham, 'Laithlinn', p. 86. Alex Woolf, *From Pictland to Alba* (Edinburgh, 2007), pp 107–8, has put forward an interesting interpretation that Óláfr's arrival led to a reconciliation between two groups, who then worked together. 44 Radner (ed.), *Fragmentary annals*, §§239, 347, pp 94–7, 126–7. 45 Benjamin T. Hudson (ed. and trans.), 'The Scottish chronicle', *Scottish Historical Review*, 77 (1998), 129–61 at 148, 154; Downham, *Viking kings*, p. 142. 46 Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill (eds), *Annals of Ulster*, s.a.

870 when Máel Sechnaill son of Niall, a king of Southern Brega, was treacherously killed by Ulfr, a 'dark foreigner'.⁴⁷ This Ulfr does not appear in English sources and he may have been one of Óláfr's deputies in Ireland while he waged war in Strathclyde.

The 'Anglo-Saxon Chronicle' identified a man called Hálfðan as a brother of Ívarr. Hálfðan first appears as a participant in the battle of Ashdown in 871. His career in Britain lasted until 876, when he shared out lands in Northumbria among his followers.⁴⁸ In 874/5, Hálfðan was based on the River Tyne, from where he led a campaign against Pictland and Strathclyde. A battle between the dark foreigners and the Picts is recorded in Irish chronicles for the year 875. Irish sources also record that Hálfðan killed Eysteinn son of Óláfr in the same year. Hálfðan fell in battle at Strangford Lough in 877, and the Annals of Ulster refer to him as a leader of the 'dark foreigners'.⁴⁹ Surviving contemporary sources are not explicit in linking the Hálfðan active in North Britain with the Hálfðan of Ireland. However, given the location of Strangford Lough across the North Channel of the Irish Sea, and the timing of Hálfðan's activities as recorded in English and Irish sources, this identification seems likely.⁵⁰

Colmán Etchingham, in his recent article, accepts the identification of Hálfðan, a leader of 'dark foreigners', as a brother of Ívarr. He further identified Ívarr's close political ally and possible brother Óláfr as leader of 'fair foreigners'. Etchingham's definition of 'fair' as 'Norwegian' and 'dark' as 'Danish' relies on the premise that vikings active in Ireland are Norwegians while those in English-speaking areas are Danes, with little mixing between the two groups. However, due to the campaigns of Ívarr, Hálfðan and Óláfr, this would mean that 'Danes' and 'Norwegians' fought in Pictland and Strathclyde, and that they allied together at the siege of Dumbarton Rock. Furthermore, as Ívarr was active in Britain and Ireland, his core retinue would presumably, according to Etchingham's definition, have been acting as 'Norwegians' in Ireland but as 'Danes' in Britain. This does not match easily with theories of rivalry inherent in the interpretation of 'fair' and 'dark' groups.

Etchingham has provided a counter-argument to David Dumville's view that Ívarr's associates and his descendants at Dublin were 'dark' or 'newer' foreigners. According to Etchingham, the twelfth-century saga *Cogad Gáedel re Gallaib*, when describing the battle at Strangford Lough in 877, 'plausibly identifies the Findgenti leader as Barith, who is elsewhere identified as Barith son of Ívarr'.⁵¹ This identification is not convincing. The link with Barðr son of Ívarr (d. 881) is indirect and *Cogad* is not reliable on the matter as a twelfth-century saga which contains an admixture of information drawn from chronicles. No reference is made to Barðr's presence at the battle in contemporary

867.6. 47 Ibid., s.a. 870.7. 48 Whitelock et al. (trans.), *Anglo-Saxon chronicle*, s.a. 876. 49 Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill (eds), *Annals of Ulster*, s.a. 877.5. 50 Etchingham, 'Laithlinn', p. 87. 51 Ibid., p. 87.

accounts.⁵² It may be that the claim of Barðr's leadership of the 'fair' heathens was invented in *Cogad* to create a narrative link with the plundering of the caves of Kerry by Barðr, which is mentioned in the same section of the text.⁵³ The cavalier approach of the author of *Cogad* to historical accuracy for the sake of linking events to make a good story can be seen elsewhere.⁵⁴ The account of the battle is framed by accounts which cast doubt on its reliability. It is preceded by the tale of deceitful murder at a feast and followed by the account of an earthquake which swallowed the army of the king of Alba; both motifs owe more to literature than history.⁵⁵ The chronology at this point in the text is also out of sequence.

Cogad Gáedel re Gallaib states that the 'dark foreigners' left Ireland after the battle, and having passed into North Britain, killed Causantín king of the Picts.⁵⁶ However, this record can be rejected, as the battle was fought in 877 and the king died in 876. Causantín's death must have taken place prior to the battle at Strangford Lough. Etchingham has interpreted *Cogad's* claim that Hálfdan's forces were expelled as marking the long-term removal of 'dark foreigners' from Ireland, but this is unwarranted. *Cogad* also claims that this expulsion was followed by a forty-year rest in viking activity in Ireland, an assertion which is flatly contradicted by contemporary sources.⁵⁷ Ó Corráin has made the convincing case that the topos of the forty-year rest was inspired by biblical narrative.⁵⁸ Although *Cogad* contains a rich body of narrative, it should not be considered as more important or equally important to the surviving contemporary sources.

AFTER THE BATTLE OF STRANGFORD LOUGH

The battle of Strangford Lough was an important engagement that failed to secure the supremacy of dark foreigners in the north-east of Ireland. After the engagement, Ívarr's family (whom I interpret as being leaders of the 'new' or dark foreigners) focused their efforts on the development of Dublin and their

⁵² *Cogad* claims that the leader of the dark foreigners was someone called Rögnvaldr's son who is not mentioned in contemporary sources. It is doubtful that Rögnvaldr's son can be identified with Hálfdan (who was there). In the earliest surviving manuscript of *Cogad*, it was written that Rögnvaldr's son died at the battle, but according to the other manuscripts he was murdered at a banquet in Dublin afterwards: Todd (ed. and trans.), *Cogadh*, §25, pp 26–7, 232. ⁵³ Seán Mac Airt (ed. and trans.), *Annals of Inisfallen* (Dublin, 1951), s.a. 873; Todd (ed. and trans.), *Cogadh*, § 25, pp 24–7. ⁵⁴ For example, Todd (ed. and trans.), *Cogadh*, §§ 11–14, pp 12–15; Downham, 'The chronology of *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallibh*' (forthcoming). ⁵⁵ Todd (ed. and trans.), *Cogadh*, §25, pp 26–7. ⁵⁶ *Ibid.* ⁵⁷ Emer Purcell, 'Ninth-century Viking entries in the Irish Annals: no 'forty years' rest' in John Sheehan and Donnchadh Ó Corráin (eds), *The Viking Age: Ireland and the West. Proceedings of the 15th Viking Congress* (Dublin, 2010), pp 322–37. ⁵⁸ Donnchadh Ó Corráin, 'Vikings



ambitions overseas. In 893, the Annals of Ulster record that ‘dark foreigners’ suffered a major defeat at the hands of the English.⁵⁹ This is probably a reference to the battle of Buttington, which was fought in that year.⁶⁰ A departure of vikings from Dublin is recorded in the same year and a contingent from Dublin may have fought there alongside the Northumbrians.⁶¹ Jarl Sigfrøðr, who led one of the contingents from Dublin, has been tentatively identified with Sigfrøðr, leader of a Northumbrian fleet that attacked Wessex in the same year.⁶² Whether or not this identification is correct, the coincidence in affairs of 893 indicates that viking ambitions in England and Ireland were intertwined.

‘Dark foreigners’ are not named again in Irish chronicles until 917. This year was marked by a great battle between the forces of Leinster and the grandsons of Ívarr, who had returned to Ireland following their expulsion in 902. After taking control of Waterford, the family had set their sights on regaining Dublin. In the battle at Ceann Fuait, Rögnvaldr, grandson of Ívarr, is called ‘king of dark foreigners’ by the Annals of Ulster.⁶³ This is significant because Rögnvaldr at this time was not king of York.⁶⁴ This identification flies in the face of theories that the title ‘king of the dark foreigners’ may be interpreted as ‘king of the Danes of York’ and that ‘king of the fair foreigners’ means ‘king of the Norwegians of Dublin’. It was not until the following year that Rögnvaldr would add York to his domain. After the battle, Dublin was taken and brought under the control of Rögnvaldr’s brother or cousin Sigtryggr. This was presumably so that Rögnvaldr, the senior partner, could pursue his career in England. It appears that Rögnvaldr never ruled in Dublin. The title ‘king of the dark foreigners’, if accurately recorded in 917, would seem to apply to the chief member of the family of Ívarr. The term ‘dark’ could refer to the family and its adherents, successors of the ‘new’ vikings who had arrived in Ireland in the mid-ninth century.

Rögnvaldr continued to hold the title ‘king of the dark foreigners’ when he led his men from Waterford to York in 918.⁶⁵ On his death in 921, Rögnvaldr is called ‘king of the fair foreigners and the dark foreigners’ in Irish chronicles.⁶⁶ His brother or cousin Sigtryggr is assigned the same title on his death in 927.⁶⁷ The label suggests that both kings had won recognition as leaders of the dynasty of Ívarr and overlordship of the ‘old’ foreigners of Ireland who may have remained in the island while Ívarr’s family had been in exile. It is

I: “Forty years’ rest”, *Peritia*, 10 (1996), 224. 59 Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill (eds), *Annals of Ulster, s.a.* 893.3. 60 Whitelock et al. (trans.), *Anglo-Saxon chronicle, s.a.* 893. 61 F.M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 3rd ed. (Oxford, 1971), p. 267. 62 Smyth, *Scandinavian York*, I, p. 34; W.S. Angus, ‘Christianity as a political force in Northumbria in the Danish and Norse Periods’ in Alan Small (ed.), *The Fourth Viking Congress, York* (Edinburgh, 1965), p. 147. 63 Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill (eds), *Annals of Ulster, s.a.* 917.3. 64 Alex Woolf, *From Pictland to Alba* (Edinburgh, 2007), pp 142–4; Downham, *Viking kings*, pp 92–5. 65 Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill (eds), *Annals of Ulster, s.a.* 918.4. 66 *Ibid.*, *s.a.* 921.4. 67 *Ibid.*, *s.a.* 927.2.



tempting to identify the ‘fair foreigners’ with vikings based in Limerick. There is no record of vikings being expelled from Limerick in 902 and only the seizure of Waterford and Dublin is recorded in 914 and 917 by grandsons of Ívarr. The family of Ívarr suffered a major blow when King Æthelstan seized York in 927. This may have promoted greater competition for resources in Ireland. Tensions heightened between leaders of Limerick and Dublin from 927. After some years of strategic manoeuvring, matters came to a climax in 937 when Óláfr son of Guðrøðr, king of Dublin, captured Óláfr ‘Scabby head’, king of Limerick, on Lough Ree and destroyed all his ships. Óláfr son of Guðrøðr is the last king who bore the title ‘king of fair and dark foreigners’ in Ireland.⁶⁸ I would suggest that this is because, after his reign, the ‘old’ or ‘fair’ foreigners of Ireland were securely under the thumb of the dynasty of Ívarr and so were no longer a force to be reckoned with. It can be argued that the terms *Finnгаill* and *Dubгаill* were coined in Ireland to describe affairs in Ireland, rather than the politics of distant territories.

WELSH EVIDENCE

The concept of ‘dark’ foreigners arises in Welsh chronicles and was probably borrowed from Ireland. In a comparable way, Welsh *llongborth* was derived from the Irish *longphort*, or ‘ship camp’. As in Irish sources, the usage of colour terminology to describe viking groups in Wales appears infrequently albeit across a wider timespan. In Welsh chronicles, ‘dark’ foreigners are referred to in the years 853, 867, 892, 987 and 989. The terms used vary from Latin *gentilibus nigris* to Welsh *Dub gint*, *Llu Du* and *Nordmannieit Duon*. There is no reference to ‘fair foreigners’, suggesting that this concept was not meaningful in a Welsh context.

If Colmán Etchingham is correct in seeing the Irish Sea as a theatre of contact between separate spheres of ‘Danish’ and ‘Norwegian’ activity, the absence of reference to ‘fair’ vikings (or ‘Norwegians’ as he has defined them) in Welsh sources would be hard to explain. However, if we reject the identification of ‘fair’ foreigners with ‘Norwegians’, it could simply be that the ‘old’ vikings of Ireland lost significance from a Welsh perspective, once they had lost Dublin. It is only from the 850s that vikings play an important part in Welsh politics. The ‘dark’ terms referred to in Welsh sources may be consistently interpreted as armies under the leadership of the dynasty of Ívarr, who were active at Dublin and elsewhere.

In 853, according to Welsh chronicles, the ‘dark’ vikings ravaged Anglesey.⁶⁹ This is a year after Irish chronicles record a victory of ‘dark’ foreigners over

68 W.M. Hennessy (ed. and trans.), *Chronicum Scotorum* (London, 1866), s.a. 940 [=941].

69 David Dumville (ed. and trans.), *Annales Cambriae, AD682–954: texts A–C in Parallel*



their 'fair' rivals at Strangford Lough, and three years before Irish chronicles record the death of Ormr, a leader of the 'dark' foreigners at the hands of Rhodri son of Merfyn, king of Gwynedd.⁷⁰ This could be interpreted as the 'dark foreigners' seeking to extend their influence in Britain following their success in Ireland.⁷¹ Welsh chronicles then identify 'dark foreigners' as the ravagers of York in records for the year 867. The event is referred to as 'Cat Dubgynt' or the 'Battle of the Black army'. Curiously, one version of *Annales Cambriae* (identified as the 'C' text or 'The Chronicle of St David's') erroneously renders this 'Cat Dulin' or 'Battle of Dublin', which may be an error of transcription or show confusion on the part of the scribe.⁷² 'Dark' foreigners next appear in Welsh chronicles for the year 890/2 in an attack apparently aimed against Gwynedd.⁷³ The north-west coast of Wales was within the sphere of influence of the vikings of Dublin, as represented in later events including the migration of Ingimundr to Anglesey in 902, as well as archaeological finds including the settlement at Llanbedrgoch.⁷⁴ It is credible that Dubliners (or more broadly, followers of the dynasty of Ívarr) were the 'dark Northmen' (*Nordmannieit Duon*) referred to on this occasion.

'Dark' foreigners are not referred to again in Welsh chronicles until the 980s. In the year 987, according to *Annales Cambriae* and *Brut y Tywysogyon*, Guðrøðr son of Haraldr, king of Man and the Hebrides, led a contingent of 'dark' vikings to ravage Anglesey and took a large number of captives.⁷⁵ In the same year, the Annals of Ulster report that the son of Haraldr allied with *Danair* ('Danes') and won a battle on the Isle of Man.⁷⁶ This evidence is a key part of Etchingham's case that 'dark' foreigners may be equated with 'Danes'. Nevertheless, Guðrøðr was himself a likely descendant of Ívarr and thus a 'dark foreigner'.⁷⁷ Furthermore, as Scandinavian fleets operating in the Irish Sea at this time appear to have been allied with Dublin, Guðrøðr may have also been working with both *Danair* and Dubliners in 987, deploying one group in Man, and the other in Anglesey.

The arrival of fleets from Scandinavia can be shown to cause a shift in patterns of allegiance in the Irish Sea. In 984, prior to the appearance of

(Cambridge, 2002), s.a. 853. ⁷⁰ Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill (eds), *Annals of Ulster*, s.a.a. 852.3, 856.6. ⁷¹ Rhodri was to be chased from his patrimony by dark foreigners in 877 and sought refuge in Ireland: Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill (eds), *Annals of Ulster*, s.a. 877.3. ⁷² Dumville (ed. and trans.), *Annales Cambriae*, s.a. 867. ⁷³ The event is not recorded in *Annales Cambriae*. According to the Peniarth 20 manuscript of *Brut y Tywysogyon*, 'Black Northmen', came to Gwynedd. *Brenhinedd y Saesson* records that the 'Black Northmen' came to Gwyn. Thomas Jones interpreted this as a contraction for Gwynedd. The Red Book of Hergest text of *Brut y Tywysogyon* anachronistically links the attack to Baldwin's Castle: Thomas Jones (trans.), *Brut y Tywysogyon of The Chronicle of the princes – Peniarth MS 20 Version* (Cardiff, 1952), p. 138 n. 5.28. ⁷⁴ Downham, *Viking kings*, pp 206–8. ⁷⁵ Dumville (ed. and trans.), *Annales Cambriae*, s.a. 987; Jones (trans.), *Brut y Tywysogyon*, pp 145–6, n. 10.1–2. ⁷⁶ Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill (eds), *Annals of Ulster*, s.a. 987.1 ⁷⁷ Downham, *Viking kings*, pp 186–91.



Danair on the Irish political scene, we see hostility between the Manx vikings and Dubliners. This was represented by an alliance between the Islesmen (led by the sons of Haraldr) and the Irish king Brian Bóruma, in a planned attack on Dublin.⁷⁸ When fleets of *Danair* appear in Irish sources two years later, they sacked Iona and the Isles.⁷⁹ They seized Máel Chiaráin, the abbot, and he was martyred in Dublin.⁸⁰ It appears that Danish fleets were cooperating with the political elite of Dublin and treating the Islesmen as common enemies. However in the following year, Guðrøðr son of Haraldr, king of the Isles, won a battle on the Isle of Man allied with *Danair*.⁸¹ Thus Guðrøðr and the Scandinavians had been brought together against an unnamed enemy. This may reflect internal rivalry within the kingdom of the Isles, for, in the same year, many *Danair* were killed in a battle that was interpreted as revenge for their sack of Iona.⁸² A continued alliance between the *Danair* and the Dubliners is suggested as the two groups campaigned together in eastern Ireland in 990.⁸³

The 'dark' army who allied with Guðrøðr in 987 reappear in Welsh records two years later. In 989, the Welsh king Maredudd ab Owain paid a ransom to the 'dark' foreigners to release the captives who had been seized from Anglesey in their earlier attack.⁸⁴ We may get an insight into the circumstances behind this deal by comparing other events of the year. It may be significant that both Guðrøðr son of Haraldr, king of the Isles and Glúniarn son of Óláfr, king of Dublin died in 989.⁸⁵ The arrival of new leaders in the Hebrides and at Dublin may have opened possibilities for negotiation. Also in 989, a heavy tax was imposed on the people of Dublin by the Irish king Máel Sechnaill mac Domnaill.⁸⁶ Presumably the people seized from Anglesey were being held in Dublin (a notorious slave market). The 'dark' army may have chosen to ransom the captives as a quick method of raising cash to pay off their royal tax collector.

To conclude, there is nothing in Welsh chronicles that conflicts with the interpretation of *Dubgail* as armies under the leadership of the dynasty of Ívarr. The Scandinavian fleets arriving in the Irish Sea must have appeared somewhat different in cultural terms to the vikings whose families had long settled in Ireland. A new term *Danair*, meaning 'Danes', was coined for them

78 Mac Airt (ed. and trans.), *Annals of Inisfallen*, s.a. 984. 79 Mac Airt (ed. and trans.), *Annals of Inisfallen*, s.a. 986; Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill (eds), *Annals of Ulster*, s.a. 986.2, 986.3. Three ships of the *Danair* also landed on the coast of Dál Riata, where 140 people are reported to have been executed and others sold. 80 John O'Donovan (ed. and trans.), *Annála rioghachta Eireann. Annals of the kingdom of Ireland by the Four Masters*, 2nd ed., 7 vols (Dublin, 1856), s.a. 985 [=986]; Hennessy (ed. and trans.), *Chronicum Scotorum*, s.a. 986. 81 Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill (eds), *Annals of Ulster*, s.a. 987.1. 82 O'Donovan (ed. and trans.), *Annals of the Four Masters*, s.a. 986 [=987]; Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill (eds), *Annals of Ulster*, s.a. 987.3. 83 O'Donovan (ed. and trans.), *Annals of the Four Masters*, s.a. 989 [=990]. 84 Dumville (ed. and trans.), *Annales Cambriae*, s.a. 986; Jones (trans.), *Brut y Tymysogyon*, s.a. 987 [=989]. 85 Hennessy (ed. and trans.), *Chronicum Scotorum*, s.a. 989. 86 *Ibid.*, s.a. 989.

in the 980s. This indicates that from an Irish perspective *Danair* were regarded as separate from *Dubgaill*.

ONOMASTIC EVIDENCE

Colmán Etchingham has argued that ‘dark foreigners’ had little influence in Dublin affairs, appearing in 851–2 and very sporadically thereafter.⁸⁷ However, their onomastic legacy in Ireland could suggest otherwise. In 1013 we find the personal name *Dubgall* appearing within the royal Dublin dynasty.⁸⁸ At least two members of in the Northern Uí Néill dynasty that intermarried with the vikings of Dublin bore this name in the tenth century.⁸⁹ It is also worth noting that the name *Lochlann* appears in this family, suggesting their alliance with vikings.⁹⁰ *Dubgall* also appears as a name among the Gailenga of Brega, an area where Dublin wielded economic influence.⁹¹ These naming patterns seem to indicate a connection between the people of Dublin and the ‘dark foreigners’.

The impact of ‘dark foreigners’ is also seen in place-names. A bridge near Dublin was called in Irish *Droichet-Dubhghaill*, ‘the bridge of the dark foreigners’, as referred to in the Annals of the Four Masters under the year 1112.⁹² *Baile Dubhghaill* (Baldoyle) in Co. Dublin may also refer to ‘dark foreigners’.⁹³ Similar place-names include Baldoyle (Co. Meath); Ballindoyle (Co. Wicklow); Ballydoyle (Co. Cork); Ballydoyle (Co. Tipperary); Ballydoyle (Co. Wexford). Undoubtedly, a more thorough investigation would reveal other locations incorporating the name *Dubgaill*. For example, it has been suggested that Cooladoyle (Co. Wicklow) incorporates the term *Dubgaill* under the influence of Scandinavian settlement.⁹⁴ It is likely that some place-names include the Leinster surname Doyle, derived from *Dubgall*, rather than being a direct reference to vikings.⁹⁵ However, the onomastic evidence indicates that ‘dark foreigners’ of the Viking Age left their mark in Ireland, and were less insignificant than Etchingham has suggested.

87 Etchingham, ‘Laithlinn’, p. 87. 88 Mac Airt (ed. and trans.), *Annals of Inisfallen, s.a.* 1013; Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill (eds), *Annals of Ulster, s.a.* 1013.8, 1014.2. 89 M.A. O’Brien (ed.), *Corpus genealogiarum Hiberniae* (Dublin, 1962), §140 a 33, p. 135; O’Donovan (ed. and trans.), *Annals of the Four Masters, s.a.* 912, 923, 978. 90 O’Donovan (ed. and trans.), *Annals of the Four Masters, s.a.* 1023; T.W. Moody et al., ed., *A new history of Ireland, IX: maps, genealogies, lists* (Oxford, 1984), p. 128. 91 O’Brien (ed.), *Corpus genealogiarum*, §154a17, p. 247. 92 O’Donovan (ed. and trans.), *Annals of the Four Masters, s.a.* 1112. 93 Richard Butler (ed.), *Registrum prioratus omnium sanctorum juxta Dublin* (Dublin, 1845), p. li. 94 M. Murphy and M. Potterton, *The Dublin region in the Middle Ages: settlement, land-use and economy* (Dublin, 2010), p. 64. 95 A.J. Hughes, ‘Irish place-names: some perspectives, pitfalls, procedures and potential’, *Seanchas Ardmhacha*, 14:2 (1991), 116–48 at 139.



CONCLUSION

Retrospective interpretations of the Viking Age through a nationalist framework have held a dominant place in modern historiography. However, the paradigm of national segregation among viking settlers risks promoting an over-simplified picture of the past. It seems debatable that vikings operated as unmixed groups of Norwegians or Danes in the mid-ninth century and that they could be identified as such by outsiders. In reality, the ethnic and cultural make-up of vikings in the ninth and tenth centuries was multi-faceted. Arguably, the seas lying between the islands of Britain and Ireland acted as highways for maritime entrepreneurs to travel and mix, rather than serving as ethnic moats with Danes concentrated on one side and Norwegians on the other. Furthermore, as vikings assimilated elements of local culture and intermarried, they developed new hybrid identities that may have affected the categories that the first vikings carried with them. Nevertheless, the received wisdom has been that if a 'Dane' arrived on the Irish coast in the ninth century, his or her descendants remained 'Danish' six or more generations later.⁹⁶ The terms *finngaill* and *dubgaill* were arguably coined in reference to local circumstances, not in reference to Scandinavian national identities. They were dubbed by the Irish rather than by the Scandinavians. Although scholars have been keen to identify invaders, settlers and leaders as either Norwegians or Danes, this was not a principal interest for people in ninth-century Ireland.⁹⁷ Indeed, it has been argued that that there was no word for 'Norway' in Irish until the eleventh century.⁹⁸ For these reasons, reinterpretations of events freed from overarching categories of Dane and Norwegian in early Viking-Age Ireland seem desirable.

Scholars have struggled for years as to whether to identify particular vikings in Ireland as Danes or Norwegians. Fundamentally, this is because the conventional translation of *Finngaill* as 'Norwegian', and *Dubgaill* as 'Dane', does not fit easily with the primary sources. The case presented by Etchingham is far from conclusive. An alternative view sits better with the ninth- and tenth-century evidence; namely that *Dubgaill* were the associates and descendants of Ívarr, and *Finngaill* were the dominant viking group in Ireland before their arrival. Nevertheless, this argument does require an acceptance that retrospective interpretations were imposed on the labels *Finn* and *Dub* from the eleventh century due to changing political circumstances. This is an assertion

96 Etchingham, 'Laithlinn', p. 85. 97 In the late nineteenth century, the heritage of vikings in Scotland and Ireland came under greater scrutiny with the resulting emphasis that they were Norwegians, not Danes as in England. This seems partly inspired by the desire to define Irish and Scottish national heritage as distinct from England. A. Newby and L. Andersson Burnett, 'Between empire and "the North": Scottish identity in the nineteenth century' in Henrik Meinander (ed.), *Parting the mists: views on Scotland as part of Britain and Europe* (Helsinki, 2008), pp 37–53. 98 Ahlqvist, 'Is acher in gaith', p. 26 n.





not all scholars will be comfortable with, for it undermines the value of later historical evidence.⁹⁹ Nevertheless, in other contexts it has been accepted that that shifting patterns of political allegiance and perspective caused history to be reinterpreted and reworded throughout the Middle Ages, and it is a fascinating aspect of the literature which has survived.¹⁰⁰ Because of the limitations of the surviving sources, the matter of identifying *Fingaiill* and *Dubgaiill* is not all black and white. However, the debate is important for our understanding of viking identities in the Insular world of the ninth and tenth centuries.

40; Ó Corráin, 'Vikings in Scotland', p. 306. 99 Downham, 'The good'. 100 Ruth Morse, *Truth and convention in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1991).

