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The Origins of Town Life in Ireland:
Spatial Integration and Urbanization in the Kingdom of the Déisi, 700-1100

Rebecca Wall

Submitted for the degree of PhD

University of Dublin

2011

Declaration

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Summary

This thesis investigates the origins of towns in pre-Norman Ireland by examining a case-study area in southeastern Ireland, the early medieval kingdom of the Déisi. Both documentary and archaeological sources are used to reconstruct and assess developments in secular and ecclesiastical politics, settlement patterns and economic organization in the Déisi kingdom between the eighth and the eleventh centuries. The fundamental assumption underlying this thesis is that the origins and development of towns are best studied in their regional context. This derives from the idea that town development or urbanization forms one strand of a wider trend toward increasing spatial integration, which has an impact not only on developing towns, but on places that remain rural throughout the period in question.

During the eighth century, there were no towns in the Déisi kingdom, but the documentary evidence suggests a growing trend toward increasing spatial integration, facilitated by the political centralization in both the secular and ecclesiastical spheres. The church seems to have played a major role in encouraging spatial integration in the westernmost part of the Déisi kingdom during this period, and some ecclesiastical sites may have served as foci for secular settlement and communal activities.

In the ninth and tenth centuries, the Vikings began to raid and then settle in many parts of Ireland, including in Déisi territory. Although the interactions between the Vikings and the Irish are well attested in documentary sources, the evidence for their earliest settlements has been lacking. The recent excavation of a ninth and tenth century possible *longphort* site at Woodstown, Co. Waterford, has provided new insights into early Viking age settlement in Ireland, but has also created new problems of interpretation and definition. Far from having a 'shattering effect' on the Déisi settlement patterns and political structure, there are indications that the site for the Scandinavian settlement at Woodstown was chosen to take advantage of that location's strategic significance and economic vibrancy. In turn, evidence from hoards suggests that sites like Woodstown could contribute to the accumulation of significant wealth by native Irish kings.

The earliest phases of settlement at Waterford town have yet to be discovered archaeologically; the oldest material uncovered to date is from the eleventh century. The relationship, if any, between Woodstown and Waterford is therefore unclear. However, it is apparent from the archaeological and documentary evidence that by the eleventh century, Waterford was a town, and an important political entity in its region and in Ireland. Again, while the relations between the leaders of Waterford and the

kings of the Déisi remain challenging to assess, the analysis of organic remains from the Waterford excavations of the late 1980s and 1990s indicates that the town's population was fundamentally reliant on their rural hinterland for food and raw materials.

Much of the study of Irish urbanization to date has focused on the towns as centres of long-distance trade, but this thesis argues that it is precisely this short-distance bulk trade with the rural hinterland that is vital to understanding the development of Irish towns. Throughout the Déisi kingdom, and throughout this period of time, individuals and groups of people were bound together by economic, political and social bonds. The settlements they built were linked by routes of transport, communication and exchange, both natural and man-made. Innovations in these networks allowed spatial integration and urbanization to take place over these four centuries; further analysis of these networks and their change through time would form the basis of the next step in the study of urbanization in Ireland.

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Introduction

0.1 'The passing of the old order'

The Viking period in Ireland, beginning with the earliest raids at the end of the eighth century and continuing through the tenth and eleventh centuries, has long been viewed by historians as one of the most significant periods of political, economic and social development in medieval Irish history. While historians, art historians and antiquarians had long been interested in Ireland's Viking past, serious scholarship on the subject truly bloomed in the late 1950s and 1960s. As Charles Doherty has pointed out, the First International Congress of Celtic Studies, held in Dublin in 1959, drew contributions that have remained some of the foundational works of scholarship on the impact of the Norse on Irish society.[1] The papers dealing with Ireland all shared the supposition that the Viking invaders and settlers caused catastrophic and irreversible changes to the Irish way of life.[2] Whether explicitly or subconsciously, the papers' hypotheses seem to have been shaped by the images of Norse-Irish interactions presented in the Irish annals and in twelfth century sagas like the *Cogadh Gáedhel re Gallaibh* and the *Caithréim Chellacháin Chaisil*.[3]

Binchy famously cited the Viking invasions as the cause of a 'passing of the old order' and the impetus for a complete reorganization of Irish society. To him, the concept of town living to Ireland was one of the most radically transformative imports introduced by the Scandinavian settlers. Prior to that time, 'the idea of a town, with a corporate personality distinct from that of the ruler, was quite foreign to the Gaelic mind…It would

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[1] Charles Doherty, 'The Vikings in Ireland: a Review', in Howard B. Clarke, Máire Ní Mhaonaigh and Raghnall Ó Floinn, eds., *Ireland and Scandinavian in the Early Viking Age*. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1998, 289-94.

[2] Brian Ó Cuív, ed., *The Impact of the Scandinavian Invasions on the Celtic-Speaking Peoples, c. 800-1000: Introductory Papers read at Plenary Sessions of the International Congress of Celtic Studies held in Dublin, 6-10 July, 1959,* Dublin, 1962.

[3] M. Ní Mhaonaigh, '*Cogad Gáedel re Gallaib:* some dating considerations', *Peritia* 9 (1995), 354-77; M. Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Bréifne bias in *Cogad Gáedel re Gallaib*', *Ériu* 43 (1992), 135-58; D. Ó Corráin, '*Caithréim Chellacháin Chaisil*: history or propaganda?', *Ériu* 25 (1974), 1-69.

be difficult to exaggerate the formidable impact of these prosperous trading stations, with their local and overseas markets, their cash and credit sales, upon the primitive economy of their Irish neighbours'.[4] Binchy's characterization of early Irish society as 'tribal, rural, hierarchical, and familiar'[5] shaped the way a generation of archaeologists and historians viewed the early medieval period in Irish history. The theory that town life in Ireland was introduced by Norsemen and was alien to indigenous Irish settlement patterns can still be found even in relatively recent survey publications on medieval Ireland.[6]

More recently, scholars have begun reassess the nature of the Viking impact on Irish society, and to stress the need to look for continuity as well as change, citing the example of the rapid integration of the Scandinavian newcomers into the complex and ever-shifting Irish political system.[7] Studies have also attempted to trace the origins of many societal changes to the pre-Viking period, and have highlighted the internal, indigenous processes by which these developments occurred. In particular, a great deal of attention has been paid to the assumptions of Binchy and those who followed him regarding the origins of town life in Ireland. The work of several scholars has pushed the debate in two separate, but not mutually exclusive, directions. Looking to the pre-Viking period, Charles Doherty has popularized the concept of the 'monastic town', an early medieval settlement with a substantial permanent population that carried out many of the social, political and economic functions characteristic of a town, but whose core was a monastic community. While he dates the rise of the great Irish monastic centres to around the beginning of the ninth century, he cites centuries of internal political and economic development, rather than the impact of Viking raids, for their growing role in Irish

---

[4] D.A. Binchy, 'The Passing of the Old Order' in Ó Cuív, ed., *The Impact of the Scandinavian Invasions*, 119-32.
[5] D.A. Binchy, 'Secular Institutions', in M. Dillon, ed., *Early Irish Society*, Dublin, 1954, 54.
[6] Michael Richter, *Medieval Ireland: the Enduring Tradition*, The New Gill History of Ireland, Vol. 1. Dublin, 2005, 112.
[7] Sean Duffy, *Ireland in the Middle Ages*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997, 29. Duffy argues that the Vikings were 'just one more violent group in a society that was already very violent', and were quickly drawn into inter-dynastic conflicts.

society.[8] While not met with universal agreement, his hypothesis has been accepted and further expanded upon by geographers and archaeologists including Swan, Bradley, Edwards and Ryan, as will be discussed below.

On the other hand, from the late 1970s onward, the work of archaeologists on the evidence from Dublin and the other so-called Viking towns in Ireland has demonstrated an apparent temporal gap between the start of Viking raids on the Irish coasts and the establishment of even the smallest permanent settlements by the invaders. The archaeological record presently indicates that urbanism in Ireland did not begin before the tenth century, and has revealed the distinctly hybrid Hiberno-Norse character of the material culture of the coastal towns.[9] It has been argued that in at least some cases, Irish patronage rather than Scandinavian establishment was the key to town development; Limerick, while originally a Viking settlement, arguably did not become a full-fledged town until it came under the influence of the native Uí Briain dynasty.[10] Archaeologists looking for the earliest and most thoroughly Scandinavian Viking settlements have searched for the elusive *longphort*, the term used by Irish annalists as early as the 830s to describe the forts or over-wintering camps apparently established to support and protect raiding parties. Unfortunately, neither the archaeological nor the annalistic evidence has been able to shed light on the exact nature of these *longphuirt*, or their relationship to and impact on pre-existing settlement patterns. There is some evidence to suggest, however,

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[8] Charles Doherty, 'The monastic town in early medieval Ireland', in H.B. Clarke and Anngret Simms, eds., *The Comparative History of Urban Origins in Non-Roman Europe: Ireland, Wales, Denmark, Germany, Poland and Russia from the ninth to the thirteenth century*, Vol. I, 1985, 45-76.

[9] P.F. Wallace, 'The Archaeological Identity of the Hiberno-Norse Town', *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 122 (1992), 35-66; H.B. Clarke, 'Proto-Towns and Towns in Ireland and Britain in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries', in Clarke, Ní Mhaonaigh and Ó Floinn, eds., *Ireland and Scandinavian in the Early Viking Age*, Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1998, 335, 368; M.F. Hurley, 'Viking Age Towns: Archaeological Evidence from Waterford and Cork', in M. Monk and J. Sheehan, eds., *Early Medieval Munster: Archaeology, History and Society*, 1998, 164-77.

[10] C. O'Rahilly, 'Medieval Limerick: the growth of two towns', in H.B. Clarke, *Irish Cities*, 1995, 163-76.

that the Vikings sometimes established their *longphuirt* either within or near conquered monastic sites.[11]

While much of this recent research has helped to improve our understanding of the development of town life in Ireland, it also leaves many questions unanswered. Most importantly, the lack of clarity on the character of the earliest stages of Viking-Irish interaction makes it impossible to assess the impact of Scandinavian settlement on Irish settlement strategies. On the one hand, it seems that we can see the outlines of town-like settlements around monastic communities in the pre-Viking period, many of which survive the raiding phase of Viking activity in Ireland. On the other hand, the archaeological record thus far suggests that town life as modern scholars typically imagine it only began in the coastal Hiberno-Norse settlements in the tenth or eleventh centuries. In between, there is a significant gap in our understanding that enquiry into the *longphuirt* has yet to fill.

This thesis investigates the political and economic factors that allowed urbanization to occur in some parts of Ireland between the eighth and the eleventh centuries. While the arrival of the Vikings is one important strand in these processes, this thesis will argue that other developments must be taken into consideration. This thesis will also take a regional approach, because as discussed below, the changes that allowed urbanization to occur had an impact on settlement and society both in areas that became towns, and in areas that remained rural throughout the period in question. The goal of this thesis is not to offer a new model for early medieval Irish urbanization, but to raise a series of new questions derived from the analysis of existing models in light of the evidence currently available. Given the substantial and diverse body of documentary and archaeological source material available to be applied to these questions, this project is confined to a particular study area. It is to be hoped that the analysis and conclusions to be drawn from one region can help to

[11] Michael Gibbons, 'The *Longphort* Phenomenon in Early Christian and Viking Ireland', *History Ireland* (Autumn 2004), 19-23.

point the way for further study, and may serve as a counterpoint to evidence from other areas of Viking settlement.

0.2 Case Study Area: The Déisi Kingdom

The area under consideration is the Déisi kingdom in southeast Munster, roughly modern Co. Waterford (see Fig. 0.1). As their name indicates, the Déisi were a tributary kingdom, subject to the Eóganacht kings of Cashel in the early medieval period, and much of their independence was related to fluctuations in Cashel's power.[12] The Déisi were also in frequent competition with the Uí Chennselaig, based during the early middle ages at Ferns in Leinster, the Osraige, on their northern borders, and the Uí Liatháin to their west. While they never constituted a threat to Eóganacht control over Munster, their location on the boundaries of powerful kingdoms gave the Déisi a high degree of political and military significance.

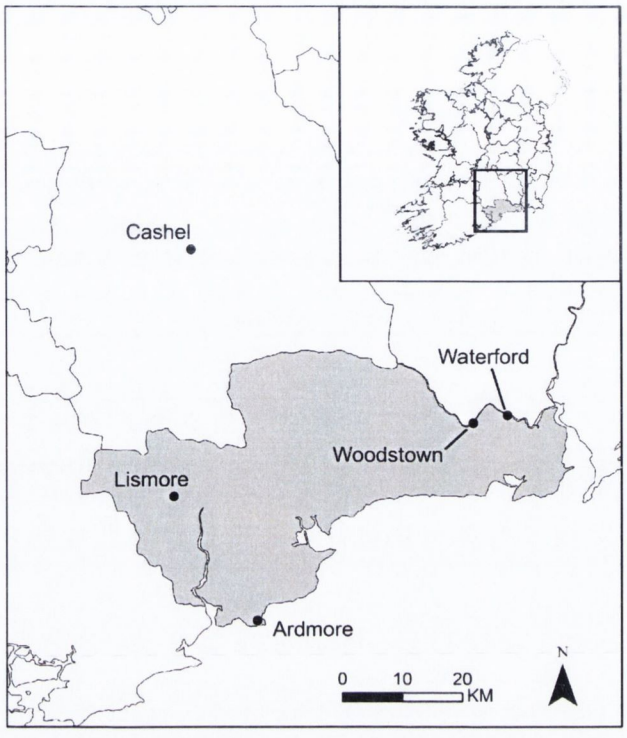

Fig. 0.1: The Early Medieval Déisi Kingdom

The physical geography of the Déisi lands is also key to understanding their significance within Munster and Ireland. Although it is dangerous to assign hard borders to early medieval territorial and political units, the Déisi territory was a relatively stable geographical entity defined by its topography, coasts and rivers. The Atlantic Ocean formed its southern boundary, from Yougal in the west to Waterford in the east. The river Suir separated the Déisi from their northern and eastern neighbours, while the river

[12] F.J. Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001, 180-3.

Blackwater served the same function in the west. The northern half of the region is mountainous, and most of the interior, as far as it is possible to reconstruct, seems to have been quite densely wooded in the early middle ages. [13] The rivers that flow through the region connect the interior and the coast. Toward the easternmost part of Déisi territory, the river Suir flows into the sea at Waterford. The rivers Nore and Barrow running through Osraige and Uí Chennselaig also end at this large sheltered bay, and all three rivers are navigable a considerable way inland. Further west, Tramore Bay, Dungarvan and Ardmore Bay offer sheltered anchorage, and Yougal Bay, like Waterford Bay, extends inland via the River Blackwater, which is tidal as far as the ecclesiastical centre of Lismore.

The Déisi were significant enough to merit mentions in many of the documentary sources for early medieval Irish history. This includes the annals, genealogical tracts, the Book of Rights, and several saints' lives, particularly those of Declan, founder of Ardmore and Mochuda, founder of Lismore. Lismore was, itself, a famous centre of scholarship, and its scriptorium produced a number of works, mainly on the subject of asceticism, that are still extant.[14] In addition, the Déisi origin legend, *Indarba na nDésí*, or 'The Expulsion of the Déisi' has survived in several manuscripts. The Déisi also receive a considerable amount of attention in the twelfth century Uí Briain propaganda piece, the *Cogadh Gáedhel re Gallaibh* (CGG), where they feature on both sides of Brian Boruma's mythologized struggle against the Norse.

There is also a significant amount of archaeological evidence for early medieval settlement in the Déisi kingdom. There are over 200 known ringforts, and dozens of ecclesiastical sites, and the published inventory for County Waterford greatly assists in the

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[13] John Tierney, 'Wood and Woodland in Early Medieval Munster', in Monk and Sheehan, 1998, 56, suggests the use of 17th century Civil Survey records to reconstruct aspects of the early medieval landscape. He cites Catherine Ketch, 'Landownership in County Waterford c. 1640: The Evidence from the Civil Survey', in William Nolan and Thomas P. Power, eds., *Waterford History and Society: Interdisciplinary Essays on the History of an Irish County*, 1992, 199-225.

[14] S. Sanderlin, 'The Monastery of Lismore, A.D. 638-1111', in Nolan and Power, eds., *Waterford: History and Society*, 1992, 27-48.

identification of sites.[15] While there have been no scientific excavations of ringforts in the area, excavations have uncovered evidence for other early medieval settlement forms, including the recent find of a remarkably intact vertical watermill on the tidal portion of the river Suir.

As mentioned earlier, the annals and the CGG provide written evidence for interactions between the Norse and Irish. This is further confirmed by both placename evidence, including the modern name of the county, and by archaeological evidence. Excavations in Waterford city have provided evidence for a hybrid, Hiberno-Norse town very similar in layout to Dublin, although chronologically somewhat later; the datable evidence for town living in Waterford relates to the eleventh, rather than the tenth century. This makes the site of Woodstown further inland along the banks of the Suir, all the more exciting. Excavations there uncovered evidence for both pre-Viking Irish settlement and Viking occupation, and the site appears to have been abandoned by its Norse inhabitants around the same date as the earliest occupation evidence from Waterford town. All of these factors, along with a desire to balance the much larger number of works on this period related to Dublin, have led to the selection of the Déisi kingdom for this study.

0.3 Thesis Organization

In order to achieve the goals set out in this introduction, this thesis is broken up into five chapters and a concluding section. The first chapter discusses models and theories of urbanization and town development in general, and as they have been applied by scholars to the Irish evidence. The second chapter explores the documentary sources available for the study of this period of Irish history, with some comments about their strengths and weaknesses as sources for the reconstruction of settlement and society in the Déisi kingdom. Chapter 2 concludes with comments about the archaeological evidence used in

[15] Michael Moore, *Archaeological Inventory of Co. Waterford*, Dublin: Stationery Office, 1999.

this thesis, and on the methodologies used for integrating the information derived from such a wide variety of source materials.

These first two chapters are an introduction to the concepts and assumptions that underpin Chapters 3, 4 and 5. The three discussion chapters each cover a chronological period, the eighth century, ninth and tenth centuries, and eleventh century, respectively. These chronological periods are somewhat arbitrary, but were chosen to capture the pre-Viking period, the early Viking age, and the late or post-Viking period. Each of these three chapters has an archaeological case study: eighth century settlement is discussed in light of evidence from the Blackwater valley, the phenomenon of the *longphort* is explored through the excavated ninth and tenth century site of Woodstown, and the eleventh century material from Waterford town helps to illuminate the relationship between town and hinterland in the final discussion chapter. The decision to end the study at around the year 1100 was based on the recognition that the events of the early twelfth century represent an entirely new set of political, social and economic developments that, while fascinating, cannot be covered adequately in the scope of this thesis. Each chapter discusses developments in secular and ecclesiastical politics, the economy, and settlement in Ireland and in the Déisi kingdom during the period under consideration, in an effort to highlight change through time.

Finally, the conclusion attempts to draw together the many strands of argument that run through this thesis, and to point out both the remaining gaps in the evidence currently available, and questions that could form the basis for further research. The body of the thesis takes up the first volume of this work; the second volume contains a gazetteer of the early medieval archaeological sites examined in Chapter 3, along with a bibliography of materials consulted in the production of this thesis. Unless otherwise noted, all maps, illustrations and photographs are the writer's own.

As mentioned above, it is not the purpose of this thesis to redefine early medieval settlement in Ireland, to provide a new complete model for urbanization, or to narrate the definitive history of the Déisi kingdom in this period. Rather, this thesis is intended to present evidence from the understudied Déisi kingdom in order to make some preliminary suggestions about settlement, politics and urbanization in that study area. It is hoped that this interdisciplinary and regional approach, which was effective for the study area chosen for this thesis, will prove to be useful in future case studies on other Irish regions.

Chapter 1

Towns and Urbanization in Early Medieval North West Europe and Ireland: Models, Theories and Definitions

1.1 Introduction

This thesis enquires into the origins of town life in Ireland in the early middle ages. In order to approach the questions raised by the Irish evidence, it is necessary to discuss underlying assumptions and terminology. This chapter will discuss ways of defining towns and town life, and models of the processes of urbanization that promote town development. Some of this theory has been developed to help explain particularly European developments, while other definitions are designed to be useful in the analysis of many time periods and geographical regions. Scholars who study town development in Ireland utilize some or all of this body of theory, but infrequently discuss their models openly. The second half of this chapter will discuss the major theories about town development in Ireland, and will link them to the various types of definitions and models of urbanization upon which they tacitly rely. Ultimately, this chapter will argue for a definition of towns and town living that relates more to function than to physical or legal criteria, but which recognizes that the diversity of early medieval Irish site types cannot wholly be explained by even the most nuanced models.

1.2 Defining Towns

The concept of a town may seem to be straightforward and common sense, but an enormous body of scholarship by geographers, economists, historians, archaeologists, demographers and anthropologists has yet to agree on a definition of a town that is at once broad enough to be widely applicable and specific enough to be of diagnostic value.

In his 1970 synopsis of the debate, Helmuth Schledermann points out many of the major problems involved in developing a workable definition of a town. [1] In the late ninth and early 20th centuries, the legalistic definition of a medieval town employed by historians allowed for a high degree of precision, in that it focused on only one attribute of a town. This way of defining towns fell short when historians turned their attention to the social and economic characteristics of towns and their populations. With the influx of archaeological data from medieval towns, particularly after the Second World War, the debate became even more confused. Archaeologists began to write about 'incipient towns' or 'pre-urban centres', indicating that the definitions with which they were attempting to work were not sufficiently flexible to allow for the accurate description and interpretation of the evidence they were uncovering.

Scholars attempted to respond to the increasing levels of imprecision by developing better typologies and definitions. To create typologies, scholars tried either to synthesize data into ideal types that could be contrasted across geographic space and time, or to build models around evidence derived from local or regional studies. Both of these modelling techniques ran the risk of circular argument, and tended to have little practical applicability. Efforts to develop new definitions were equally problematic. These could be either synthetic, essentially another type of model, or operational, intended to be used by the reader to understand one particular case study or argument. Every definition, however, was created with some specific town or group of towns in mind, and scholars trying to employ them were always left with sites that were 'almost' towns.

Despite these difficulties, the dangers of refusing to define are even greater. Schledermann points out that those who reject the process of definition merely fail to make plain the methodological and theoretical substructure of their arguments. Although he is somewhat pessimistic about the possibilities of developing workable models or definitions

[1] Helmuth Schledermann, 'The idea of the town: typology, definitions and approaches to the study of the medieval town in northern Europe', *World Archaeology* Vol. 2, No. 2 (Oct. 1970), 115-27.

of town life, Schledermann advocates studies that focus on the structure and function of various settlement forms as the best route to the refinement of our understanding of urbanism.

Many of Schledermann's points were explored further at a multidisciplinary conference in London in 1970 that gave rise to the massive volume *Man, Settlement and Urbanism.*[2] The contributors come from a range of disciplines and bring a variety of methodologies to the study of towns. A number of papers stand out as particularly useful in advancing our understanding of how towns can or should be defined. At one end of the spectrum, John Alexander cautions that our notions of the characteristic features of a town may be anachronistic and therefore may not be applicable to the historical cases under consideration. The only really enduring features of a town, in Alexander's view, are permanence and a fixed location. He argues that one possible definition would be simply that a settlement is a town if its contemporary viewers believed it to be a town.[3] This has important ramifications in Ireland, among other regions, where certain places referred to as towns or cities in contemporary documentary sources lack archaeological evidence of the sorts of features typically understood to be urban.

Ruth Tringham agrees that there is no one 'right' definition of a town, because in reality, there is a continuum of possible site types with a variety of functions and characteristics. She argues that the major characteristic of an urban place is its dependence on the countryside that surrounds it for its raw materials and foodstuffs. The agrarian population from the surrounding area will benefit in turn from the wide variety of social, political, economic, military or administrative functions that are centralized at the town. Due to that relationship, she argues, urban places should not be viewed as separate from

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[2] Peter J. Ucko, Ruth Tringham and G.W. Dimbleby, eds., *Man, Settlement and Urbanism: Proceedings of a Meeting of the Research Seminar in Archaeology and Related Subjects Held at the Institute of Archaeology, London University,* 1972.

[3] John Alexander, ' The Beginnings of Urban Life in Europe', in Ucko, et. al., eds., 843-50.

the rural, agrarian settlement pattern, but as fully embedded participants in that network.[4] This marks a significant departure from the theories promoted by Henri Pirenne, for instance, which portray towns as wholly separate from and in opposition to the rural, agrarian component of society.[5]

David Grove argues in a similar vein to Tringham, noting that the compactness of a town would make it very distinct morphologically and socially from the surrounding countryside. He clarifies the differences between rural villages, towns and cities, arguing that a town provides services for a catchment area, whereas a village can only provide services for its own population. The difference between towns and cities, in Grove's view, is simply order of magnitude. Cities provide a more varied and complex set of services than towns, but their essential functions are analogous.[6]

Bruce Trigger clarifies and crystallizes many of the ideas explored by Tringham, Grove and Alexander. [7] He writes that 'service villages, towns and cities are at best arbitrary divisions of a continuum', and that any definition of a town must be able to accommodate settlements of a variety of sizes and levels of complexity.[8] This means that definitions must focus, as Schledermann hoped, on the social, political and economic functions of towns. Trigger explains simply that, 'whatever else a city may be it is a unit of settlement which performs specialized functions in relationship to a broader hinterland'.[9] Like Tringham, he emphasizes the fact that towns can only exist and can only be defined in the context of their rural hinterlands. However, Trigger also importantly points out that the presence or absence of towns should not be taken as indicative of a society's level of complexity. Many societies carry out a wide variety of complex political, social and economic activities at dispersed locations, rather than at a single or a

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[4] Ruth Tringham, 'Introduction: Settlement Patterns and Urbanization', in Ucko, et. al., eds., xix-xxviii.
[5] Henri Pirenne, *Medieval Cities: Their Origins and the Revival of Trade*, trans. Frank D. Halsey, New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1956.
[6] David Grove, 'The Function and Future of Urban Centres', in Ucko, et. al., eds., 559-65.
[7] Bruce Trigger, 'Determinants of Urban Growth in Pre-Industrial Societies', in Ucko, et. al., eds., 575-599.
[8] Ibid., 577.
[9] Ibid.

very few centralized locations. Centralization can happen for a variety of reasons, at different rates and under different conditions, and once established, towns and cities can grow, shrink or collapse over a given period of time.[10]

The four papers by Alexander, Tringham, Grove and Trigger each share the notion that a settlement's function is the best indicator of whether or not it can be defined as a town. A fifth paper from the same conference volume outlines the major methodological implications of defining urbanism based on a site's functions and the form necessitated by centralization of those functions. Paul Wheatley distils a variety of approaches down to four main ways of examining urbanism.[11] Interactional models are based on the growth of specialized networks of social, economic and political relationships that centred on cities. Normative models conceive of urbanism as a recognizable way of life, and incidentally, one that can potentially occur at sites that are not towns or cities. Economic models examine the centralization and development of productive, consumptive and redistributive functions at particular sites. Demographic models leave aside all of these other considerations and simply view urbanism as the quality of dense aggregations of people in a restricted area. While each of these approaches has its merits, Schledermann's cautions still apply.

Each of the papers discussed above raises important points of theory to bear in mind while attempting to talk about towns and their role in the economic, social and political life of the societies in which they are situate. None, however, provides the reader with a workable definition of a town. Because most scholars in the fields of history, archaeology or historical geography are typically more concerned with substance than with theory, they are forced to develop and apply what Schledermann termed 'operational definitions' in order to allow them to specify what features of urban form or function they are examining. This is sometimes referred to as the *Kriterienbundel* approach, in which

[10] Trigger, 'Determinants of Urban Growth', 595-6.
[11] Paul Wheatley, 'The Concept of Urbanism', in Ucko, et. al., eds., 601-37.

the researcher develops a checklist of urban characteristics, and some threshold number of features a site must have in order to be considered a town. In his discussion of towns in Anglo-Saxon England, Martin Biddle employed this approach, explaining that, 'since there is no basic agreement on what a town was or is, a conceptual definition was adopted according to which a place was accepted as a town if it possessed or fulfilled more than one of the following criteria,' listing the following twelve features: defences, a planned street system, one or more markets, a mint, legal autonomy, a role as a central place, a relatively large, dense population, a diversified economy, urban-type plots and houses, social differentiation, complex religious organization and a judicial centre. He notes, however, that 'the possession of one or even more of them does not prove urban status, but merely provides an indication which has to be considered more closely in each case'.[12] In this sense, he uses the *Kriterienbundel* as a way of organizing evidence and as a guide to talking about the characteristics of urban life, rather than as a definition or explanatory model.

Biddle explicitly states that the presence or absence of one feature of urban life should not allow a site to be identified as a town. In this sense, his approach conceives of towns as a polythetic group, in which 'each entity possesses a large number of attributes of the group, each attribute is shared by large numbers of entities, and no one attribute is both sufficient and necessary to group membership'.[13] In theory, this should allow researchers to work with a concept of the town that is flexible enough to include two settlement forms that are quite different in their form and function. In practice, however, researchers who choose the criteria to be examined have in mind some notion of a town that both guides their choice of characteristic features and, whether explicitly or implicitly, prioritizes the list. Moreover, some of the characteristics will be easier to identify than others, and some are problematic in themselves. For instance, while defences and house plots may be easily

[12] Martin Biddle, 'Towns', in David M. Wilson, ed., *The Archaeology of Anglo-Saxon England*, 1976, 100.
[13] David L. Clarke, *Analytic Archaeology*, 1968, 37-8.

identified in excavations, the degree to which a settlement operated as a central place within its region is frequently difficult to assess, and draws on the author's and the readers' grasp of yet another body of theory.

In his important and somewhat controversial work, *Dark Age Economics*, Richard Hodges attempts to avoid some of these major pitfalls when defining the subject of his analysis. He offers the following overall definition:

> 'An urban community is a settlement of some size and population which is markedly larger than communities concerned with subsistence alone; the majority of its inhabitants, moreover, are not engaged in full-time agrarian pursuits. Such a community should include the presence of more than one institution, so that a monastery or palace can only be termed urban if it is the focus of more people than merely monks or ministers and royalty. It is not possible to sustain proto-urbanism: a site is either urban or it is not.'[14]

He goes on then to focus on one particular sub-type of urban site, the *emporia*, also referred to by some scholars as 'ports of trade' or 'gateway communities'. These have a specific role as links in a network of long-distance trade routes, and are the point at which the local and regional economies articulate with an inter-regional economy. In selecting such sites, he adds specificity to his general definition. The select groups of towns with which Hodges concerns himself are involved in long-distance trade, serve as central places within their locale and region, and are conspicuous both for their relative population density and for their dependence on their agrarian hinterland for food and raw materials. This definition derives from his concept of the conditions under which the processes of urbanization can occur, as will be discussed in the next section, but its practical value is that it offers a workable model of a sub-type of early medieval urban centres.

While Hodges' definition certainly moves the debate along, it is important to recognize that his decision to focus on the *emporia* was motivated by his overall argument. Nevertheless, as Chris Dyer has noted, Hodges' overall definition met with approval, particularly from historians. Archaeologists, by contrast, were more reliant on the

[14] Richard Hodges, *Dark Age Economics: The origins of towns and trade AD 600-1000*, 1982, 23.

Kriterienbundel approach as elaborated by Biddle.[15] Perhaps this is due to the fact that archaeologists, faced with the masses of data produced even in the course of modestly-sized excavations, were unable to come to quick hypotheses with regard to a site's role as a central place, or the extent of its trading links. Features like street-plans and defences, being easier to identify, may have seemed like firmer ground upon which to base preliminary interpretations. Whatever the reason, differences in methodological approach made the sharing of data between the disciplines more difficult.

Hodges' work had another important result. He argues that the mid-ninth century saw a 'critical morphogenesis' in the social and economic structures of Carolingia, Anglo-Saxon England and Scandinavia. After this point, from about 900 onwards, Europe became a 'truly urban society' characterized by state formation, increased political and economic centralization, and an increasingly complex division of labour. He attributes this to a variety of factors that interacted with one another in what he calls the 'multiplier effect', a positive feedback mechanism that facilitated change. Some of the towns that developed after that point grew from the *emporia* of the earlier phase of urbanization, but many were established *de novo*. [16] Some scholars following on from his thinking have therefore begun to view the *emporia* phase of urbanization itself as an entire era of 'proto-urbanism' that preceded the full urbanization of the period after 900. Adriaan Verhulst, for instance, argues that in terms of morphology and socio-economic character, the early towns of the eighth and ninth centuries are more similar to the surrounding countryside or to rural villages than they are to towns of the tenth and eleventh centuries.[17]

Methodologically, this has significant consequences. On the one hand, it emphasizes the continuum of settlement forms from dispersed rural settlements to rural

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[15] Christopher Dyer, 'Recent developments in early medieval urban history and archaeology in England', in D. Denecke and G. Shaw, eds., *Urban Historical Geography: Recent Progress in Britain and Ireland*, Cambridge Studies in Historical Geography 10, 1988, 69-80.
[16] Hodges, *Dark Age Economics*, 151-61.
[17] Adriaan Verhulst, 'The origins and early development of medieval towns in northern Europe', *Economic History Review* Vol. 47, No. 2 (1994), 362-73.

villages, to service villages, to 'proto-towns', to fully urban centres. However, the model can come to have a life of its own, with scholars trying to determine why a proto-town 'failed' to grow into a fully-fledged town. The element of chronology can actually serve to obscure the arguments about form and function that constitute the bulk of the debate. For instance, although it is worth pointing out the similarities between *emporia* and rural villages, one should not obscure their differing economic roles and relationships to other settlements near and far.

Even when the chronological element is removed, scholars still have difficulties creating definitions that can divide the continuum of settlement forms into acceptable types. One of the most commonly used definitions of a town in recent scholarship derives from the work of Susan Reynolds. She argues that a town is a permanent, relatively dense settlement whose inhabitants are primarily engaged in non-agrarian occupations. This entails a particular relationship with a rural hinterland from which the population of the town acquires its food and raw materials. Reynolds argues further that the town should be clearly distinguishable from its rural surroundings and that its inhabitants should view themselves and be viewed as different from their rural neighbours.[18]

Chris Dyer attempts to use this definition to discuss the distinction between a large village and a small town, at least in the English context.[19] The debate surrounding this point is indicative of the difficulties archaeologists face when processing the results of a given excavation. It can be challenging to argue for the 'urban' status of a small site located in a rural area. Of all of the distinguishing features Dyer highlights, the most problematic may be the question of the occupations of a settlement's inhabitants. It is often hard to prove that none of the inhabitants of a settlement engaged in any kind of agricultural labour. One could point out a paucity of tools related to cultivation, grain

[18] Susan Reynolds, *An Introduction to the History of English Medieval Towns*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977, ix-x; Susan Reynolds, 'The writing of medieval urban history in England', *Theoretische Geschiedens* 19 (1992), 49-50.

[19] Christopher Dyer, 'The Archaeology of Medieval Small Towns', *Medieval Archaeology* Vol. 47, Issue 1 (2003), 85-114, especially 98-101.

processing, or other related activities, but this is an argument from silence. Perhaps the best evidence would be from faunal assemblages and botanical remains indicative of off-site processing. Such high-resolution data is not always easy to come by, especially on a small site, and off-site processing could have been carried out by town dwellers. Ideally, if one were able to reconstruct the socio-economic geography of the entire surrounding region, it would be possible to assess the role of that large village/small town within the wider settlement pattern. If that were possible, the identification of the site as a village or a town would almost be redundant, because its actual function would be apparent.

In his important recent work, *The Field and the Forge*, John Landers advocates this regional, landscape-based approach to the study of towns and the societies in which they develop.

> Towns and cities do not simply pop up at random, or in response to some immanent logic of their own. They develop because living there enables their inhabitants, or the dominant element among them, to achieve their goals in ways that the available alternatives do not. Another way of saying this is that urban settlements always have a function, or functions, with respect to some broader social and economic system within which they are embedded… Their functions only make sense in terms of relationships with settlements elsewhere, whether these are dispersed across the surrounding countryside or distantly located on trade routes and other communication networks.[20]

Landers pushes scholars to ask what people were trying to do when they established a given settlement. This applies not only to towns and cities, but to any settlement form. If the focus is shifted away from the defining characteristics of specific settlement forms and onto the varied and shifting ways in which a given society accomplishes its goals within the geographical space it inhabits, we may get closer to an understanding of early medieval urbanization and town life.

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[20] John Landers, *The Field and the Forge: Population, Production and Power in the Pre-Industrial West*, Oxford University Press, 2003, 110-11.

1.3 Urbanization

The term 'urbanization' implies a set of changes to the organization of a population and its activities over a period of time. In this sense, the concept of urbanization is wider in scope than that of town development, in that it encompasses changes occurring in areas that remain rural throughout the period in question, as well as in areas that take on any of a range of urban functions, however they may be defined. As Landers' definition quoted above explains, the establishment of a town is an intentional, innovative act by an individual or group. The observation that a town was established in a particular time and place should lead to questions about the changes that allowed for or encouraged the rise of that settlement form as opposed to any other.

As is so often the case, this is easier said than accomplished. One of the major problems in the study of early medieval urbanization is the nature of the evidence. While in many regions, a fair amount of both archaeological and documentary evidence is available for analysis, it is frequently difficult to reconcile the two, or to use them side-by-side in a meaningful way. This is due in part to the fact that many of the names of kingdoms, territorial units and places discussed in the sources remain difficult to place on the ground.

Even more pressing are the methodological problems that face archaeologists who wish to contribute to a discussion on changes in settlement patterns through time. Firstly, the documentary sources tend to describe or discuss named groups of people- kingdoms, lineages, tribes, linguistic groups, etc. On the one hand, it is usually unclear how these named groups were divided into communities, and further, how those communities were organized into settlements for which we might uncover archaeological evidence. Here, the term community is defined as the largest group of people who routinely interact face to face. A settlement should be taken to mean the physical place inhabited by a group of

people. A settlement is typically home to one community, but in some cases, a large community can be spread over more than one settlement, or a large settlement can be home to more than one community.[21]

In order to analyze changes over time in a given region or society, scholars have to look at more than single settlements. Typically, the unit of study is the settlement pattern, defined by Irving Rouse as, 'the manner in which a people's cultural activities and social institutions are distributed over the landscape'.[22] However, even in the most detailed studies, archaeologists and geographers never have the opportunity to deal with the settlement pattern itself, but only with its remains, which Rouse refers to as the 'remnant settlement pattern'. Like all other archaeological assemblages, the settlement pattern is subject to the vagaries of deposition and destruction, and it is only ever possible to offer hypothetical reconstructions of the original organization of people and their lives within the landscape. Archaeological investigation of remnant settlement patterns can, however, offer unique insights into the geographic distributions of certain activities. For instance, in some settlement patterns, similar activities are carried out at each site under investigation, while in others, certain activities are concentrated at specific locations. Those locations could be determined by access to resources necessary for the activity, or selected for other reasons. Examination of all of these variables is vital to the study of urbanization.

Even in regions in which the remnant settlement pattern is particularly complete, it is sometimes difficult to see what evidence for change through time it can offer to researchers.[23] While economic and ecological changes may be reflected in changing artefact, faunal or archaeo-botanical assemblages or the abandonment or shifting of settlements, social and political changes are not always reflected by changes in settlement patterns. In the reverse, changes in settlement patterns or settlement forms may not signal

[21] Tringham, 'Introduction: Settlement Patterns and Urbanization, xix-xxviii.
[22] Irving Rouse, 'Settlement Patterns in Archaeology', in Ucko, et. al., eds., 96.
[23] Tringham, 'Introduction: Settlement Patterns and Urbanization, xix-xxviii.

sweeping societal change. This can be a source of confusion and difficulty for scholars engaged in interdisciplinary research.

Despite the inherent methodological problems, many scholars have tackled the question of urbanization, which is, in essence, an issue of change in settlement patterns through time. Based on the definitions discussed in the last section, the general consensus seems to be that a town is, at its most basic, an aggregation of people engaged in a wider-than-normal variety of activities, and with a higher-than-normal level of connection to both long- and short-distance networks of exchange. Based on the concept of the settlement pattern discussed above, this means that the establishment of a town involves the centralization of functions that previously occurred over a wider, decentralized area. It may also indicate that new activities are occurring.

The reasons for this centralization of activities and people have been the subject of much scholarly debate, leading to a variety of definitions of the concept of a central place. Brian Blouet argues that a central place develops as a result of resource inequalities over a given region. These can result from natural environmental differences, or can be a consequence of the production of a surplus in a particular locality. Because people will need to exchange goods to even out this inequality, they will meet at mutually convenient central places. He also points out that certain agricultural technologies or activities may encourage households to cluster in order to benefit from cooperative labour.[24]

These can facilitate the development of at least two types of nucleated settlements, green-field trading sites and agglomerations of farms. While these are both important to our understanding of urbanization, other scholars have pointed out that many towns and cities are founded in or around pre-existing royal, military or religious centres. Dyer has discussed the presence of all of these types of 'pre-urban nuclei' in Anglo-Saxon

[24] Brian Blouet, 'Factors Influencing the Evolution of Settlement Patterns', in Ucko, et., al., eds., 3-15.

England.[25] The green-field trading sites may be represented by a group of sites known as 'productive sites', where concentrations of metal work and coins are found in open country, sometimes at road junctions or fords. These may have been periodic markets or another type of central place.[26]

According to Hodges, when periodic markets concerned with long-distance trade became more regular, permanent structures were built on the site, and more and more people would lived there permanently or seasonally. If the long-distance trade that necessitated its foundation continued to thrive, it would continue its organic growth, and frequently would acquire additional social and political functions, usually under the influence of strong rulers.[27] While many of the changes that constitute the process of urbanization were gradual, Hodges argues that this takeover of the *emporia* by the ruling elite, 'marks a major socio-political action best modelled by the sudden flip-over point in a catastrophe-theory model, such is the speed with which it appears to occur'.[28]

Hodges is not alone in emphasizing the twin influences of trade and political authority in the development of towns. In his discussion of urbanization in early medieval Scandinavia, Hans Andersson states that, 'urbanization can be seen as part of the general political, administrative and economic development, and is in certain situations difficult to distinguish from the organizational development towards a state-like political system'.[29] He points out, however, that a variety of settlement forms can grow into urban centres, from the long distance trading sites that Hodges emphasizes, to simple agrarian villages. Additionally, he cites evidence from certain regions, such as northern Norway and Iceland, in which complex social, economic and political activities took place at a variety of different sites within a 'central area' rather than at a single town.[30] Devroey noticed a

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[25] Dyer, 'The Archaeology of Medieval Small Towns', 88-91.
[26] Ibid., 91.
[27] Hodges, *Dark Age Economics*, 51-2.
[28] Ibid., 65.
[29] Hans Andersson, 'Urbanisation', in Knut Helle, ed., *Cambridge History of Scandinavia*, Vol. 1, 2003, 316.
[30] Ibid., 315-7.

similar pattern in certain areas of Frankia, based on evidence from the eighth to the tenth centuries. Some areas had 'nebulous' settlement patterns with several concentrations of people and activities, rather than a single centralized town. Certain 'urban' activities like significant trade activity or craft production were happening in the area, but not at sites exhibiting the typical physical characteristics of population density, defences or house-plots.[31]

Landers' work on pre-industrial economies offers a helpful framework for thinking about the social, economic and political roles of central places. He argues that the pre-industrial economy operates on two levels. Low-level traffic is characteristic of the subsistence economy of the majority of rural population. High-bulk goods are moved short distances from the fields to the home or market, and few people need to travel either very far or very fast. In this context, the central places that develop are 'oriented to the requirements of cultivators, their supporting specialists, and local masters'.[32] This includes processing centres like a mill, manufacturing centres like a blacksmith's forge, or centres of political and religious activity like a church or elite residence. Each of these places has its primary function, but also tends to be the location at which the community conducts certain other economic and social activities. The positioning of these agrarian central places will be determined by the landscape and the logic of the overall settlement pattern. Such sites can grow if they take on an increased variety of functions over a period of time, and in response, other central places may lose some of their former functions or fall into disuse.[33]

Alongside this low-level economic activity, high-level traffic involves the moving of low-bulk, high value goods, rare raw materials and information. This type of exchange is largely operated and controlled by a supra-regional elite whose status is partly based on

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[31] J.P. Devroey, 'Courants et réseaux d'échange dans l'économie franque entre Loire a Rhine', in T.R. Mayer, ed., *Mercati e mercanti nell'alto medioevo: l'area euroasiatica e l'area mediterranea*, 1993, 327-89, especially 371-81.
[32] Landers, *The Field and the Forge*, 99.
[33] Ibid.

access to these commodities. The same networks were often used to move troops, war materiel or intelligence, and when long-distance road building or investment in other transport infrastructure occurred in the early medieval period, it was typically done under political authority for economic or military advantages. When towns developed within this system, they were 'nodal trading centres' serving these elite consumers, and tended to be located near political or royal centres.[34]

Landers argues that either of these types of central places can form the core of a town or city, although they can also exist for long periods of time without taking on urban characteristics. In his view, a true urban centre forms a link between these two networks. 'Urban populations relied on their agrarian hinterland for food, and so towns and cities were potential gateways between the two economies'.[35] Therefore, because urbanization is a process that involves both levels of economic activity and all segments of the community, evidence for urbanization should be sought throughout a given region.

This is particularly true of the hinterland, or the territory from which the population of a town obtains its food and raw materials. Agriculture in these areas tends to become specialized, oriented to produce a surplus to supply the town, and perhaps to produce specific raw materials needed in the manufacture of goods for sale or export.[36] Dyer has summarized the dual role of towns, which 'were both changing their own environments, and serving as hubs, unifying their hinterlands and acting as channels of communication between rural economies. This role as centres of exchange benefited the towns but also stimulated production and specialization in the nearby countryside'.[37]

Landers' major addition to the debate is his emphasis on the concept of 'spatial integration', which he defines as the 'co-ordination of activities over growing distances', and which he argues was a 'prerequisite for both economic growth and political

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[34] Ibid.
[35] Landers, *The Field and the Forge*, 109.
[36] Ibid., 112.
[37] Dyer, 'The Archaeology of Medieval Small Towns', 101.

centralization and its practicability depended on the state of transport and communications' within the region in question.[38] Economic growth, he argues, requires spatial integration in the form of regional specialization and trade, while political centralization requires the means to exercise power over larger territorial units. 'Both forms of spatial integration were linked to the emergence of towns and cities as centres of exchange, co-ordination, and, more rarely, specialized production'.[39] This is not entirely different from Hodges' argument that the combined forces of long-distance trade and political power led to the establishment of towns, but Landers' study emphasizes the regional, rather than nodal, aspects of urbanization. In this sense, the examination of spatial integration, as it is manifested throughout the settlement pattern, is perhaps more useful than examining only towns.

1.4 Urbanization in Pre-Norman Ireland: Introduction

As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, urbanization and the origins of towns in Ireland have long been attributed to the Vikings, either through direct imposition of urban settlements on a non-urban society, or by indirectly bringing Ireland into greater contact with the wider, urbanizing European economy. Unfortunately, Irish scholars very rarely analyze their assumptions, theoretical approaches or models, particularly when discussing newly discovered archaeological evidence. This next section will highlight the work of those scholars who have contributed to the debate about urbanization in Ireland, and will attempt to explain the links between their research and the models of urbanization discussed above.

1.5 Theories of Irish Urbanization

As research into the secular and ecclesiastical social, economic and political history of early medieval Ireland flourished during the 1960s and 1970s with the work of such scholars as Kathleen Hughes, F.J. Byrne, Donnchadh Ó Corráin and many others, Binchy's

[38] Landers, *The Field and the Forge*, 72, 98.
[39] Landers, *The Field and the Forge*, 98.

concept of the Vikings as a 'shattering' force came to be seen as untenable. Other aspects of his theories thus came under scrutiny, particularly his insistence that town life was alien to Irish society and was imposed upon them by the Viking invaders.[40] This renewed attention in the late 1970s and 1980s also drew on the theories of historians and geographers working on other aspects of early urbanization in Europe. Writing in 1977, Butlin suggested that the Iron Age hillforts of Ireland might be analogous to the *oppida* found elsewhere in Europe and which frequently appear to have some features of urbanism, particularly markets.[41] Although his theory has not been borne out by the archaeological evidence, Butlin made the following important statement:

> Thus the 'imported urbanism only' thesis is inadequate, and needs further critical examination in the light of fresh evidence, for it does not take sufficient cognizance of the effects of social, economic, religious and political changes which were undoubtedly being experienced in the period from the fifth to the twelfth century, and which resulted in the rise of new forms of social organisation and settlement, and, at the other extreme, the demise and redundancy of some features of political and economic organization which had survived, in all probability, since the Iron Age. The effects of this matrix of changes on settlement forms is still far from clear, but it does seem that in the period under consideration some form of actual or incipient urbanism took place…[42]

In other words, Butlin called for renewed inquiry into the relationship between social and economic change and changes in settlement forms, including but not limited to urbanization or town development.

This is the focus of much of Doherty's attention in publications from 1980 onward. His article on trade and exchange in early medieval Ireland highlights the growing importance of trade, as distinct from other forms of economic interaction like gift-giving, reciprocal exchange, or the accumulation and redistribution of wealth by an individual or

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[40] D.A. Binchy, 'The passing of the old order', in Ó Cuív, ed., *Proceedings of the International Congress of Celtic Studies*, 1962, 119-32.
[41] R.A. Butlin, 'Urban and proto-urban settlements in pre-Norman Ireland', in R.A. Butlin, ed., *The development of the Irish town*, 1977, 11-27. For *oppida* as possible pre-urban cores, see D. Nash, 'The growth of urban society in France', in B. Cunliffe and T. Rowley, eds., *Oppida in barbarian Europe* BAR Supplementary Series II, 1976, 95-133.
[42] Ibid., 25.

an institution. While in theory trade occurs on neutral ground between at least theoretical equals, and has no 'personal' component, reciprocal or redistributive exchanges are primarily designed to establish and maintain relationships between the parties involved. For a variety of reasons, between the eighth and tenth centuries, throughout northern Europe but at varying rates, there was an increase in economic activity, a centralization of authority, and a rise in trade activities. The rise in trade goes hand in hand with that of central authority, because trade and the market place are not controlled by social pressure in the way that reciprocal or redistributive exchanges are. For this reason, over this period from the eighth to the tenth centuries, the community as the mediator and control over economic activity 'was steadily losing ground' to centralized authority and the marketplace.[43]

He applies this concept to the Irish evidence, and argues that signs of increased economic activity and the centralization of political authority can be perceived in Ireland by the end of the eighth century, prior to the start of substantial interactions with the Vikings. Over the ninth and tenth centuries, he argues that at least two types of urbanism developed in Ireland: at the coastal towns, urbanism was tied to trade, especially long-distance trade, while certain large monastic centres served as hubs in the redistributive system. He suggests that there may be other foci of economic activity as yet unknown. The reciprocal/redistributive and market-based economies were, however, crucially linked, and grew side by side over the tenth and eleventh centuries. Kingship also continued to develop during this period, with strong kings increasing both the extent and the intensity of their control over their territories and sub-kings, and the efforts of the most powerful kings to expand their authority were supported by the church. They participated in the increasing economic activity in order to consolidate their hierarchical relationships; the late eleventh or early twelfth century text, *Lebor na Cert*, demonstrates the increasingly substantial and

[43] Charles Doherty, 'Exchange and Trade in Early Medieval Ireland', *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 110 (1980), 67-71.

elaborate gifts involved in reciprocal exchanges between kings, in which imported goods played a large part.

Doherty closed the article with the comment, 'the purpose of this paper has been to present a framework within which research on towns and trade can be accommodated. In the past there has been a tendency to confine commercial activity in Ireland to the Norse coastal towns. If I have shown that it is impossible to consider these sites in isolation then one point will have been made'.[44] In this sense, he seeks the complex of changes in Irish social, economic and political organization that made urbanization possible over the period from the eighth and ninth centuries to the tenth and eleventh centuries.

However, Doherty is best known for his 'monastic town' hypothesis; he argues that by the seventh or eighth century, the church was in a 'unique position' to develop urban characteristics. By that stage, the church 'was an institution in a way that early medieval kingship could never be', with established centres, a large, stratified population, access to agrarian technology and the manpower to use it to produce a surplus. Perhaps even more importantly, the ecclesiastical enclosure seems to have delineated an area of sanctuary, agreed upon, and therefore respected, by the church, secular authority and the community.[45] Doherty draws on studies of towns in the ancient world to argue that this sanctified or protected zone was one of the major features of archaic towns, and that establishing a town involved the laying out of its perimeter. The church seems to have been able to merge the classical and biblical concept of the sacred city with early Irish concepts of kingly protection involving ceremonial measurement of the boundaries of the protected site.[46] These notional and physical boundaries allowed the church to distinguish between varying levels of sanctity, and to apply different standards of acceptable behaviour and activity in different areas of an ecclesiastical site. Thus they were able to

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[44] Doherty, 'Exchange and Trade', 85.
[45] Charles Doherty, 'The monastic town in early medieval Ireland', in Clarke and Simms, eds., *The Comparative History of Urban Origins in Non-Roman Europe*, vol. 1, 1985, 55.
[46] Ibid., 47-51.

restrict the core area of the church enclosure to clerical or religious people and activities, 'while at the same time expansion on the periphery was virtually unlimited'.[47] Secular individuals and non-religious activities could occupy the surrounding 'suburbs', but their proximity to the sanctified enclosed area afforded them a degree of sanctuary or protection. This schema was intended to place the church at the literal and figurative centre of the community, and to make it a focus for religious and secular activity and settlement. The church's interest in attracting and moderating secular activities is manifest in their monumental architecture by the beginning of the tenth century. Doherty argues that stone churches, round towers, high crosses and open spaces were all designed for public use and to foster and protect a market or other secular activities. Certain sites that had this 'complete repertoire of public monuments and buildings' in the tenth century can be said to have had an urban character, and Doherty offers the examples of Kildare and Clonmacnoise.[48] He notes the close links between both of these sites and powerful secular dynasties during the period over which they developed their increasing role in the economic and political networks of their regions.[49] Finally, he reiterates that the growth of the monastic town was linked to the growth of the coastal towns from the tenth century onward, and that their success was also connected to the increasing powers of secular kings and the centralization of political authority.[50]

Doherty's analysis met with enough approval that only a few years later, Graham could refer to the 'neo-orthodoxy of the monastic town' in his article on the origins of urbanism in early medieval Ireland.[51] Graham's criticism of Doherty's approach revolved around the fact that Doherty did not make explicit his assumptions about what constitutes an urban place: 'Doherty appears to be in favour of a multi-functional *kriterienbundel* mode of definition, although he avoids specifying precise limits'. He argues further that

[47] Doherty, 'The monastic town in early medieval Ireland', 59.
[48] Ibid., 60.
[49] Ibid., 61-7.
[50] Ibid., 68-71.
[51] B.J. Graham, 'Urban genesis in early medieval Ireland', *Journal of Historical Geography* 13 (1987), 3-16.

this problem is not unique to Doherty, but is endemic in studies of urbanization, which are 'littered with qualifications such as 'proto-towns', 'pre-urban cores' and 'incipient towns''.[52] In the interests of both pinning down a workable definition of the town, and in order to assess the validity of the monastic town concept, Graham examines the characteristics of the hypothesized monastic towns and compares them to the criteria established by Weber. All in all, he argues that while there is evidence that some characteristics of urbanism developed at a very few monastic sites, almost no sites have enough of these features to be considered urban during this period. 'Thus the emergent orthodoxy of the monastic town is at least as contentious as the former belief in exogenous imposition which it replaces'.[53] He accepts that 'there is sufficient evidence to underpin a case that, structurally, Irish society could have supported urbanization before the Anglo-Norman invasion', but argues that the real moment of urbanization and the development of an urban network in Ireland was not the tenth and eleventh centuries, but the mid-twelfth and thirteenth centuries.[54]

Graham's critique and caution not to exaggerate the usefulness of the monastic town model were timely and appropriate, but his reliance on Weber's multi-functional or *Kriterienbundel* approach to the definition of towns put the debate back where it was when Doherty wrote about exchange and trade. Disproving the theory that various sites had urban qualities or were undergoing urbanization does not advance the state of knowledge about changes in the social, economic and political organization of Irish communities, or the effects of those changes on settlement patterns. Subsequent efforts to disprove the monastic town hypothesis have fallen into the same trap, and have introduced new complications to muddy the waters still further. Valante argues that 'the 'monastic town' is thus a misleading term that needs to be excised from our vocabulary in order to pursue

[52] Graham, 'Urban genesis in early medieval Ireland', 12.
[53] Ibid., 14.
[54] Ibid.

more useful avenues of research', following many of the same lines of criticism as Graham.[55] However, underlying Valante's work is the assumption that early medieval ecclesiastical sites could not be towns because they did not participate in manufacturing or long-distance trade to a sufficient degree.[56] In this way she bypasses Doherty's distinction between the roles of the coastal towns and the monastic towns in the Irish economy of the tenth and eleventh centuries, and once again sidesteps the genuine questions with regard to the changes in the organization and structure of Irish society over this period.

Swift also challenges those interpretations of Doherty's monastic town model which envision 'large nucleated and 'urban' or 'proto-urban' settlements from the seventh or eighth century'.[57] She examines seventh and eighth century documentation with a view towards understanding the physical and social layout of ecclesiastical sites of that period, and concludes that their organization resembled that of high-status secular sites. In both places, the core was a structure associated with either secular or ecclesiastical authority, like the king's house or the church. Around this core were the dwellings of professional members of the community, like warriors or priests, and then beyond that were buildings associated with subsidiary groups like scholars, penitents, administrators, and clients. This area outside the core of the settlement could also include open spaces for assemblies, fields, animal pens and agricultural outbuildings, and in the lands beyond the settlement nucleus were the fields and homes of the farmers associated with the church or lord who controlled the settlement. In other words, she argues that in the seventh and eighth century secular and ecclesiastical settlement strategies looked morphologically so similar that, 'instead of 'monastic towns', we should be talking of the forts and fields of the early Irish church'.[58] This point is well taken, and it is to be hoped that future excavations will be

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[55] Mary Valante, 'Reassessing the Irish 'monastic town', *Irish Historical Studies* Vol. 31, No. 121 (May 1998), 18.
[56] Ibid., 5.
[57] Catherine Swift, 'Forts and Fields: A study of 'monastic towns' in seventh and eighth century Ireland', *The Journal of Irish Archaeology* 9 (1998), 105.
[58] Swift, 'Forts and Fields', 119.

able to demonstrate how lordly or church sites functioned as foci for settlement, particularly unenclosed settlement. Swift's article acknowledges that settlement nucleation, if not urbanization, was probably a feature of Irish society prior to the Viking age, a fact that is still only reluctantly accepted and not well understood in Irish scholarship.[59]

To some extent, the monastic town model of urbanization remains on the back burner in current studies of Irish urbanization. It seems that almost everyone accepts that the largest ecclesiastical centres were more than just monasteries or churches, but the vocabulary does not exist to explain their role in the Irish economy, as Doherty set out to do. There is also a growing body of evidence to indicate social and economic changes in pre-Viking Ireland that facilitated increasing settlement nucleation, trade and exchange and the development of centralized authority. This line of inquiry into early medieval Irish urbanization remains distinct from another strand in the historiography that continues to dominate the discussion.

A significant portion of the debate around urbanization focuses not on the overall changes in the economy, social and political structures and settlement patterns of early medieval Ireland, but emphasizes the individual trajectories of the coastal towns themselves. Evidence from the excavations in Dublin and Waterford in the 1970s and 1980s has led scholars to argue that the towns were characterized by their inhabitants' non-subsistence occupation and consequent reliance on their hinterland for food and raw materials.[60] This recognition of their links to the local economy led Bradley to characterize the coastal towns in the tenth century as 'founded with the deliberate intention of exploiting the resources of the Irish hinterland and Ireland's position on the western sea

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[59] See below, Chapter 3.

[60] John Bradley, 'The interpretation of Scandinavian settlement in Ireland', in Bradley, ed., *Settlement and Society in Medieval Ireland: studies presented to Francis Xavier Martin*, Kilkenny: Boethius Press, 1988, 51-3.

routes'.[61] This apparent definition of a town as a link between the local economy of the hinterland and long-distance trade routes, echoing the definitions offered by Reynolds and others, seems to be the most common conceptual framework in which town development in Ireland is discussed.[62]

However, there seem to be lingering doubts as to the precise point at which a settlement becomes a 'true town'. In an effort to pin down a more precise working definition, most of these scholars return to a *Kriterienbundel* method of defining the town. They highlight the significance of street-plans, house plots and defences as signs of urbanism, alongside evidence for long-distance trade, manufacturing activities and reliance on the rural hinterland. On the basis of these features, Clarke and Wallace agree that the development of the coastal settlements into true urban centres occurred in the eleventh century, not the tenth, and that prior to that date they should not be considered towns.[63] Despite their arguments, most scholars continue to refer to Dublin, at least, as a town from the tenth century onward.[64]

Because the development of the coastal towns is seen as fundamentally tied to long-distance trade, there have been efforts to determine whether the earliest phases of Viking settlement also served as links between the local economy and long-distance trade networks, even in the absence of other features of urbanism. This leads to discussion about *longphuirt* (sg. *longphort*), the ship-camps often believed to be the earliest Viking settlements in Ireland. The coastal towns are believed to have been built on or near earlier

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[61] Bradley, 'The interpretation of Scandinavian settlement in Ireland', 70.
[62] Ibid., 71; P.F. Wallace, 'The Archaeological Identity of the Hiberno-Norse Town', *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 122 (1992), 35-66.
[63] Wallace, 'The Archaeological Identity', 62-4; H.B. Clarke, 'Proto-towns and Towns in Ireland and Britain in the ninth and tenth Centuries' in Clarke, Ó Floinn and Ní Mhaonaigh, eds., *Ireland and Scandinavia in the Early Viking Age*, 1998, 353, 368.
[64] For instance, Mary Valante, 'Dublin's economic relations with hinterland and periphery in the later Viking age', in Seán Duffy, ed., *Medieval Dublin I*, Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000, 69; Poul Holm, 'Viking Dublin and the City-State Concept: Parameters and Significance of the Hiberno-Norse Settlement', in M.H. Hansen, ed., *A Comparative Study of Thirty City-State Cultures*, Copenhagen, 2000, 253; Mary Valante, *The Vikings in Ireland: Settlement, Trade and Urbanization*, Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2008, 135; M. Murphy and M. Potterton, *The Dublin Region in the Middle Ages - Settlement, land-use and economy*, Discovery Programme Monograph No. 9, Dublin: Four Courts Press for the Discovery Programme, 2010, 61.

longphort settlements, and several other possible *longphuirt* have been identified in other parts of the country.[65] As will be discussed in greater detail later, *longphuirt* as a monument type are challenging to assess, because there is only one excavated example of a possible *longphort* site, at Woodstown, Co. Waterford.[66] Interestingly, most of the interpretations of Woodstown's significance focused on evidence that it was a centre of trading activity, specifically long-distance trade, despite the lack of substantial quantities of imported goods in the artefact assemblage.[67] In essence, the *longphuirt* and the early phases of the settlement at Dublin have come to represent a 'proto-urban' phase in Irish scholarship, which remains somewhat problematic, as will be discussed further below.

1.6 Urbanization in Ireland: New Directions

Although frequently discussed as though they are polar opposites, Doherty's model of the monastic town and the social, economic and political background to its development, is not incompatible with the model of the coastal towns as long-distance trading sites reliant on their rural hinterlands for food and raw materials. Indeed, as Doherty has repeatedly argued, discussions of urbanism must take both of these site types into account, because they developed alongside one another. While they may have had very different economic, social and political roles to play, the monastic towns and the coastal towns were both embedded in the Irish agrarian economy throughout the period under examination. For this reason, it is vital to return to a consideration of the overall functioning of early medieval Irish communities, and how those communities organized their activities within their landscape and settlement structure.

Swift's article not withstanding, most scholars still envision early medieval Irish settlement as fundamentally dispersed, consisting of isolated, self-sufficient farmsteads whose inhabitants meet relatively infrequently. This impression does not seem to be borne

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[65] John Sheehan, 'The *Longphort* in Viking Age Ireland', *Acta Archaeologica* 79 (2008), 282-95.
[66] At the time of writing excavation was underway at Annagassan, Co. Louth, another possible *longphort* site, under the direction of Dr. Mark Clinton.
[67] See below, Chapter 4.

out by the documentary sources, which imply a high degree of cooperation and neighbourliness, for lack of a better term. In England and Continental Europe, discussions of urbanization take place against the backdrop of rural nucleations or villages, while in Scandinavia and Ireland, urbanization is seen to take place in the absence of pre-existing nucleated settlement of any but the most modest and ephemeral kind.[68] Doherty has recently summarized the problems with documentary sources that use Latin terms or loanwords whose precise meaning in an early medieval Irish context is unclear, particularly terms denoting settlement forms like villages, towns and cities.[69] Despite the problems of translation, he argues that there is sufficient evidence, both documentary and archaeological, to indicate the presence of nucleated rural settlements, or villages, in early medieval Ireland. As Doherty indicates, however, the whole question of nucleation, and the related but separate questions surrounding urbanization, cannot be resolved with developing a sense of change through time in Irish settlement patterns and socio-economic organization. Until the evidence for early medieval settlement in Ireland allows scholars to tighten their chronologies, there is no way to assess change or development, let alone its causes.[70]

Chapters 3, 4 and 5 of this thesis attempt to trace this change through time in the context of one small kingdom in southeastern Ireland. While the full picture cannot be reconstructed on the basis of the evidence currently available, the purpose of this thesis is to work with and challenge a variety of models of community organization and urbanization in early medieval Ireland. In general, this thesis takes as its starting point the idea that urbanization cannot be studied by looking at towns alone, but requires a regional

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[68] J.H. Andrews, 'The geographical element in Irish history', in Ó Cróinín, ed., *A New History of Ireland, Vol. 1: Prehistoric and Early Ireland*, Oxford University Press, 2005, 4-7; Mats Ridderspore, 'Village and single farm: settlement structure or landscape organization', in C. Fabech and J. Ringtved, eds., *Settlement and Landscape: Proceedings of a conference in Århus, Denmark, May 4-7 1998*, Jutland Archaeological Society, 1999, 167-75.

[69] Charles Doherty, 'Settlement in Early Ireland- a review', in T.B. Barry, ed., *A History of Settlement in Ireland*, 2000, 50-80.

[70] Doherty, 'Settlement in Early Ireland- a review', 71-2.

approach. Moreover, this study is less concerned with refining definitions of towns or other settlement forms, and more concerned with trying to perceive the functions and relationships between various settlements and how those roles and networks change over time.

Chapter 2

Sources of Evidence

2.1 Introduction

Scholars interested in studying early medieval Ireland are fortunate to have a wealth of both documentary and archaeological evidence at their disposal. Early medieval Irish society produced a wide variety of literary narratives, poetry, historical works, legal tracts and other forms of writing, many of which have survived, at least in a modified form, to the present day. This thesis asks questions that require an interdisciplinary approach, and in addition to the valuable insights provided by documentary sources, this thesis examines the wealth of archaeological evidence available for the study of early medieval Ireland. Understanding this body of material has been the life work of many scholars, and a review of all of their efforts is not possible here. This chapter seeks to provide a brief overview of these sources, the challenges and benefits of their use as historical evidence, and the ways in which they have been utilized in the writing of this thesis.

2.2 The Irish Annals

The Irish annals are some of the most widely used sources for the reconstruction of the political and social history of medieval Ireland. In his 1975 monograph, MacNiocaill defines annals as, 'a record of events arranged under the year of occurrence, without any necessary connexion between them… and they vary from the barest notes of single events under single years to lengthy and elaborate narratives'.[1] Although their form makes them appear accessible and reliable, the interpretation of the annals and their use as historical evidence require careful analysis of their origins and development. [2] To date, the most

[1] Gearóid MacNiocaill, 'The Medieval Irish Annals', *Medieval Irish History Series* 3, Dublin Historical Association, 1975, 13.
[2] MacNiocaill, 'The Medieval Irish Annals', 13-18.

thorough appraisals of the complete corpus of surviving annalistic compilations and the relationships between the various texts are those of MacNiocaill and McCarthy.[3] Other scholars, including Hughes, O'Rahilly, Grabowski and Dumville, Charles-Edwards, Ó Cróinín, and Jaski, have undertaken important work on a variety of problematic aspects of this body of texts. It is not necessary to repeat all of the conclusions drawn by these scholars, and this section is essentially intended to explain how and why certain sets of annals were chosen and used as sources of evidence in this thesis.

Origins and Development of the Annals

Traditionally, scholars have argued that the Irish annals derive from the practice of annotating Easter tables with the year's memorable events. Easter tables were used in the calculation of the date of Easter, a movable feast, and although none of these tables has survived in Ireland, examples are known from Britain and the Continent. During the paschal controversy within the early Irish church, such tables would have had real practical and symbolic significance. MacNiocaill has noted that the earliest stratum of annalistic material appears to date to within a few decades of the resolution of this conflict on Iona in the early eighth century.[4] Although he admits that this might be merely coincidental, it is interesting to imagine that the independent life of the annals began when Easter tables became obsolete.

MacNiocaill has also pointed out that other Irish scholarly and ecclesiastical practices are likely to have contributed to the rise of the annalistic form.[5] He suggests that in addition to Easter tables, lists of abbots' death dates maintained in monasteries due to their liturgical importance may also have been annotated to reflect other events occurring in or between the years listed. More generally, the Irish scholarly interest in *senchas*, or

[3] MacNiocaill, 'The Medieval Irish Annals'; D.P. McCarthy, *The Irish Annals: their genesis, evolution and history*, Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2008.
[4] MacNiocaill, 'The Medieval Irish Annals', 13.
[5] Ibid., 13.

historical knowledge, may have facilitated the expansion of this written form from its basic beginnings into the fuller, independent genre of annals.

McCarthy rejects the idea that the Easter tables were central to the introduction of the annalistic form to Ireland, and argues that the Irish annals represent the adoption of a long established Christian and Mediterranean genre.[6] He points out that in their discussions of events that occurred prior to the introduction of Christianity to Ireland, the Irish annals reflect Mediterranean exemplars like Eusebius' chronicle.[7] McCarthy's reminder of the wider Christian, Mediterranean background of the annalistic form is an important one. However, he offers little evidence to explain his rejection of the Easter tables as one possible point of origin for the writing of annals in Ireland, and in the absence of any surviving examples of such annotated tables, the question must be considered an open one.

Regardless of their origins, after this very earliest period, the Irish annals followed their own independent trajectory as a genre.[8] Because the annals were compiled in an ecclesiastical, institutional setting, they exhibit a constant interest in ecclesiastical affairs, although as Etchingham has demonstrated, secular events attracted greater attention from the mid-tenth century onward.[9] In terms of language, Dumville argues that although the earliest stratum of the annals tends to be written in Latin, there is a shift toward the vernacular over the period from the fifth to the tenth centuries.[10] The ecclesiastical centre or centres at which a set of annals were written, compiled, edited and transcribed also had an impact on the types of events they include, as well as on their manner of reporting. Many of the annals, for instance, demonstrate a geographical bias, reporting many minor events in the author or compiler's locality. In addition, annalists paid attention to events

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[6] McCarthy, *The Irish Annals*, 1-9.
[7] Ibid., 7.
[8] MacNiocaill, 'The Medieval Irish Annals', 13.
[9] Colmán Etchingham, *Viking raids on Irish church settlements in the ninth century*, Maynooth Monograph Series 1, 1996, 18-9, 28-9.
[10] David Dumville, 'Latin and Irish in the *Annals of Ulster*, A.D. 431-1050', in D. Whitelock, R. McKitterick, and D. Dumville, eds., *Ireland in early medieval Europe*, Cambridge, 1982, 320-41.

involving monasteries and churches with which their institution had a relationship, even when the reported incident took place outside their typical geographical area of interest. It is vital to take note of these regional affiliations when using various annals as sources of historical evidence.[11]

Understanding the geographical orientation of a set of annals is only one of many factors that need to be taken into consideration. The writers and compilers of the annals both recorded current events and transcribed older accounts of earlier historical events, and were also periodically annotated and amended. The annals survive largely in late manuscripts, and represent a mixture of information from a variety of sources gathered over centuries of edition and modification. As MacNiocaill explains, the use of the annals as historical evidence requires an understanding of the relationships between surviving sets of annals, and the processes of edition and compilation involved in their growth and development over time.[12]

Most scholars take a comparative approach to the study of the annals, examining the similarities and differences between the surviving texts. MacNiocaill explains the basic principle that a high degree of verbal and syntactical similarity between two surviving texts makes it very likely that either one text derives from the other, or that both texts derive from an original, possibly lost, source.[13] However, he goes on to point out that the fact that two sets of annals use different wording to report the same event does not necessarily imply that there is no relationship between the texts.

The events listed in a given year are not necessarily in chronological order, recorded under the year in which the writer heard about them, rather than the year in which they happened. The composers themselves, moreover, presumably had differing interests and varying access to information; within a given set of annals, there are variations in

[11] MacNiocaill, 'The Medieval Irish Annals', 18.
[12] Ibid., 13-8.
[13] Ibid., 13-4.

typical entry length and content over time. Annalists also frequently borrowed material from other sources on hand, such as older annals or chronicles, and many extant sets of annals owe the bulk of their early material to older, frequently lost, sources. In their extant states, many of the changes that may have occurred to a set of annals over its history of composition, transcription, editing and interpretation are invisible. Copyists frequently transcribed both the original text and interpolations or marginalia without distinguishing between them. The ways in which they incorporated additional information varied, and sometimes created errors, either because material was added to an entry in the wrong year, or to the wrong entry in the correct year.[14] In other cases, sets of annals simply leave out years in which no events occurred, which can distort the chronology of subsequent annal entries.[15] As demonstrated by McCarthy and others, these many problems have to be resolved on a case-by-case basis, by comparing different sets of annals, and scholars who use the annals as sources of historical evidence must be aware of the potential inaccuracies.[16]

The question of the relationships between the various existing annalistic compilations has been explored by a number of scholars, who draw widely differing conclusions. Much debate centres on the earliest stratum of the annals, and concerns hypothetical early texts that are preserved to a greater or lesser extent in the surviving compilations. As mentioned earlier, the very earliest, pre-Christian events described in surviving annalistic compilations, derive largely from Eusebius' chronicle. For the period from 431 to about 740, the major source is a set of annals written at the island monastery

[14] MacNiocaill, 'The Medieval Irish Annals', 14-5.
[15] Ibid., 16-7.
[16] McCarthy, *The Irish Annals*, 342-54. McCarthy has carried out a great deal of work on the chronological underpinnings of various annals, and has attempted to harmonize their idiosyncrasies. His work is available on his website, at <www.cs.tcd.ie/Dan.McCarthy/chronology/synchronisms/annals-chron.htm>.

of Iona.[17] This text is now lost, but forms the core of the early material in several daughter texts, and is particularly well preserved in the *Annals of Ulster*.[18]

Most scholars are in agreement about the existence of the 'Iona chronicle', covering the period up to the mid eighth century. However, there are differences of opinion with regard to the subsequent textual history of the annals. Charles-Edwards argues that a copy of the 'Iona chronicle' came to be in Brega, in eastern Ireland, in the mid eighth century and was continued in a monastery or monasteries there until 911. He refers to this composite text, consisting of an Iona segment and a Brega segment, as the *Chronicle of Ireland*, which is transmitted both in the *Annals of Ulster* and in the Clonmacnoise group of texts.[19]

MacNiocaill, studying the *Annals of Ulster*, argues that from the mid eighth century, that text has a dual composition, comprised of a northern, Armagh-based strand, and a Meath, possibly Clonard, component.[20] In other words, he believes that two independent continuations of the 'Iona chronicle' were being written in two distinct ecclesiastical centers from the mid eighth century onward, and were later joined together to form the basis of the *Annals of Ulster* and other texts covering the period from the mid eighth to the mid tenth centuries.

McCarthy has argued that the 'Iona chronicle' was continued for a short time, from about 740 to 753 at the monastery of Moville, at which time a copy arrived at Clonmacnoise.[21] McCarthy's major argument is that this set of annals, a Clonmacnoise continuation of the Iona-Moville chronicle, was maintained at that monastery continuously from 753 into the early thirteenth century, and is the basis of most surviving annalistic texts. The significance of this hypothesis is that it greatly increases the perceived

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[17] Thomas Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle of Ireland*, vol. 1, 2006, 7-9; MacNiocaill, 'The Medieval Irish Annals', 18-20; John Bannerman, 'Notes on the Scottish entries in the Irish annals', *Scottish Gaelic Studies* 11 (1968), 149-70.
[18] Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle of Ireland*, vol. 1, 6-7; MacNiocaill, 'The Medieval Irish Annals', 20.
[19] Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle of Ireland*, vol. 1, 9-24.
[20] MacNiocaill, 'The Medieval Irish Annals', 21-3.
[21] McCarthy, *The Medieval Irish Annals*, 168-75.

reliability of the eighth to tenth century entries in the Clonmacnoise group texts, which have at times been regarded by scholars as later interpolations.[22]

Other scholars have raised additional hypotheses about this phase of the textual history of the Irish annals, and at the moment, these questions remain unresolved. The discussion of the following phase of annalistic composition in Ireland is similarly contentious. Here the debate focuses largely on the question of the Clonmacnoise group of texts. Various scholars have offered hypotheses as to which surviving texts belong to this group, and which most closely preserves the original 'Clonmacnoise chronicle'.

McCarthy's hypothesis that the 'Clonmacnoise chronicle' was maintained at that monastery from the mid eighth century through to the early thirteenth century has an impact on his argument with regard to the subsequent history of the Irish annals. He argues that the Clonmacnoise group of texts should properly consist of the *Annals of Tigernach*, *Chronicum Scotorum*, and the *Annals of Roscrea*. To deal with most of the other compilations containing reliable early material, he has created another group, which he refers to as the Cuana group.[23] The name refers to a *Liber Cuanach*, mentioned as the scribe's source in several entries in the *Annals of Ulster*. McCarthy argues that *Liber Cuanach* was compiled around 1022, and was based on a version of the 'Clonmacnoise chronicle', but made important modifications to its chronological scheme. Based on these chronological identifiers, McCarthy includes the *Annals of Ulster*, the *Annals of Inisfallen* and the *Annals of Boyle* as the surviving descendents of *Liber Cuanach*, each of which have their own distinct character after c. 1019, the point at which *Liber Cuanach* ends.

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[22] McCarthy, *The Medieval Irish Annals*, 174-5. The '*AU* priority' thesis, which discounts the historical reliability of the eighth to tenth century material in the Clonmacnoise group annals, is best articulated in A.P. Smyth, 'The earliest Irish annals: their first contemporary entries, and the earliest centres of recording', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 72C (1972), 1-48.

[23] McCarthy, *The Medieval Irish Annals*, 198-222.

In her detailed study of the *Annals of Inisfallen*, Grabowski grapples with these questions and comes to somewhat different conclusions. [24] Her inquiry seeks to determine the position of the *Annals of Inisfallen* in relation to the *Annals of Ulster*, on the one hand, and the Clonmacnoise group of texts on the other. She summarizes the debate by explaining that although the *Annals of Inisfallen* have generally been viewed by scholars as more closely related to the Clonmacnoise group, many have noted similarities and overlaps with the *Annals of Ulster*.[25] To set the foundation for her argument, Grabowski demonstrates that the split between the Clonmacnoise group texts and the *Annals of Ulster* was at 911, after which point there is little textual affinity between AU and the Clonmacnoise group. For this reason, 'any continuing relationship between AI and those texts must of necessity be with only one of those families. AI cannot be directly derivative of both families beyond the point of divergence. It then follows that a relationship between AI and either AU or the Clonmacnoise group after 911 implies also that AI is using a text of the same type for the common material before the point of divergence'. Based on her analysis of the texts, Grabowski concludes that the text on which the *Annals of Inisfallen* was based was of the Clonmacnoise group rather than an ancestor of the *Annals of Ulster*.[26] Like McCarthy, she argues that this base text was continued and edited in one or more Munster monasteries starting in the second half of the eleventh century.

Although the complex history of annalistic writing in Ireland from the genre's origins to the eleventh century is incompletely understood, it is possible to draw a few conclusions or cautions. For instance, the need for care in dealing with the annals is a point of consensus among scholars. In order to use the annals effectively, it is necessary to take into account the potential chronological abnormalities, complications associated with

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[24] Kathryn Grabowski, 'The Annals of Inisfallen, A.D. 431-1092: Sources, Structure and History', in Kathryn Grabowski and David Dumville, *Chronicles and Annals of Medieval Ireland and Wales*, Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 1984, 1-107.
[25] Ibid., 56-7.
[26] Ibid., 111.

multiple phases of writing, editing, transcribing and annotating, and the geographical and political orientations of the various authors. With regard to the question of the reliability of the various sets of annals, especially in their coverage of eighth to tenth century events, it seems prudent to cover all of the bases. The *Annals of Ulster*, whether or not they represent an independent continuation of the 'Iona chronicle', are still considered one of the most chronologically accurate and complete sets of annals, particularly for the early medieval period. The Clonmacnoise group annals, whether or not they were maintained continuously at that monastery from the mid eighth century onward, contain important material not to be found in the *Annals of Ulster*, and can and should be used alongside them. The *Annals of Inisfallen*, whether grouped with the *Annals of Ulster* or with the Clonmacnoise group texts, remains an important source of evidence about events in medieval Munster.

The Annals as Evidence for Early Medieval Déisi History

As mentioned earlier, the purpose of this discussion is not to offer a reinterpretation of scholarship on the annals, but to make clear the process by which certain sets of annals were chosen as sources of evidence for this thesis. This project has a specific geographical focus on the lands of the Déisi in southeastern Ireland and covers the period from the eighth to the eleventh centuries. These chronological and geographical parameters drove the selection of source material, and three main sources were used throughout this thesis. These were the *Annals of Ulster*, the *Annals of Inisfallen*, and *Chronicum Scotorum*. Each of these surviving compilations of annals was selected for its significant coverage of the time period under investigation, and the *Annals of Ulster* and *Chronicum Scotorum* were chosen as representatives of two divergent groups of annalistic texts. The *Annals of Inisfallen* were chosen, despite the confusion about their relationship to the Clonmacnoise group annals and the *Annals of Ulster*, because they preserve unique material relating to Munster.

In addition, material from the *Fragmentary Annals* and the *Annals of the Four Masters* is cited when appropriate, particularly the Osraige-related material preserved in their accounts of events in the ninth century.[27] These two sources did not appear in the foregoing discussion of the textual history of the annals, because they are somewhat later and very different in their composition.[28] Their chronology is particularly suspect, and although they include intriguing unique information, this is used in later discussions in this thesis with caution.

In all cases, the online CELT editions of the annals have been used first and foremost. Printed editions and facsimiles have been examined as necessary.

2.3 The Old Irish Laws

One of the richest sources of information about the economy and society of eighth century Ireland are the Old Irish legal tracts. Most of these texts are preserved in manuscripts of the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries, but have been dated on the basis of linguistic evidence to a relatively short period of initial composition between approximately 650 and 750.[29] These core texts are elaborated with glosses, annotations and commentary, some written as early as the ninth century, although most were composed in the twelfth to sixteenth centuries.[30] As a source for this history of the eighth century, these later glosses and commentaries are not especially useful, although in some cases where the primary, core text is fragmentary or has been lost, the later material must be used to attempt reconstruct the original.[31]

There are several potential problems with the interpretation of the Old Irish laws. For one thing, as Charles-Edwards has pointed out, it is challenging to determine their purpose and position in the governmental structure of the society in which they were

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[27] Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle of Ireland*, vol. 1, 20. For a discussion about the origins of the *Fragmentary Annals*, see Joan Radner, *Fragmentary Annals of Ireland*, Dublin, 1978, xxii-xxxi.
[28] McCarthy, *The Medieval Irish Annals*, 10, 12-3.
[29] Fergus Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1991, 225.
[30] Ibid., 226; T.M. Charles-Edwards, 'Early Irish Law', in Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, ed., *A New History of Ireland, Vol. 1: Prehistoric and Early Ireland*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, 331-2.
[31] Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, 231.

written. 'These tracts were the written expression of the legal tradition, not an account of royal legislation, and still less the instrument of such legislation', and therefore have a 'timelessness' about them.[32] Thus, it is challenging to assess the extent to which the law and its enforcement changed through time, and to link legal developments to the reign of any particular king.

Another fundamental question relates to the authorship of these legal texts, and more specifically to the role of the church in their composition. Those who argue against clerical involvement cite texts that discuss legal traditions that would presumably have been distasteful to the church, like those outlining the rules for divorce or polygyny.[33] This debate forms part of a wider discussion about the separation or lack thereof, between secular and ecclesiastical society in early medieval Ireland more generally. Although both Kelly and Charles-Edwards leave open the question of clerical authorship of the Old Irish laws, Ó Corráin, Breatnach and Breen argue that there really was no separation between ecclesiastical and secular intellectual circles.[34] They argue that 'the law-tracts, in Latin and in the vernacular, are the work of a single class of learned men who were as well versed in scripture as in the legal lore of their ancestors and founded their laws on a conscious and sophisticated compromise between the two'.[35] From examination of the texts themselves, it is clear that some legal authors adopted more features of Christian or canon law than others in their compositions.[36]

Given these problems of interpretation, clearly the legal texts must be used with care as a source for the social and economic history of Ireland in the early middle ages. Nevertheless, Kelly argues that 'it must be accepted that in general the law-texts are a sound guide to early Irish legal institutions', and that they reflect real situations and

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[32] Charles-Edwards, 'Early Irish Law', 332.
[33] Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, 233.
[34] Ibid., 232-6; Charles-Edwards, 'Early Irish Law', 357; Donnchadh Ó Corráin, Liam Breatnach and Aidan Breen, 'The Laws of the Irish', *Peritia* 3 (1984), 382-438.
[35] Ó Corráin, Breatnach and Breen, 'The Laws of the Irish', 412.
[36] Charles-Edwards, 'Early Irish Law', 355-6.

interactions between individuals and groups of people.[37] Charles-Edwards points out that certain legal collections like the *Senchas Már* are so concerned with the organization of their society that they can be used with a great deal of confidence to reconstruct social relationships in the seventh and eighth centuries, at least in their idealized form.[38] On this basis, this thesis employs evidence from the legal texts to gain insights into the functioning of Irish society in the eighth century that cannot be obtained from the annals or from archaeology. Because the interpretation of the Old Irish laws is such a specialized field, this thesis relies on the translations and analysis of experts like Fergus Kelly.

2.4 The Munster Sagas

This section deals with two texts, *Cogad Gáedel re Gallaib* (CGG) and *Caithréim Chellacháin Chaisil* (CCC), both composed in Munster, probably in the first half of the twelfth century. They are some times referred to collectively as 'sagas', while CGG has been called a 'non-annalistic chronicle' and CCC an 'historical romance'.[39] They are both extended narratives written about the past for present politic purposes, and both rely on a variety of other written sources to obtain historical information from which to construct their tale. For this reason, they are sources of evidence for the twelfth-century milieu in which they were composed, but also preserve historical information from non-extant sources that would otherwise be entirely lost.

Cogad Gáedel re Gallaib (CGG)

Cogad Gáedel re Gallaib (CGG) was written in the early twelfth century for Muirchertach ua Briain, descendent of Brian Bóruma, and was intended to provide the Uí Briain kings of Munster with a suitably glorious history.[40] It traces the rise of the Dál Cáis

[37] Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, 238.
[38] Charles-Edwards, 'Early Irish Law', 341.
[39] James Carney, 'Language and Literature to 1169', in *A New History of Ireland I: Prehistoric and Early Ireland*, ed. Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, 451-510: 487; McCarthy, *The Irish Annals*, 6-7; Donnchadh Ó Corráin, 'Caithréim Chellecháin Chaisil: History or Propaganda?', *Ériu* 25 (1974), 1-69: 1.
[40] See an overview of this consensus in Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, '*Cogad Gáedel re Gallaib*: Some Dating Considerations', *Peritia* 9 (1995), 354-77.

during the careers of Brian Bóruma, his father, and brother, against the backdrop of their wars against the Vikings. The text survives in three manuscripts, The *Book of Leinster*, TCD MS 1319, H.2.17, and Brussels MS 2569-72. The Brussels manuscript is a 17th transcript by Micheál Ó Cléirigh, and although it is the latest, it contains the only complete version of CGG.[41] James Henthorn Todd edited the text in the nineteenth century, and his work is still the standard scholarly edition.[42]

In its extant form, the text can be divided into two distinct stylistic sections. The first section takes an annalistic form, reporting episode after episode of violence by the Vikings against the Irish, but with only a general regard for chronology. The second section is saga-like, employing flowery language to narrate the doings of Brian Bóruma and his brother, Mathgamain. Ní Mhaonaigh argues that characterizing the text as having two parts is 'valid but potentially misleading', because annalistic source material underlies both stylistic sections.[43] Moreover, she argues that CGG should be perceived as a complete whole, rather than as two distinct texts joined together, because both sections are critical to the author's rhetorical purpose.[44]

The author was writing for his twelfth century audience, and many scholars have endeavored to determine whether or not any part of his narrative can be used as a source of evidence for the Viking Age events around which his story takes shape. As Ní Mhaonaigh notes, 'the value of the *Cogad* as a source for the period of Viking activity in Ireland would be greatly enhanced if the reliability of the material at the redactor's disposal could be determined'.[45] Several scholars have attempted to answer that question by comparing CGG to surviving annalistic accounts of the same period. Goedheer notes the similarities between the annalistic portion of CGG and the *Annals of Ulster*, and suggests that perhaps

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[41] Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, '*Cogad Gáedel re Gallaib* and the Annals: A Comparison', *Ériu* 47 (1996), 101-26: 101.
[42] James Henthorn Todd, *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh, the War of the Gaedhil with the Gaill*, London, 1867.
[43] Ní Mhaonaigh, '*Cogad Gáedel re Gallaib and the Annals*', 102.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Ní Mhaonaigh, '*Cogad Gáedel re Gallaib and the Annals*', 104-6.

the author of CGG drew material from a version of those annals.[46] Leech argues that the author of CGG obtained his material from the same chronicle that underlies the *Annals of Inisfallen*, citing the large number of entries common to both texts.[47] Hughes argues indirectly for Goedheer's hypothesis, suggesting that the compiler of CGG relied on the lost "Chronicle of Ireland", which is preserved more completely in the *Annals of Ulster*.[48]

In her more recent study, Ní Mhaonaigh has demonstrated that the annalistic portions of CGG bear great similarities to both the *Annals of Inisfallen* and the Clonmacnoise group of annals. After thorough analysis, she concludes that the compilers of CGG and of the *Annals of Inisfallen* probably had access to the same or similar base text, a conflation of the Clonmacnoise chronicle and one or more Munster chronicles.[49] Furthermore, Ní Mhaonaigh examines the entries that are unique to CGG, and highlights the prevalence of southeast Munster and west Munster strands of information. She suggests that this information represents lost local Munster chronicles, not used by the compiler of the *Annals of Inisfallen*, and theorizes that these local documents may have been held at Lismore.[50] Finally, there is unique material in CGG relating to Roscrea, Osraige and Leinster that would not likely have figured prominently in local west or southeast Munster sources. She hypothesizes that the compiler of CGG must also have had access to a lost north Munster source, one that differed greatly from the sources underlying the *Fragmentary Annals* or the *Annals of the Four Masters*, which also preserve accounts of Viking activity in those areas.[51]

In other words, Ní Mhaonaigh's analysis demonstrates that the compiler of CGG did indeed utilize several annalistic sources in the composition of his text. The closest surviving parallel to that base text is the *Annals of Inisfallen*, and there are strong

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[46] A.J. Goedheer, *Irish and Norse traditions about the Battle of Clontarf*, Haarlem, 1938, 32-45.
[47] Roger H. Leech, '*Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh* and the *Annals of Inisfallen*', *North Munster Antiquarian Journal* 11 (1968), 13-21.
[48] Kathleen Hughes, *Early Christian Ireland: an introduction to the sources*, London, 1972, 294-7.
[49] Ní Mhaonaigh, '*Cogad Gáedel re Gallaib* and the Annals: A Comparison', 112-3, 118-9.
[50] Ní Mhaonaigh, '*Cogad Gáedel re Gallaib* and the Annals', 118-23.
[51] Ibid., 123-5.

similarities also to the Clonmacnoise group of annals. More importantly, she convincingly argues that CGG is the only surviving text that preserves a series of local Munster sources. For these reasons, she takes the position that CGG is a viable and useful source of evidence about the Viking Age, particularly in Munster.[52] Therefore, while the political intent of the work as a whole necessitates a cautious approach, particularly with regard to chronology and subject matter, the unique material it preserves makes it invaluable to this project.

Caithréim Chellacháin Chaisil (CCC)

Caithréim Chellacháin Chaisil (CCC), like CGG, was written in the twelfth century, possibly during the reign of Cormac mac Carthaig, and is often considered to be the Mac Carthaig answer to the Uí Briain CGG.[53] CCC tells the story of Cellachán, tenth century Eóganacht king of Cashel, and his career of opposition to the Vikings. The story was evidently very popular among eighteenth and nineteenth century scribes, and many copies of the text are to be found in late manuscripts. The earliest surviving copy is from the Book of Lismore, which dates to around the late fifteenth century, but that version is incomplete.[54] Bugge published a scholarly edition of the text in the early twentieth century, and although it is dated and somewhat problematic, it remains the best edition in print.[55]

Like CGG, CCC opens with a king-list and a discussion of the depredations of the Vikings in the years leading up to the start of the hero's career. Unlike CGG, however, the author of CCC presents this information briefly and with a minimum of editorial comment, and this preamble is not especially long. After this scene-setting section, the author begins his narration of Cellachán's rise to fame thanks to his campaigns against the Vikings. The

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[52] Ibid., 125-6.
[53] John Ryan, 'The historical content of *Cáithréim Ceallacháin Chaisil*', *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 71 (1941), 89-100; Ó Corráin, 'Caithréim Chellacháin Chaisil: History or Propaganda?', 59.
[54] Ó Corráin provides a partial list of the manuscripts in which the text appears: Ó Corráin, 'Caithréim Chellacháin Chaisil: History or Propaganda?', 2-3.
[55] Alexander Bugge, ed. and trans., *Caithreim Cellachain Caisil: the victorious career of Cellachan of Cashel*, Oslo, 1905.

author is also careful to specify that Cellachán was the only king who successfully defended Munster from the foreigners from the death of Artrí mac Cathail to the reign of Brian Bóruma. His desire to give credit to the Uí Briain for their illustrious ancestor is probably an indication that the compiler of CCC had access to a copy of the recently composed CGG, as well as an indication of the contemporary political relationship between the Eóganacht Mac Carthaig and the Dál Cáis Uí Briain.[56]

Again, CCC is a twelfth century text, written for specific contemporary political purposes, but which discusses Viking Age events in Munster for which we have few other detailed sources of evidence. As with CGG, therefore, it is vital to try to understand if this saga can be used as a source for ninth and tenth century events, and if so, what kinds of information it preserves. Scholarly opinion on the matter varies widely. The text's editor, Bugge, argues in his introduction that Cellachán's story, while possibly exaggerated for dramatic effect, was absolutely based in fact.[57] Robin Flower and Kathleen Hughes, on the other hand, dismiss CCC as a complete fabrication, and John Ryan emphasizes the severe mismatch between the Cellachán mentioned in the annals and the hero of CCC.[58] Ó Corráin concurs with Ryan's assessment. Having reviewed the Cellachán of the annals, he writes, 'this sober annalistic portrait is far removed from the scourge of the Vikings presented us in the text; the Viking tyranny over Munster depicted in such lurid colours we may dismiss as sheer fantasy and invention'.[59] He also rejects the author's anachronistic if politically fair-minded depiction of the Dál Cáis as early participants in the kingship of Munster.[60] However, Ó Corráin contends that the author of CCC did in fact depend on written historical sources and did respect the broad outlines of historical events, although

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[56] Ó Corráin, 'Caithréim Chellacháin Chaisil: History or Propaganda?', 7, 56-9.
[57] Bugge, *Caithreim Cellachain Caisil*, x, xiii.
[58] Robin Flower, in O'Grady and Flower, eds., *Catalogue of Irish Manuscripts in the British Museum*, Vol. 2, London: British Museum, 1926, 403; Hughes, *Early Christian Ireland*, 288-98; Ryan, 'The historical content', 89-100.
[59] Ó Corráin, 'Caithréim Chellacháin Chaisil: History or Propaganda?', 5.
[60] Ibid.

his use of those sources and that history is different both from CGG and from modern concepts of historiography.[61]

Working through CCC chapter by chapter, Ó Corráin presents evidence to support a number of conclusions. First of all, he argues that most, if not all, of the information contained in CCC about the Viking leaders and their activities in Munster derives from CGG.[62] Thus, although it is full of inconsistencies and inaccuracies, many of these problems are present in CGG and should not be blamed on the author of CCC. Ó Corráin also concludes that 'the author of *CCC* had no access to genuine annalistic sources for the Viking affairs of the tenth century', except as filtered through the Uí Briain lens of CGG.[63] However, he did have access to and utilize other historical material, which likely included an annotated Munster king-list and certain sets of Munster genealogies.[64] In framing his narrative, the compiler of CCC seems to have adhered closely to the genealogies and king-lists he had to hand, without any attempt to cross check or rationalize the chronological scheme he imposes on the story. Based on the compiler's evident lack of access to annalistic material, Ó Corráin concludes that he was a secular writer in the employ of Cormac mac Carthaig, who wrote in the narrative form, but with the historical and political sensibilities of the later bardic poets.[65] The writer's secular worldview is further demonstrated by the lack of interest in the church he displays in his narrative.

Towards the end of his study of CCC, Ó Corráin draws another extremely important conclusion with regard to historiography and politics in early medieval Ireland. He notes that the compiler of CCC relied on genealogical material, but evidently felt no need to anchor the historical figures he discusses in an accurate chronological framework. He takes this as an indication that historical and genealogical knowledge was not

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[61] Ibid., 4-5.
[62] Ibid., 56.
[63] Ibid., 57.
[64] Ó Corráin, 'Caithréim Chellacháin Chaisil: History or Propaganda?', 60-3.
[65] Ibid., 62-3.

especially widely held among the intended audience of this tale.[66] He suggests that because of changes in legal and social practice, there was no need for people to have a multi-generational, multi-lineal understanding of their kindred. During the eleventh and twelfth centuries, Munster and the rest of Ireland experienced shifts in the balance and geographical distribution of political and military authority, and kin-based kingdoms were replaced by power politics and the primacy of lord-vassal relationships.[67] Ó Corráin believes that this is made clear in CCC, and that its greatest use as an historical source may be the information it can provide about these developments, rather than the tenth century history it purports to narrate.[68]

Developments in the writing of genealogies will be discussed in a later section of this chapter, and the relationship between CCC and the various strands of the genealogical material will be discussed later in the thesis. As Ó Corráin recommends, CCC will not be used in this thesis as a source of direct information about tenth century events. However, alongside other materials, it can be used as an indicator of certain developments in the eleventh century, as will be discussed in a later chapter of the thesis.

To sum up, this thesis takes note of Brian Ó Cúiv's argument that both CCC and CGG must be understood as part of a body of dynasty-building historical narratives written in the late eleventh and early twelfth century about the well-known heroes of the ninth and tenth centuries.[69] Despite their similarities, these two narratives were compiled from very different sets of base material, and must be used differently as sources of historical evidence. While CGG seems to preserve genuine annalistic material that would otherwise be lost, CCC is best used to gain insight into the changes in history writing and political organization occurring over the eleventh century.

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[66] Ibid., 66-7.
[67] Ibid., 67-8.
[68] Ibid., 68-9.
[69] Brian Ó Cúiv, 'Literary creation and Irish historical tradition', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 49 (1963), 233-62.

2.5 Saints' Lives

Like the eleventh and twelfth century sagas, the Irish saints' lives are a corpus of texts written in narrative form about heroes, in this case, saints, of the past, to meet contemporary religious and political needs. The earliest lives of Irish saints were written by Continental churchmen as early as the mid seventh century, such as the lives of Columbanus and Fursey. However, the bulk of hagiography relating to Irish saints was written by Irish ecclesiastics from the late 7th century onward, and these native lives have the greatest potential value as sources of evidence for Irish social, political and economic history. The oldest native lives of Irish saints are Cogitosus' Life of Brigit, Tírechán's Patrician Miscellany, Muirchú's Life of Patrick, and Adomnán's Life of Columba.[70]

Early Irish hagiography draws on a combination of Continental models and Irish vernacular literature for its style and motifs. As it expanded within the Irish literary tradition, hagiography incorporated native scholarly interests in topography and genealogy, as well as a variety of secular concepts, themes and tropes.[71] The early Irish lives were all composed in Latin, but over the ninth and tenth centuries, most lives came to be written in the vernacular. This shift from Latin to Irish is paralleled in the writing of annals and other genres during this period of time.[72] Perhaps unsurprisingly, some of the earliest lives composed in Irish in the ninth century were those of Patrick and Brigit.[73] At some point, probably associated with church reform from the twelfth century onward, there was a revival of Latin hagiography in Ireland.[74]

The extant saints' lives have generally been preserved in manuscripts from the fourteenth century or later, and the bulk are written in either Middle Irish or in Latin. One of the major challenges in using saints' lives as historical evidence is the issue of dating the

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[70] For an overview of the early history of Irish hagiography, see Kim McCone, 'An Introduction to Early Irish Saints' Lives', *The Maynooth Review* 11 (Dec. 1984), 26-59.
[71] McCone, 'An Introduction to Early Irish Saints' Lives', 35-6.
[72] Richard Sharpe, *Medieval Irish Saints' Lives: An Introduction to the* Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991, 19-22.
[73] McCone, 'An Introduction to Early Irish Saints' Lives', 38.
[74] Sharpe, *Medieval Irish Saints' Lives*, 19.

narrative. As McCone explains, Latin lives are often assumed to be older and based on earlier historical materials than Middle Irish lives, but it is also possible that at various times, lives written in one language would be translated and transcribed in the other.[75] The best policy is to attempt to date each text separately, using a combination of internal linguistic and textual clues, and bearing in mind the potential layers of composition, edition, compilation and translation involved.[76] Sharpe notes that the subject matter of a saint's life does not usually aid in dating. Most Irish hagiography describes a distant past, and discusses saints who lived within the first few centuries of the Christianization of Ireland.[77] Therefore, examining the annals, martyrologies or other historical documents for references to the saint in question will not assist in dating the hagiographical text.[78] As is true with the historical saga literature discussed above, saints' lives are best understood within the political and social context in which they were written, and when it is possible to date the text with some level of confidence, it can be an invaluable source of historical evidence.

Charles Doherty has demonstrated this to great effect in his study on the use of hagiography as a source for the economic history of early medieval Ireland. He explains that the resources for studying the organization of the Irish economy between the ninth and twelfth centuries are very limited, in both the ecclesiastical and secular spheres, but demonstrates that examination of some of the saints' lives, especially from the tenth century onward, may help to fill in this gap. Doherty argues that hagiographers demonstrate interest in and awareness of the economic circumstances of the monastic community in which they were produced and in the region around that ecclesiastical center.[79] This is reflected in concerns about the relationship between the secular and the

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[75] McCone, 'An Introduction to Early Irish Saints' Lives', 39-40.
[76] Ibid., 40; Charles Doherty, 'Some aspects of hagiography as a source for Irish economic history', *Peritia* 1 (1982), 300-1.
[77] Sharpe, *Medieval Irish Saints' Lives*, 8-10.
[78] Ibid., 10.
[79] Doherty, 'Some aspects of hagiography', 301-2.

ecclesiastical world, and in discussions about how best to provide for the practical needs of a community devoted to worship. Doherty also argues, in several articles, that monastic communities necessarily participated in their local and regional economies, politics and society, and that some monasteries became foci for a variety of secular activities from as early as the eighth century onward.[80] For these reasons, he says, 'much of the hagiographical writing in Ireland must be read against this economic and increasingly commercialized background'.[81] Doherty offers evidence that saints' lives preserve information like land grants or other transactions, taxation and tribute, and the practical organization of monastic estates.[82] Finally, and perhaps most importantly, he demonstrates that many saints' lives contain information about the relationships between various monastic communities. He suggests that these networks of influence, whether believed by the hagiographers to be real or merely aspirational, mattered in early medieval Irish society on both a political and economic level.[83]

In other words, although there are problems with dating and interpreting the various strata to be found in individual hagiographical texts, the Irish saints' lives are an invaluable source of information about the political, social and economic circumstances in which they were written. As McCone argues, 'although their value as direct or literal history may be negligible, the places and events, people and relationships presented in saints' Lives are nevertheless of enormous interest and importance... the Lives are vital evidence for political attitudes and aspirations, both secular and ecclesiastic, in the circle and time of their composition'.[84] In this thesis, two saints' lives are used more extensively than any other. The first is the Latin life of St. Mochuda, founder of the monastic community at Lismore in the late seventh century. The text survives in a late manuscript, and Sharpe

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[80] Ibid., 302-3. See also Charles Doherty, 'The monastic town in early medieval Ireland', in Clarke, H.B. and A. Simms, eds., *The comparative history of urban origins in non-Roman Europe*, Oxford, 1985, 45-75.
[81] Doherty, 'Some aspects of hagiography', 303.
[82] Ibid., 306-21.
[83] Ibid., 322-8.
[84] McCone, 'An Introduction to Early Irish Saints' Lives', 56.

argues that the text was probably originally composed in the eighth century, with later additions and modifications.[85] The second is the life of St. Declan, founder of the monastery at Ardmore. The extant Latin life of Declan was probably written in the second half of the twelfth century, after Ardmore lost its episcopal status at the synod of Kells-Mellifont in 1152.[86] During the second half of the twelfth century, Ardmore seems to have fought to regain its status, and in addition to commissioning a life of their founder, they also built the cathedral that still stands at Ardmore.

Both of these saints and their foundations have a direct connection to the Déisi and to southeast Munster more generally. Their lives, composed at different times and for different purposes, must be used differently as sources of information. Like other twelfth century texts mentioned in this chapter, Declan's Latin life must only be used with the greatest caution as a source for earlier events, and its greatest value may be in the genealogical or topographical information it contains. The life of Mochuda seems to preserve an early core narrative, although no doubt with later additions and modifications. In this thesis, hagiographical texts will be used in conjunction with other sources, to gain a sense of the links between Lismore, Ardmore and the networks of political, social and economic influence within their region and in Ireland as a whole.

2.6 The Déisi Genealogies and the *Expulsion of the Déisi*

The final set of sources to be examined in this chapter is also directly connected to the Déisi. The possibilities for reconstructing the early medieval history of the Déisi are greatly enhanced thanks to the survival of a significant amount of genealogical material and a narrative origin-legend known as the *Expulsion of the Déisi*. For reasons that will become clear, this origin legend is best discussed in the context of the Déisi genealogies. Together, they offer insights into the political organization of the Déisi in the eighth

[85] Sharpe, *Medieval Irish Saints' Lives*, 385.
[86] Sharpe, *Medieval Irish Saints' Lives*, 31-2. Sharpe raises the possibility that Bishop Eugenius of Ardmore was the author of Declan's Latin life.

century, and make it possible to speculate about changes in that political organization over the period from the eighth to the eleventh centuries.

Genealogies

An enormous corpus of Irish genealogical material has survived to the present day. Unfortunately, as Ó Corráin has pointed out, most modern scholars feel a degree of wariness towards genealogical material, and this body of evidence remains understudied.[87] One of the most significant advances in the study of the Irish genealogies was the publication of Michael O'Brien's *Corpus Genealogiarum Hiberniae* in 1968.[88] This massive tome contains editions of the genealogies found in MS Rawlinson B. 502 and the *Book of Leinster*, with notes on additional variants in the *Book of Ballymote*, the *Book of Lecan*, and MS Laud 610. Although O'Brien did not include indexes or supplementary notes, his edition of this mass of genealogical material has made it significantly easier for scholars to work with the evidence they preserve. O'Brien originally intended that more volumes of *Corpus Genealogiarum Hiberniae* would be published, but only the first was ever completed before his death.

A number of other scholars have spent a great deal of energy editing and understanding various pieces of the genealogical corpus, including John O'Donovan, Eoin MacNeill, Kuno Meyer, Paul Walsh, Donnchadh Ó Corráin, and in the case of the Déisi genealogies in particular, Seamus Pender. On the whole, however, a significant amount of work remains to be done. In part, many modern scholars' reluctance to work with genealogies is due to the perception that they are impossibly tangled and inscrutable. Ó Corráin acknowledges the challenges, and says that genealogies can only be understood and interpreted 'within a wider context of origin-legend, saga and derivative literature- a

[87] Donnchadh Ó Corráin, 'Creating the Past: The Early Irish Genealogical Tradition', *Peritia* 12 (1998), 177-8.
[88] M.A. O'Brien, ed., *Corpus Genealogiarum Hiberniae*, Vol. 1, Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1968.

complex area where one genre flows into another'.[89] Kelleher argues that the genealogies, as a whole, represent an obscure mixture of fact and propaganda that is 'not easily disentangled'.[90] As with the other types of sources discussed in this chapter, it is vital to understand the context in which genealogies were written over the centuries, and the ways in which they were used by their authors and audiences.

Genealogy was pursued as a professional scholarly activity from the seventh to the seventeenth centuries in Ireland.[91] Ó Corráin has strongly argued that although there may have been a tradition of oral genealogy in Ireland at various periods, the genealogies as historical sources that survive to the present day represent a written tradition. He argues that, 'there is no convincing evidence that the texts preserved in the great medieval codices are oral materials later committed to writing, and they and related documents were produced by clerical scholars, often masters of monastic schools'.[92] This last point is an important one. The writing of formal genealogies probably developed as one strand of the efforts of Irish ecclesiastical scholars to position pre-Christian Irish history within world history. The genealogies were meant to help link contemporary lineages with the ancestor figures presented in the narrative pre-history, thereby continuing the story up to the audience's own moment in time.[93] Early genealogists could draw on many models, including the Old Testament and Continental writers like Isidore.[94] By the end of the eleventh century, the writing of genealogies was highly formalized and systematized, and securely tied in to the Irish scholarly concept of their peoples' place in world history, as expressed in works like *Lebor Gabála.* As Scowcroft explains, the secondary function of

[89] Ó Corráin, 'Creating the Past', 181.
[90] John V. Kelleher, 'The Pre-Norman Irish genealogies', *Irish Historical Studies* 16 (1968), 150.
[91] Ó Corráin, 'Creating the Past', 178.
[92] Ibid., 187-8.
[93] Kelleher, 'The Pre-Norman Irish genealogies', 145; Ó Corráin, 'Creating the Past', 202-3.
[94] Ó Corráin, 'Creating the Past', 201-6.

Lebor Gabála, and of the genealogical texts linked to it, was to create and maintain the ideal of the kingship of Tara as the pinnacle of Irish society.[95]

Long before the eleventh century and the formalized worldview presented in *Lebor Gabála*, the writing of genealogies served specific contemporary political and social needs.[96] As these needs changed, so did the genealogies. Kelleher, reflecting on the genealogical information collected by O'Brien, noted the stratification visible in many genealogies. Members of a particular branch of a family are recorded for a few generations, followed by a moment of 'selection and suppression' in which that branch is dropped, and a new branch's proliferation becomes the focus for the next few generations.[97] This is no doubt reflective of changes in the political and economic fortunes of various sub-lineages within kin-groups. As will be demonstrated more fully in the specific discussion of the Déisi genealogical tracts, the pedigrees for a particular family could also be extended or abridged at will, frequently in order to synchronize members of the family with other famous deeds or personages.

Generally speaking, the early genealogical schemes tend to be wider and more detailed, while later tracts tend to be narrow, linear pedigrees. Kelleher argues that in the early eleventh century, the genealogies went into decline, and much material was lost. In the twelfth century, there was a revival of interest, but it was antiquarian in nature, and the new compilers of the genealogies hardly understood the materials they edited. In their current political system, single dynastic families rather than large federations of alternating, linked kin-groups had hereditary rights of succession to territorial kingships, and there was less and less need to maintain a clear understanding of a wide, branching genealogy.[98] Noting this same tendency towards narrow pedigrees from the late tenth

[95] R. Mark Scowcroft, '*Leabhar Gabhála*- part II: the growth of the tradition', *Ériu* 39 (1988), 13-4.
[96] Ó Corráin, 'Creating the Past', 185-6, 189.
[97] Kelleher, 'The Pre-Norman Irish genealogies', 151.
[98] Ibid., 147, 152.

century onward, Ó Corráin suggests an active, rather than a passive, explanation.[99] He argues that if genealogy had become politically obsolete, it would have ceased as a professional activity. Because that is not the case, the composition of linear genealogies must have been intentional rather than accidental, and must have been viewed as the most effective available propaganda for the new territorial kings. In the same way, internal contradictions, anachronisms and abbreviations in the genealogical corpus should not be viewed as mistakes, but should be taken as evidence of the remodelling constantly undertaken by professional genealogists over the centuries.[100]

Ó Corráin also cautions scholars to bear in mind that genealogical schemes often have symbolic layers of meaning: ''Decent' and 'kinship' can be metaphors for other processes: subjugation of one dynasty by another, dynastic replacement, contiguity, establishment of hierarchy or an order of precedence'.[101] As is true of the saints' lives, the formalized medium of the genealogies is still flexible enough to carry these nuances of meaning, especially when read in conjunction with the other historical forms alongside which it was composed and transmitted. Fortunately, the Déisi genealogies are a perfect example of the various phases of genealogical composition and compilation, and can be read alongside the narrative origin legend, the *Expulsion of the Déisi.*

Séamus Pender has published the most complete edition of the Déisi genealogies, based largely on texts from the *Book of Lecan*, while Eoin MacNeill published the Déisi genealogies from the *Book of Ballymote*, and parts of the Déisi genealogies appear in O'Brien's volume.[102] The most thorough analysis of the material as a whole is a recent

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[99] Ó Corráin, 'Creating the Past', 186-7.
[100] Ó Corráin, 'Creating the Past', 185-6.
[101] Ibid., 183.
[102] Séamus Pender, ed., *Déssi genealogies: with an appendix of historical references*, Dublin: Irish Manuscripts Commission, 1937; Eoin MacNeill, 'The Dési Genealogies from the Book of Ballymote', *Journal of the Waterford and Southeast of Ireland Archaeological Society* 13 (1910), 44-51, 81-7, 151-7. O'Brien, *Corpus Genealogiarum Hiberniae*, 394-402.

study by David Thornton.[103] As is true of the genealogical corpus as a whole, the early Déisi genealogies are broad and segmentary, while the later texts are narrow, linear pedigrees. The earliest surviving Déisi genealogy is a poem about Bran Finn mac Máel Ochtraig in the *Book of Leinster*.[104] This figure died in 671, and Thornton argues that the poem dates to the late seventh century.[105] Aside from this early text, Thornton has identified three phases in the rest of the existing Déisi genealogical material. The first, his 'L-group', is found in the *Book of Leinster*, TCD MS H.2.7, the *Book of Ballymote*, the *Book of Lecan*, and the *Book of Uí Maine*.[106] The texts in this group end around 760, and Thornton argues that this indicates a date of composition in the late eighth century.[107] The 'L-group' is segmented and symmetrical, tracing multiple lines of descent from the two sons of Art Corp, Brecc and Oengus, and the genealogists included lists of offspring in addition to the kings' individual pedigrees. These L-group genealogies are a key source for the reconstruction of Déisi political organization in the eighth century, and will be discussed further later in this thesis.

The second group of Déisi genealogical material is a confusing and inconsistent mixture of texts from the late tenth and eleventh centuries.[108] The majority of these texts are linear pedigrees of the Uí Fhaeláin and Uí Bricc, but unlike the L-group texts, these genealogies do not represent a unified conceptual framework. Moreover, because these texts are narrow rather than branching, scholars have far fewer named individuals to study. As Thornton points out, many of the kings mentioned in the annals during this period of time cannot be identified in the genealogies.[109] This creates the impression that they were

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[103] David Thornton, 'The Déisi Muman in Munster and Dyfed', in Thornton, *Kings, Chronologies and Genealogies: Studies in the Political History of Early Medieval Ireland and Wales*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, 121-79.
[104] O'Brien, *Corpus Genealogiarum Hiberniae*, 395.
[105] Thornton, 'The Déisi Muman', 127.
[106] The best starting point for looking at this material is O'Brien, *Corpus Genealogiarum Hiberniae*, 394-402.
[107] Thornton, 'The Déisi Muman', 127-30.
[108] Ibid., 130-1, 168-73.
[109] Ibid., 168-73.

usurpers, outsiders, or rivals, when in fact many Déisi lineages may have been providing kings throughout this period, just as they did in earlier periods.

The final phase of Déisi genealogy runs from the late tenth century to the thirteenth century, and represents the rise of the Uí Fhaeláin and Uí Bricc dynasties in the kingdom.[110] By this stage, the genealogists ceased to mention lineages that had been powerful, or at least politically significant, in earlier periods, like the Uí Fhothaid and Uí Óengusa. Thornton argues that this runs parallel to the overall development of both the writing of genealogies and the organization of political and military power in Ireland over this period of time, 'away from the classic 'tribal' pattern to lordship based on corporate dynasties'.[111]

Overall, the Déisi genealogies can be seen to mirror the same processes of development visible in the genealogical corpus as a whole between the eighth and eleventh centuries. In this thesis, genealogical material is helpful in understanding the relationships between various ruling segments of the Déisi royal line, as well as changes in the perceived or real balance of power among these families over time. As discussed earlier, the genealogies must always be read in conjunction with other historical materials, like the annals and saints' lives. It may not be a coincidence that the first annal entry recording the death of a king of the Déisi falls under the year 632 in the *Annals of Inisfallen*, and records the death of Cobthach, grandfather of the Bran Finn about whom the earliest Déisi genealogy was written. Moreover, in the case of the Déisi, it is possible to read the genealogies alongside their origin legend, the *Expulsion of the Déisi*.

The *Expulsion of the Déisi*

This text, set in the late fifth and sixth centuries, was probably first composed in the eighth century. The oldest version of the text is represented by copies found in Rawlinson B. 502, and Laud 610, as well as fragments in the Book of Uí Maine and *Liber Flavus*

[110] Thornton, 'The Déisi Muman', 173-9.
[111] Ibid., 174.

Fergusiorum.[112] Although it contains a variety of serious chronological and narrative inconsistencies and anachronisms, the text also preserves a large amount of information about genealogy, political relationships and alliances between the Déisi lineages and with other groups. Indeed, Ó Cathasaigh argues that the inconsistencies in the story are actually helpful to the historian, because the text 'exemplifies the fact that the compilation of Irish texts from disparate- and incompatible- sources is sometimes effected in such a way as to enable us to separate the different strands'.[113]

In his study, Ó Cathasaigh demonstrates that the text itself falls into two sections, the first of which tells the bulk of the story, and the second of which seems to be a set of appended 'supplementary notes'.[114] The first section, or body of the text, describes how the Déisi were banished from Meath, wandered through Leinster, and eventually settled in Munster. In the supplementary notes, some of these events are mentioned again, and there is an attempt to tidy up various aspects of the story, from the number of tribes, to the number of battles, to the number of years the Déisi supposedly wandered. There is also an effort to synchronize parts of the Déisi story to events involving other people like the Féni and Fothairt.

Ó Cathasaigh argues that both the body of the text and the supplementary notes represent efforts at compilation, and that the two texts were then transmitted together and survive in that form.[115] Hull notes that the Laud 610 version of the story even contains a reference to the compiler's difficulties reconciling two conflicting sources, one of which reports seven battles where the other records thirty.[116] Ó Cathasaigh attempts to determine what kinds of conflicting source material the compilers might have had to deal with, and

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[112] Kuno Meyer, ed., 'The Expulsion of the Dessi', *Y Cymmrodor* 14 (1901), 101-35; Kuno Meyer, ed., 'The Expulsion of the Déssi', *Ériu* 3 (1907), 135-42; S. Pender, ed., 'Two unpublished version of the Expulsion of the Déssi', in S. Pender, ed., *Féilscríbhinn Torna: Essays and Studies presented to Professor Tadhg Ua Donnchadha*, Cork, 1947, 209-17.
[113] Tomás Ó Cathasaigh, 'The Déisi and Dyfed', *Éigse* 20 (1984), 7.
[114] Ibid., 8-10.
[115] Ibid., 9-10.
[116] V.E. Hull, 'The Book of Uí Maine version of the Expulsion of the Déssi', *Zeitschrift fur celtische Philologie* 24 (1954), 268, n.6.

points out the genealogies.[117] He argues that the chronological inconsistencies within the body of the text represent a foreshortening of the Déisi pedigree by the removal of a number of early ancestors' generations, in the same manner exhibited in certain Déisi genealogical tracts. The chronological scheme presented in the supplementary notes, and some of the synchronization that is attempted there, can be explained by looking at other parts of the Déisi genealogies, where those early generations have not been removed. In this sense, he argues that compilers of this type of text would have made use of any and all material at their disposal to achieve their rhetorical purpose, even when that created chronologically impossible situations within the story.

Ó Cathasaigh concludes that most parts of the *Expulsion of the Déisi* as preserved in MS Rawlinson B. 502 and MS Laud 610 are eighth century in date.[118] In other words, he believes that although the surviving texts undoubtedly represent a long history of compilation, edition and modification, they can be used as a source for the eighth century political organization of the Déisi kingdom. Thornton picks up his argument, and attempts to demonstrate the significant 'unwitting evidence' the *Expulsion* can provide about the eighth-century context in which it was written.[119] He extensively compares the chronological and genealogical schemes represented in the *Expulsion* with his early L-group genealogies, as well as with the annals and saints' lives. He argues that the early genealogies and the *Expulsion* are designed to provide the Déisi with links to the Uí Néill, Connachta and Laigin, rather than with the Eóganacht, perhaps as a way of asserting their independence within Munster.[120] Moreover, Thornton argues that it is possible to trace the shifting balance of power within the various segments of the Déisi ruling line from the

[117] Ó Cathasaigh, 'The Déisi and Dyfed', 11-4, 29-31.
[118] Ibid., 16-8.
[119] Thornton, 'The Déisi Muman', 125.
[120] Ibid., 134.

eighth to the thirteenth centuries.[121] His observations will be dealt with in greater detail in later chapters of this thesis.

2.7 Documentary Sources: Conclusion

Overall, it is clear that the genealogies, in combination with associated materials like the Déisi origin tale, the annals, saints' lives and sagas, provide a solid base of evidence from which to attempt to reconstruct this history of the Déisi kingdom between the eighth and the eleventh centuries. Moreover, all of these sources are interconnected. During their whole history of composition and use, each was written in the context of the others, as part of a complete historiographical and literary body of knowledge and work. The texts inform one another, reflect one another, and must be used and understood as sources of evidence, side by side rather than individually. Thus, while each of the sources discussed above has its own individual problems of dating and interpretation, taken as part of a body of related material, they can shed light on the developments in the political, social and economic organization of the kingdom in this period.

2.8 Interdisciplinary Research

As an interdisciplinary project, this study places equal value on the potential contributions of both documentary and archaeological data to an understanding of past settlement. The documentary evidence offers integral insights into the political, social and economic organization of early medieval Ireland. In this instance, contemporary written sources help with the reconstruction of Déisi political history and document contacts between the Déisi and other population groups, both locally and over longer distances. The annals, genealogies, saints' lives and other narrative sources, all discuss places, personalities and events that build a picture of the relationships between people and the natural and manmade landscapes of early medieval Déisi. In that light, the analysis of extant archaeological remains and their geographical siting and context both enhances the

[121] Thornton, 'The Déisi Muman', 136-79.

historical evidence and creates its own picture of settlement and social organization in the kingdom.

Examination of archaeological remains would be integral to any study of early medieval settlement patterns, but it is of equal, if not greater, value to the study of the origins of town development. While the documentary sources offer glimpses of the social and economic changes that facilitated increasing spatial integration and centralization over the period in question, only through examination of archaeological evidence is it possible to test hypotheses about the physical, geographical ramifications of these developments. For instance, while the development of fully-fledged towns represented innovations in terms of social, economic and spatial organization, their locations and relationships with other pre-existing settlements would indicate that they grew organically within the framework of pre-existing settlement patterns.

Geographic Information Systems

The integration of information derived from documentary and archaeological sources is one of the major challenges in any interdisciplinary project. Because the major aims of this study are landscape and settlement based, a geographical or spatial framework is the best way to integrate data from disparate sources. This is greatly facilitated by Geographic Information Systems (GIS) software, in this case, the package ArcGIS produced by ESRI. There are a number of ways to define GIS, but in essence, 'the name GIS describes a range of software packages displaying the common abilities to store, manage, manipulate, analyze and display spatially referenced information'.[122] Data is collected in a database, which GIS can then store and visualize in two formats, depending on the user's needs and the amount and type of information to be collected and visualized. The first is known as a vector system, in which data is stored as a set of points, lines or polygons, such as archaeological sites, roads, rivers or county boundaries. The second is

[122] Henry Chapman, *Landscape Archaeology and GIS*, 2006, 15.

called a raster system, in which the data is organized into cells, each of which is given a particular value or attribute to describe it. An example of a typical raster system is a digital terrain model, in which each cell of a map is given a particular color, depending on the height above sea level in that location, resulting in a topographical map. Both raster and vector data sets can be visualized as a series of layers forming a map. These maps link back into the original database, and by running queries or analysis on the existing data sets, new data sets can be created. For instance, if the database contains a 'rivers' data set and a 'churches' data set, it is possible to categorize the churches by proximity to a river.

The integration of material from documentary sources is relatively simple when it has a spatial component, such as an account of a journey in a saint's life or mentions of battles at specific locations. Other data, such as forest cover or changes in boundaries, can be digitized from historic maps. The exercise of mapping data from a variety of different sources frequently raises new and challenging questions about the sources themselves, as well as enhancing the interpretive significance of each data set.

The role of GIS in this project, then, is three-fold: it allows for the collection and integration of spatially referenced data from a wide variety of sources; it facilitates the production of meaningful maps for inclusion in the dissertation; and it provides a workspace in which to ask new questions of the sources. In other words, it is not simply a tool used at the beginning or end of the project to organize data into maps, but has helped to shape the direction of the project all along. Interaction with GIS informed the selection of smaller study areas within Déisi that would best reward more intensive fieldwork. Inquiry into site selection factors and routeways is a continuous process of moving from documentary sources to archaeological and cartographic sources to GIS to the field and back again.

2.9 Archaeological Source Material

The quality of any GIS depends on the quality of the information the researcher collects and inputs into it. If the data is meaningless, the GIS will be meaningless; therefore, it is vital to explain when, where and how that data has been found, chosen and collected. The archaeological data for this project was downloaded from the Sites and Monuments Record website, <www.archaeology.ie>, and represents the most up-to-date data available on the date of the download, 1 April 2009. In general, the maps follow the SMR's own descriptive categories for site types, and no attempt has been made to map sites for which no known archaeological remains exist.

Early medieval monument types examined in this thesis included ringforts, enclosures, souterrains and ecclesiastical sites, which are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3. Viking-related site types include hoards, *longphuirt*, and the late Viking Age settlement at Waterford, which are discussed in Chapters 4 and 5. Other sites, including mines, roads, river fording or crossing points, ogams, and single finds of diagnostic artefacts have also been examined when possible.

Information about all of the sites analyzed in this thesis has been collected from the *Archaeological Inventory of County Waterford*,[123] the National Monuments Service Archives, the topographic files held in the National Museum of Ireland, published excavation reports and notices, internal reports made available by archaeological consultancy firms, the 1st Edition Ordnance Survey 6-inch series maps, ortho-photographs,[124] placename evidence,[125] and the variety of documentary sources discussed earlier. In cases where there seems to be justification for the reclassification of a site, the evidence is noted in the footnotes or the gazetteer as appropriate. The identification of early medieval ecclesiastical sites or possible early ecclesiastical sites is based on the

[123] Michael Moore, ed., *Archaeological Inventory of County Waterford*. Dublin: Stationary Office, 1999.
[124] Both the aerial photographs and digital versions of the Ordnance Survey 1st Edition 6-inch maps are available through the Ordnance Survey of Ireland website, <maps.osi.ie/publicviewer>.
[125] Rev. P. Canon Power, *The Place-names of Decies*, 2nd ed., Cork University Press, 1952.

presence of some combination of a number of features, including a *cill-* placename, bullaun stones, a circular or subcircular enclosure, ogam stones, and local tradition of an early church site.[126]

In addition to desk-based survey, a limited amount of field survey of monuments was conducted for this thesis. This fieldwork focused on a small sub-study area in western Co. Waterford, in the Blackwater valley, and was a survey of the standing remains of selected early medieval secular and ecclesiastical sites in the area, as well as some possible trackways and fording sites. Each site chosen for a field visit was measured, photographed, and sketch-planned, and full details, including photographs, are included in the appended gazetteer in Volume 2.

2.10 Interdisciplinary Research: Conclusion

As an interdisciplinary project, this thesis has drawn on the evidence provided by both archaeological and documentary sources to the greatest possible extent. While the evidence is rarely contradictory, these different sources provide answers to very different questions. Their coverage is also not uniform, and in some sections of this thesis, greater emphasis is placed on archaeological sources, while in others the argument relies on documentary evidence. These methodological challenges are common to all interdisciplinary studies of early medieval Ireland, and some of the remaining gaps in the evidence are discussed further in the concluding chapter.

[126] The full list of features for the identification of an early medieval ecclesiastical site is provided by Leo Swan, 'Enclosed Ecclesiastical Sites and Their Relevance to Settlement Patterns of the First Millennium A.D.', in Reeves-Smyth and Hammond, eds., *Landscape Archaeology in Ireland*, 1983, 269.

Chapter 3

Eighth Century Ireland and the Déisi Kingdom

3.1 Introduction

The eighth century is often seen as the full flowering of Irish early medieval culture, characterized by a rich tradition of scholarship, literary and artistic endeavors, a monastic and ascetic Christian tradition, a shifting and fragmented political system, and an elaborately hierarchical social structure. The many surviving texts from this period allow modern historians to vividly imagine life in early medieval Irish society, and the modern Irish landscape is still dotted with the remains of secular and ecclesiastic enclosed settlements of this period. This wealth of evidence is both a blessing and a curse. Only a tiny fraction of the thousands of known ringforts have been excavated or dated, and the problematic nature of the documentary sources often makes their interpretation difficult. Despite all the details provided by the surviving evidence, much of the 'big picture' remains open to question.

This chapter has at its core major questions about how eighth century Irish communities were organized and how they functioned. One way to approach this question is from the top downwards, and the first section discusses regional secular politics during this period. Another way is to look at the organization and character of the Irish church, whose settlements were dispersed across the landscape and linked to both the local agrarian economy and to wider political, social, and economic networks. Similarly, it is possible to examine both documentary evidence and the remains of the early medieval settlement pattern in order to draw inferences about how rural communities were organized, how they operated, and how settlements related to one another. The second section of this chapter will look at both ecclesiastical and secular settlement as revealed in

both the documentary and archaeological sources. Finally, the last section will focus on settlement and community organization in the Déisi kingdom in the eighth century, with a smaller case study in the Blackwater Valley. The purpose of this chapter is to try to assess how communities functioned in pre-Viking Ireland, in order to establish a backdrop against which subsequent processes of urbanization can be more clearly seen.

3.2 Irish Politics in the Eighth Century: Introduction

One of the major themes in eighth century Irish political history is the development of the concept of Ireland as divided into a northern half, Leth Cuinn, and a southern half, Leth Moga, ruled by the kings of Tara and Cashel respectively. Byrne suggests that this concept evolved during the eighth century as the Uí Néill kings gained unchallenged control over the northern half of Ireland.[1] In response to their growing strength, the kings of Cashel attempted to establish similar authority in the south, both in reality, and by generating a historical narrative that bolstered their claims.[2] Throughout the eighth century, however, the northern kings proved to be stronger than their southern counterparts, although a few kings of Cashel challenged the Uí Néill supremacy.[3]

The success of the Uí Néill can be attributed to a number of factors, including their apparent ability and willingness to restrict the number of lineages eligible for kingship. By contrast, the kings of Cashel were drawn from several Eóganacht lineages, spread throughout Munster. Byrne notes that from the seventh to the mid-eighth centuries, the kingship of Cashel was limited to only three of the Eóganacht groups, those of the Eóganacht Áine, the Eóganacht Chaisil and the Eóganacht Glendamnach, all of whom were situated in the middle of Munster. This would seem to indicate the beginnings of territorial and dynastic consolidation similar to that happening among the Uí Néill during

[1] F.J. Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001, 202-3. Gearóid Mac Niocaill, *Ireland Before the Vikings*, Gill and Macmillan, 1972, 107-45.
[2] Ibid., 202.
[3] Ibid., 203.

the same period. According to Byrne, however, the kingship of Cashel did not develop any further during the eighth century, and remained a 'very loose hegemony', until the rise of the Dál Cais in the tenth century.[4]

It is not possible to fully reconstruct the political developments and machinations of eighth-century Ireland on the basis of surviving sources, but the broad outlines are perceptible. They are worth examining, on the one hand, because the division of the island into northern and southern halves had a major impact on later political geography, but also because local Déisi politics must be analyzed in light of wider developments. Although the following narrative is perhaps necessarily patchy, it is intended to provide a backdrop against which happenings in the Déisi kingdom can be more readily understood.

3.3 The Kingships of Tara and Cashel, 700-800

At the start of the eighth century, the kingship of Tara was held by three Northern Uí Néill kings. Loingsech mac Óengusso (d. 704) and Congal mac Fergusso (d. 710) were members of Cenél Conaill, but after Congal's death the kingship passed to Fergal mac Máele Dúin, of the Cenél Eógain (d. 722).[5] During this period of Northern Uí Néill dominance, other kingdoms in the area around Tara were restless. In 712, there was conflict between two branches of the Síl nÁedo Sláine.[6] The victor, Flann mac Áeda Fer Chúl, turned west in the hopes taking control over the kingship of Uisnech in Mide from its king, Murchad mac Diarmato.[7] Although the king of Uisnech retained control thanks in part to support from the king of Tara, the Uí Failgi took advantage of the chaos in Mide to launch an unsuccessful attack from the south.[8]

During the next decade of the eighth century, the Laigin, led by Murchad mac Brain, also attempted to further destabilize the situation in Mide with campaigns in 719

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[4] Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 203-4.
[5] AU703.2; AU710.3; AU722.8. Mac Niocaill, *Ireland Before the Vikings*, 119.
[6] AU712.6.
[7] AU714.1.
[8] AU714.5.

and 721.[9] After the first attack, the Uí Neill attacked into Laigin repeatedly.[10] When they returned in 721, the Laigin were joined by Cathal mac Finnguine, king of Cashel, but the outcome of the campaign was apparently inconclusive. The following year, the king of Tara, Fergal mac Máele Dúin, led an army into Laigin territory and gained Murchad's submission, and according to the annalists, demanded tribute as well as hostages.[11] Murchad apparently did not deliver on these conditions, and the conflict culminated in a major battle between the Uí Néill and the Laigin at the Hill of Allen, in modern Co. Kildare, in 722.[12] Casualties were reportedly heavy on both sides, particularly among the Northern Uí Néill, and the king of Tara, Fergal mac Máele Dúin, was among the dead.

This seems to have thrown the north and east into relative chaos. Fergal mac Máele Dúin's immediate successor as the king of Tara may have been the former king of Brega, Fogartach, who was killed shortly thereafter by Cináed mac Írgalaigh of the Síl nÁedo Sláine.[13] The Northern Uí Néill faced their own internal struggles; in 727, the Cenél Eógain and the Cenél Conaill fought a battle amongst themselves that resulted in Cenél Conaill gaining control over the Northern Uí Néill.[14] Once established in the north, the Cenél Conaill under Flaithbertach mac Loingsecho, attacked and killed Cináed mac Írgalaigh, reclaiming the kingship of Tara for the Northern Uí Néill.[15] However, Flaithbertach faced continued opposition from the Cenél Eógain, led by Áed Allán, who campaigned against him continuously in the early 730s.[16] Perhaps as a result of this

[9] AU719.5; AU721.6. Mac Niocaill, *Ireland Before the Vikings*, 121.
[10] AT719.7.
[11] AU721.8; AT721.5.
[12] AU722.8; AT722.7; CS722 is a particularly long account.
[13] AU724.3. Mac Niocaill, *Ireland Before the Vikings*, 122.
[14] AU727.2. Mac Niocaill, *Ireland Before the Vikings*, 122.
[15] AU728.1.
[16] AU732.10; AU733.3; AT733.3; AU734.8; AT734.5.

pressure, Flaithbertach seems to have abdicated in favour of Áed Allán in 734, and apparently retired to a religious life.[17]

Following the death of Murchad mac Brain in 727, there was unrest among the Laigin.[18] In the year after his death, Murchad's sons, Fáelán and Dúnchad, fought for the kingship of Laigin, and Fáelán emerged as the victor when his brother was killed in battle.[19] This had ramifications in the south, because Dúnchad left behind a widow, Tualaith, who was the daughter of Cathal mac Finnguine, king of Cashel. Cathal became a determined enemy, leading attacks on southern Laigin during the 730s.[20] In addition to his enmity towards Fáelán, Cathal may have campaigned in southern Laigin in order to contain the Uí Chennselaig, who were experiencing growing strength under the leadership of Áed mac Colggen.[21]

Cathal mac Finnguine is first mentioned in the annals campaigning into Brega in 721 alongside Murchad mac Brain and the Laigin. An interpolated entry in the *Annals of Inisfallen* says that he gained the submission of the king of Tara on that occasion, and became one of the five Munster kings to rule the whole island.[22] Although this claim is undoubtedly anachronistic, it does seem that Cathal was a strong and successful king. In the earlier eighth century, Munster had experienced a certain amount of internal conflict. In 713, the king of Cashel, Cormac mac Ailello, was killed by the Déis Tuaiscirt, based near the Shannon estuary.[23] His successor, Eterscél mac Máele Umai, is known only from an obit in the *Annals of Inisfallen* under the year 721, immediately preceding Cathal's Brega campaign.[24] Eterscél, like Cormac, seems to have faced opposition from the west:

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[17] AU734.10; AT734.7. Mac Niocaill, *Ireland Before the Vikings*, 124. Flaithbertach is said to have died '*in clericatu*' in 765: AU765.2; AT765.2.
[18] AU727.7.
[19] AU728.1.
[20] Mac Niocaill, *Ireland Before the Vikings*, 123.
[21] Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 147-50.
[22] AI721.2.
[23] AU713.6; AT712.9
[24] AI721.1.

the *Annals of Inisfallen* report the death in 717 of Cú Dínisc mac Foirchellaich of the Eóganacht Locha Léin, and refer to him as king of West Munster.[25] Cathal mac Finnguine apparently capitalized on the deaths of these two dynasts within a few years of one another and succeeded in reunifying Munster under a single Eóganacht king.

Throughout his reign, Cathal was apparently sure enough of his authority within Munster to spend time and energy campaigning elsewhere, and perhaps even pursuing expansionist policies.[26] His focus was generally north and eastward, and he used both military campaigns and the above-mentioned marriage alliance to interfere in Laigin, Brega, and Mide during much of his reign. After his campaign with the Laigin into Brega in 721, Cathal continued his attacks on the Uí Néill, although he is not mentioned as having taken part in the battle of Allen in 722. It is possible that during the chaotic years following that battle, Cathal spent time securing his hold over Munster, although the annals do not offer any insight into that process. Cathal reappears in the annals for the 730s, which records him campaigning in Laigin and Uí Néill territories. He faced Áed mac Colggen unsuccessfully in 732, but in the following year, was still strong enough to campaign deep into Brega.[27] Cathal's actions in 733 may have been designed to exploit divisions among the Uí Néill; during the early 730s, Flaithbertach mac Loingsecho of the Cenél Conaill was struggling to fend off the growing power of the Cenél Eógain under the leadership of Áed Allán. Perhaps with an eye on this conflict, in 733 Cathal reportedly fought battles against the kings of Mide and Clann Cholmain Bicc at Tailtiu (Teltown) and Tlachtga (the Hill of Ward), evidently with inconclusive results.[28] Byrne argues that although the locations of these battles suggests that Cathal was attempting to take control

[25] AI717.2.
[26] Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 207-8.
[27] AU732.12; AT732.8; AU733.7.
[28] AU733.7.

over sites linked to the kingship of Tara, there is no evidence that Cathal was trying to make a realistic bid for the high-kingship.[29]

Whether or not Cathal sought to interpose himself into the kingship of Tara in 733, during the second half of the 730s, both he and the king of Tara, Áed Allán, became enmeshed in conflicts with the Laigin. The leadership of the Laigin was contested between the surviving sons of Murchad, who were of the Uí Dúnlainge based in north Laigin, and the Uí Chennselaig of southern Laigin, led by Áed mac Colggen. Both Cathal and Áed Allán sought to demonstrate their supremacy by gaining control over Laigin. Byrne perceives the root of this conflict to be a disagreement as to whether the Laigin rightly belonged in the northern or southern half of the island.[30] Neither king appears to have been trying to 'conquer' Laigin or to absorb the kingdom into their own territory.[31] Rather, they fought to secure the submission, loyalty, and perhaps tribute, of the Laigin, and thereby to establish and maintain their hierarchical dominance.

To this end, Cathal fought the Laigin twice in the later 730s. He joined forces with the king of the Osraige in 735 and defeated the Laigin, although there were apparently severe casualties on both sides.[32] Two years after this battle, the annals report that Cathal met Áed Allán at Terryglass, and although the topics of discussion are not mentioned, both annals reporting this event follow with a notice that the *lex Patricii* was proclaimed that year.[33] While the events may be connected, Byrne argues that, 'it is unlikely that the meeting between the two kings involved much more than an agreement concerning their respective spheres of influence'.[34] Whatever agreement may have been made, the events of the following year illustrate that it must not have lasted. In 738, the king of Laigin,

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[29] Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 208-9.
[30] Ibid., 207-9.
[31] Ibid., 148, 210.
[32] AU735.3; AI735.1; AT735.3.
[33] AU737.9; AU737.10; AT737.5; AT737.6.
[34] Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 210. MacNiocaill suggests that they formed a pact to attack the Laigin, but the evidence does not seem to support this interpretation. MacNiocaill, *Ireland Before the Vikings*, 124.

Fáelán mac Murchada, died, and Áed Allán defeated the Laigin at the battle of Áth Senaig, presumably gaining their full submission. In the same year, Cathal reportedly invaded Laigin and exacted submission and tribute from either Fáelán or his brother, Bran Bec, which makes the position and content of this notice in the annals challenging to interpret.[35] Bran Bec, and the Uí Chennselaig king, Áed mac Colggen, are listed among the slain at the battle of Áth Senaig. The overall impression given by the evidence for the events of 738 is that both Áed Allán and Cathal were still trying to play out their own conflict via interference in Laigin, regardless of any agreement they might have reached at Terryglass the year before.

The direct impact of the events of 738 is hard to determine; to some extent it appears that despite the death toll of the battle of Áth Senaig, political life carried on much as before. Another of Murchad's sons, Muiredach, took over the kingship of the Laigin, and evidently faced no more trouble from the Uí Chennselaig after Áed mac Colggen's death. Both Cathal and Áed Allán remained in their kingships until the early 740s, but Áed Allán faced opposition from a Southern Uí Néill rival, Domnall Midi mac Murchada of the Clann Cholmáin. Domnall eventually succeeded in defeating and killing Áed Allán in 743, and claimed the kingship of Tara for the Clann Cholmáin.[36] The annals note under the following year that Domnall Midi resumed clerical life, and Byrne postulates that he 'retired briefly to a monastery' for religious reasons.[37] Mac Niocaill hypothesized that Domnall Midi combined his secular office with the leadership of a monastery, and

[35] Fáelán's death is reported in AU738.1; AI738.1; AT738.1. The Battle of Áth Senaig appears in AU738.4; AT738.4. Cathal's invasion of Laigin is at: AU738.9; AT738.7. Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 150, 209. Byrne has some doubts about the chronology of these events, and suggests that Cathal exacted tribute from Fáelán prior to his death, an action that contributed to Áed Allán's decision to engage the Laigin at Áth Senaig. Part of the confusion is that while AT says that Cathal took tribute from Fáelán's younger brother and successor, Bran Bec, AU says that Fáelán himself paid the tribute. Whether the chronology or the name is in error will have to remain an open question.

[36] AU743.4; T743.3; AI743.1.

[37] AU744.2; AT744.2. Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 156.

suggests Clonard as the likeliest community.[38] In either case, it would seem that the early part of Domnall Midi's reign was relatively peaceful, and that he managed to maintain friendly relations with the Uí Dúnlainge king of Laigin, Muiredach mac Murchada.[39]

In 742, the year before Domnall Midi's accession, Cathal died after two decades as king of Cashel, and Munster began to decline.[40] As Byrne has pointed out, Cathal mac Finnguine's reign was seen by later generations of poets and writers as a high point in Munster's early history.[41] His immediate successor was probably Cathasach mac Eterscélai of the Eóganacht Áine, but nothing appears in the annals about him.[42] The kingship then passed to a member of the southwest Munster Eóganacht Locha Léin lineage, Mael Dúin mac Áedo. This shifted the power centre of the king of Munster much further west than it had been in the previous several generations. This may have presented Mael Dúin with serious challenges, and he seems to have been largely unsuccessful in unifying the sub-kingdoms of the province or in repelling Uí Néill aggression. He faced defeat at the hands of the western sub-kingdoms of Araid Chliach and Uí Fidgente in 766, and the Uí Néill defeated the Munstermen and ravaged the province twice in 775 and 776.[43] MacNiocaill argues that Mael Dúin had particular difficulties with the Ciarraige, which was 'uneasy in its subordination to the Eóganacht of Loch Léin, and would have preferred to be subordinate to the king of Cashel, who had the advantage of being further away'.[44] Byrne agrees that Mael Dúin failed to gain sufficient authority over the western sub-kingdoms, and suggests that in fact his weakness helped to solidify the bonds between the central Munster Eóganacht lineages and the western sub-kingdoms.[45] The kingship of

[38] Mac Niocaill, *Ireland Before the Vikings*, 126.
[39] Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 126-7.
[40] AU742.3; AT742.3; AI742.1. The entry in AI implies that he was buried at Emly.
[41] Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 210-11. His reign is the backdrop, for instance, to the twelfth century *Aislinge Meic Conglinne*, and he is the subject of a praise-poem in the *Book of Laigin*.
[42] Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 219-20; Mac Niocaill, *Ireland Before the Vikings*, 130-1.
[43] AI766.2; AU775.5; AU776.11.
[44] Mac Niocaill, *Ireland Before the Vikings*, 131-2.
[45] Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 216-20.

Cashel was at its low ebb, from which it would not recover until the end of the eighth century.

As the power of the Eóganacht declined, that of the Uí Néill stabilized, and their territories seem to have experienced relative peace from the late 740s through the 760s.[46] In the mid-750s, however, Domnall Midi mac Murchada, the Clann Cholmáin king of Tara, faced a challenge from the Cenél Eógain under Niall Frossach, son of Fergal mac Máele Dúin and brother of Áed Allán. He led the Southern Uí Néill and the Laigin against Niall Frossach in 756, and seems to have convinced Niall that he could not easily be overthrown.[47] At Domnall's death in 763, the annals report that he was still the king of Tara, and it was not until after his death that Niall was able to claim the kingship.[48]

Domnall's sons, Murchad and Donnchad, were evidently unable to challenge Niall as he consolidated his authority because they were busy fighting with one another for supremacy in Southern Uí Néill territory. When the brothers met in battle in 765, Murchad was supported by Ailgel, king of Tethbae in northwest Mide, and Donnchad was backed by Follaman, king of Caílle Follamain in northeast Mide.[49] Donnchad and Follaman defeated Murchad and his forces, killing Murchad, and Donnchad took the kingship of the Southern Uí Néill.[50] The annals report that in the following year, someone 'treacherously' murdered Donnchad's ally Follaman.[51] Mac Niocaill suggests that Donnchad ordered the killing of Follaman, and that both the murder and the battle between Mide and Brega that same year were intended to solidify Donnchad's control over the Southern Uí Néill.[52]

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[46] Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 156-7.
[47] AU756.3; AT756.4.
[48] AU763.1; AI763.2; AT763.1.
[49] The alliance between Follaman and Donnchad may have been a continuation of an alliance between Follaman and Donnchad's father Domnall. Follaman and Domnall were the two kings who stood against Cathal mac Finguine when he attacked Brega in 733.
[50] AU765.5; AT765.6.
[51] AU766.2; AT766.2.
[52] AU766.4. Mac Niocaill, *Ireland Before the Vikings*, 126-7.

Once Donnchad stabilized the Southern Uí Néill, he began to represent a serious threat to Niall Frossach. According to the *Annals of the Four Masters*, Niall Frossach abdicated the throne, and Donnchad immediately took control of the kingship.[53] Evidence from all of the annals indicates that Donnchad worked to expand his sphere of influence during the early 770s. In 770, he campaigned into Laigin, and then turned his attention to the north, leading hostings into Northern Uí Néill territory in 771 and 772.[54] In 774, he created a 'disturbance' at the *Óenach Tailten*, and in the following year, he defeated the Munstermen.[55]

Donnchad evidently did not face opposition from the Laigin, who had their own troubles in the generations after the battle of Áth Senaig. During the 750s, the Laigin were threatened by the Osraige, led by the aggressive king Anmchaid mac Con Cherca.[56] From the 760s onward, however, they began to recover under the leadership of the Uí Dúnlainge king of Laigin, Cellach mac Dúnchada, who reigned until his death in 776.[57] Byrne notes, however, that when the reinvigorated Laigin began to interfere in the affairs of the Uí Failgi and the Fothairt in 770, Donnchad promptly stepped in and 'asserted his suzerainty' over Cellach's kingdom.[58]

The men of Munster under Mael Dúin put up slightly more resistance to Donnchad's expanding power, and following his campaign in 775, they mounted a counter-attack in 776.[59] However, as discussed above, the kingship of Cashel could not compete with that of Tara during this part of the eighth century, and the province became weaker still after Mael Dúin's death in 786.[60] His successor as the king of Cashel, Olchobar mac Fláinn, was not even a member of the Eóganacht. He was of the Uí

[53] AFM765.17. Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 156.
[54] AU770.8; AU771.10; AU772.3.
[55] AU774.7; AU775.5.
[56] Mac Niocaill, *Ireland Before the Vikings*, 127-9.
[57] AU776.8; AI776.1.
[58] AU770.4; AU770.8. Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 157.
[59] AU776.11.
[60] AI786.1.

Fidgenti, and probably managed to secure the kingship of Cashel thanks to his position of power as the abbot of Scattery Island in the Shannon estuary.[61] Mac Niocaill suggests that during this part of the eighth century, Munster was divided by ongoing conflict between eastern and western Munster, which was evidently not resolved by Olchobar's accession, even if he was a popular choice.[62] Olchobar was replaced in the early 790s by Artrí mac Cathail of the Eóganacht Glendamnach, who helped to restore stability to Munster, holding onto the kingship of Cashel until his death in the early 820s.[63] The entry in the *Annals of Ulster* depicting his accession states that Artrí was 'ordained', and that the *cáin* of Ailbe was promulgated in Munster at the same ceremony.[64] This indicates that Artrí had the support of the Munster churches, which must have contributed to his ability to unify the fractious southern sub-kingdoms.

The Uí Néill kings were evidently not entirely free to capitalize on Munster's weakness, because during the last two decades of the eighth century, they were increasingly preoccupied by conflict with the Laigin and the northern kings. Donnchad marched north to take hostages from Domnall, son of Áed Muinderg, the king of Ailech, in 779.[65] In 780, the Laigin attacked the Southern Uí Néill, and in the following year, they also engaged the men of Brega in battle.[66] Mac Niocaill argues that these combined pressures induced Donnchad to make peace and an alliance with the king of Ulaid in 784.[67] To an extent, Donnchad's efforts to turn some of his rivals into allies seems to have been successful, and the annals for 794 report that the king of Tara assisted the Laigin in their campaign against the men of Munster.[68] Fighting among the lineages of the Northern Uí

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[61] Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 219.
[62] Mac Niocaill, *Ireland Before the Vikings*, 132.
[63] Olchobar died in 797, and his obit at AI797.2 refers to him only as abbot of Scattery Island.
[64] AU793.3. These events are not mentioned at all in AI, for whatever reason, and both CS and AT are lacunose for this period. AFM788.13 reports only the promulgation of the law of Ailbe.
[65] AU779.10.
[66] AU780.7; AU781.4.
[67] AU784.8. Mac Niocaill, *Ireland Before the Vikings*, 143.
[68] AU794.6.

Néill had prevented them from challenging Donnchad during the late 780s, but by 790, Áed, son of Niall Frossach, had established his dominance over the north.[69] Donnchad met Áed, later known as Áed Oirdnide, in battle in 791 and defeated him, but when they fought again in 797, Áed killed Donnchad, ravaged Mide, and established himself as king of Tara.[70]

At the close of the eighth century, the kingships of Tara and Cashel were both held by strong, aggressive leaders. Conflict between the two provinces still revolved around their hierarchical positions in relations to one another, and this jockeying was frequently played out in the kingdom of Laigin. Laigin remained cornered, in a sense, between the ambitions of these two kings, as did some of the other small kingdoms in the southeast, including the Osraige and the Déisi. At certain moments, these kingdoms seem to have been able to take advantage of their pivotal position, while at other times, they must have been seriously disrupted by the continual violence. A full picture of the history of these small kingdoms cannot be reconstructed on the basis of surviving documentary evidence, which provides only partial glimpses. The next section will examine the available documentary evidence for the history of the Déisi kingdom in the eighth century, and will explore how the Déisi managed during periods of conflict and upheaval. The annalistic material relating to the Déisi in this period is largely restricted to obits, although their participation in certain battles is noted. The annalistic evidence can be supplemented with the early Déisi genealogies, and their saga-like origin legend, *Indarba na nDési*, both composed during this period, which provide a certain amount of insight into the political geography of the kingdom.

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[69] AU787.3; AU789.12.
[70] AU781.5; AU797.1; AU797.3; AU797.5; AI797.1.

3.4 Politics in the Déisi Kingdom, c. 700-800

Although a number of texts discuss the origins of the Déisi and their movements from as early as the 5th century, it is only really possible to reconstruct the political history of the Déisi from the 8th century onwards. In addition to the annals, evidence for Déisi history in this period includes a group of genealogical tracts and the narrative origin-legend known as the *Indarba na nDéisi*, or 'The Expulsion of the Déisi'.[71]

The *Indarba* is a narrative account of the exile of the Déisi from Tara, and their resettlement, first in Laigin, and finally, in Munster. The text itself is comprised of three major sections. The first deals with the circumstances of the Déisi expulsion from Tara and their migration to take up residence in north Laigin. During their occupation of those lands, the king of Tara tries unsuccessfully to win them back. One of the branches of the Déisi departs for Dyfed in Wales. In the second phase, the Déisi are again on the move: removed from north Laigin, they are given lands further south in Laigin, where they make a marriage alliance with the king, Crimthann mac Énnai Chennselaig. After Crimthann's death, they lose their lands again, and travel through Osraige and into Munster. There they make a second marriage alliance, this time with the king of Cashel, and are given lands in Munster formerly held by the Osraige, driving them eastwards. The third section lists the various groups of people that are invited by the Déisi to settle with them in Munster, and to replenish their population, much of which was lost during the various wars they fought to gain their permanent home.

Much of the discussion about this text has centred on the question of whether or not a group of the Déisi did in fact travel to and settle in Dyfed.[72] While this is a valid question, the important point in this context is that the author of the *Indarba* wished to

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[71] See above, Chapter 2.

[72] Tomás Ó Cathasaigh, 'The Déisi and Dyfed', *Éigse* 20 (1984), 1-33; David Thornton, 'The Déisi Muman in Munster and Dyfed', in *Kings, Chronologies and Genealogies: Studies in the Political History of Early Medieval Ireland and Wales*, Oxford: Unit for Prosopographical Research, Linacre College, 2003, 121-179.

express a close, familial connection to Dyfed. Whether this reflects actual migration on the part of a lineage of the Déisi, or whether it is based on the author's knowledge that some people from southeastern Ireland had settled in Wales in the past is still a subject of debate. The author's account of Déisi settlement in Wales, and his apparent close knowledge of Dyfed pedigrees, are indicative of his desire to express and maintain a political or social link of some kind between the two kingdoms. If nothing else, this would seem to suggest that communications between the two areas were possible, and perhaps even frequent, during the eighth century.

There have also been efforts to use the *Indarba* as a source for the reconstruction of the political history of the Déisi in the eighth century. Thornton has argued that the text provides 'unwitting' testimony about the period of its composition. [73] In other words, while the story may derive from memories of true historical events, in its written form, it reflects the political and geographical realities of the author's day. The author attempts to explain the alliances and rivalries between the Déisi and their neighbours, and the relative power of the various lineages within the Déisi. The basic genealogical structure underpinning the *Indarba* claims a relationship between the Déisi and the major dynasties of Laigin, through their ancestor, Mess Corp, whose descendents are co-lineal to those of his brother, Nia Corp.[74] The Déisi are said to have descended from Mess Corp's son, Art Corp, via his four sons, Brecc, Oengus, Eochaid Allmuir and Forad. Of these, Oengus is the most prominent in the narrative of the *Indarba*. At the very beginning of the story, the author removes Forad from discussion, stating that he was, 'the son of a bondmaid and did not get any land'.[75] Eochaid is the leader of the group that departs for Wales, thus

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[73] David Thornton, 'The Déisi Muman in Munster and Dyfed', in *Kings, Chronologies and Genealogies: Studies in the Political History of Early Medieval Ireland and Wales*, Oxford: Unit for Prosopographical Research, Linacre College, 2003, 121-179.
[74] See the diagram in Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 288.
[75] Kuno Meyer, 'The Expulsion of the Deissi', *Y Cymmrodor* 16 (1901) 101-35.

effectively removing him from Munster politics. Brecc's major role is his contribution of two sons, Eogan and Ross, who participate in most of the action alongside Oengus.

The author takes care, however, to indicate to the reader that Oengus and his descendents were not contenders for the kingship. Oengus is said to have held the kingship for a few weeks following the death of his brother Brecc, but turns it over to his nephews.[76] Later, when Eogan and Ross are considering a return to Tara, Oengus begs them to stay, promising them, 'precedence to your children over my own children till Doom, and my own children to go to battle and across the border before every one, and to be the last to come out of the enemy's land'.[77] The author seems to be creating a palatable explanation for the current political reality, in which there were three viable Déisi lineages, only two of which were, in the author's view, eligible for kingship. Thornton has suggested that Oengus' descendents may actually have been champions or war leaders, and may have held land on a contested border, possibly in northeastern Déisi territory.[78] Mac Cotter argues that the medieval cantred of *Ohenwys* derives from the lands held by the Uí Óengusa in the pre-Norman period.[79] If his reconstruction is correct, then the Uí Óengusa controlled lands east of Dungarvan, in the middle of coastal Déisi territory, rather than on a contested border. In any case, the associations between the various Déisi lineages and the geography of their territory remain challenging to assess.

The resettlement of the Déisi, first in north and then in south Laigin, presents an interesting view of Laigin politics in this period, as well as hinting at the relationships between the Déisi and various groups in Laigin that the author viewed as important. The exiled tribe is first offered land by Fiachu Ba hAiccíd, one of the sons of Cathair Már. Cathair was the common ancestor claimed by the major Laigin dynasties, and Fiachu is the

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[76] Meyer, 'The Expulsion of the Deissi'.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Thornton, 'The Déisi Muman', 141.
[79] Paul MacCotter, *Medieval Ireland: Territorial, Political and Economic Divisions*, Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2008, 245-6, and Appendix 2, map 2.

common ancestor of the Uí Dúnlainge and Uí Chennselaigh, among others.[80] In order to offer the Déisi a place to live, Fiachu supposedly removed the Uí Bairrche from their lands. On one level, this is an anachronism, as the Uí Bairrche were supposedly the descendents of Dáire Barrach, Fiachu's brother. That fraternal relationship also makes it unlikely that this episode is reflective of a real event, and it would seem that the author was expressing the relative political fortunes of Fiachu's descendents versus those of his brother's lineage. According to the *Indarba*, the Uí Bairrche eventually returned to reclaim their lands, resulting in the second expulsion of the Déisi. Although the Déisi were forced to move along again, the author takes care not to blame bad relations with Fiachu's descendents.

Indeed, according to the *Indarba*, they soon formed a new alliance with one of his more famous descendents, Crimthann mac Énnai Chennselaig. All three daughters of a man named Ernbrand of the Déisi supposedly married Crimthann in turn, and Crimthann gave the Déisi lands in *Ard Ladrann*, on the coast of what is now Wexford. This Ernbrand is not given a patronymic in the *Indarba*, nor is he described as a king, making his identification tentative at best. An Ernbrand is, however, listed in the earliest genealogical tracts on the Uí Briúin branch of the Déisi, and at the right relative chronological position to have been the father of Crimthann's wives.[81] Again, this may reflect actual events, or it may be a case of the author of the *Indarba* selecting an appropriate name from the genealogies to flesh out his story.

When Crimthann died, his sons declared war on their father's ally, and drove the Déisi west into Osraige. They attempted to build a settlement at the confluence of the Suir, Nore and Barrow rivers, but were driven out by the king of the Osraige and forced further

[80] See the diagram in Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 288.
[81] M.A. O'Brien, *Corpus Genealogiarum Hiberniae*, Vol. 1, 1968, 394-5; Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 288.

west to an unidentified place called *Ard Chuilind.*[82] Here again, the author seems to be attempting to account for the changeable relationship between the Déisi and the Uí Chennselaig, who were allies in one generation and enemies in the next. It is interesting to note that although the Uí Chennselaig were a powerful force in south Laigin during the mid-8th century, they were by no means in control of the kingship of all of Laigin at the time. Thus, the author's description of close, if not consistent, relations between the two groups is probably fairly real, as opposed to simply aspirational.

Towards the end of the story, Eithne the Dread, a supposed daughter of this marriage alliance with Crimthann, secures a permanent home in Munster for the Déisi. During their exile in *Ard Chuilind* in the west, the king of Cashel, Oengus mac Nadfraich, sends a messenger to ask Eithne to marry him. She agrees, and Oengus grants her three wishes, with which she obtains land and privileges in Munster for the Déisi. The Déisi are permitted to decide whose land they want to take over, and they choose the Osraige, whom they push east of the River Lingaun after a series of battles. Most of these battles are described as taking place on the northern banks of the Suir. The most decisive battle was fought in the plain of *Inneoin*, near Clonmel, and the Déisi won by druidic trickery. The Osraige retreated to the western bank of the River Anner, where they attempted to make a stand at *Rath Machuthnoe*, but the Déisi defeated them again, pushing them eastwards across the River Lingaun, which enters the Suir just east of Carrick-on-Suir. The author states that the Lingaun 'is the boundary between the Dessi and the men of Ossory till

[82] There are several placenames with the element '*cuilenn*', meaning holly, in both Cork and Tipperary, which could be possible identifications for this *Ard Chuilind.* The *Onomasticon Goedelicum* suggests that a place of this name may have been in Laigin. Later versions of the story have a long discourse about the Corco Duibne here, which may suggest that Ard Chuilind, described as being in the west, was in Corcu Duibne territory around Dingle Bay. Corc Duibne is only briefly mentioned as Oengus' fosterson in the older version of the *Indarba*, and the later version may be amplifying the link, for whatever reason.

Doom',[83] and indeed, the Lingaun forms the modern county boundary separating Tipperary and Kilkenny.

This episode provides a certain amount of geographical information. First of all, the battles between the Déisi and the Osraige only take place in areas north of the Suir, possibly indicating that the lands south of the Suir were relatively uncontested Déisi territory. Second, the account of the Osraige fighting for land as far west as Clonmel may indicate that they were capable, at least at a certain stage, of encroaching not only on Déisi interests, but on those of the Eóganacht Chaisil. In that case, it is possible to view the Déisi as something of a buffer between the Eóganacht Chaisil and the Osraige.

On a more speculative level, there is a possible identification for the *Rath Machuthnoe* on the western bank of the Anner, at which the final battle between the Osraige and the Déisi took place. The first edition Ordnance Survey maps show a circular enclosure in Redmondstown, on the western bank of the Anner, just north of where it flows into the Suir.[84] There is no placename evidence to support this identification, due to the fact that the area is a much-modified estate landscape, but it remains a possibility. Similarly, the *Belach nÉca* or 'road of the dead' that the author says runs alongside *Rath Machuthnoe* cannot now be identified in the modified landscape. Neither is there a straightforward way of identifying the 'ford of the red cow', which the author described as west of *Inneoin*, the site at which the druid's trick of changing a man into a cow allowed the Déisi to overcome the Osraige. There are a number of bridges over the Suir in this area, and Power lists several fording places in Waterford townlands on the opposite bank, but none specifically known by this name. The best contender may be a ford listed both in Power and on the first edition OS map in the townland of Kilnamack, not far west of Clonmel. While the local name for this at the time of Power's research was simply *An*

[83] Meyer, 'The Expulsion of the Deissi', §21.
[84] SMR number TS083-010----

tÁth, a large circular enclosure in the same townland was known by the name of *Lios Chom na mBó*, or the lios of the cow's hollow.[85] This is the name by which it is identified on the first edition OS maps as well, and it may be an echo of this story.

The account of the resettlement of the Déisi in Munster and their wars against the Osraige also offer insights into the political situation. These episodes reflect the ongoing tension between the Déisi and their Osraige neighbours to the north and east. Whereas the *Indarba* characterizes most of the interactions between the Déisi and other groups as reasonably amicable, the author portrays their relationship with the Osraige as uniformly hostile. Their alliance with the Eóganacht Chaisil is characterized as successful and mutually beneficial. The Déisi certainly receive their lands from the king of Cashel, indicating a subordinate position, but Eithne the Dread also extracts a promise from her new husband that the Déisi will be considered just as free as the rest of the Eóganacht of Munster, including the Uí Liatháin, their immediate western neighbours. The reality of this claim is hard to confirm or deny; certainly, the Déisi were one of the more important sub-kingdoms in Munster, but whether this equal freedom entailed freedom from duties or taxes is hard to determine. The author may simply be expressing a history of cooperation, rather than anything more specifically legal.

After forcing the Osraige eastwards, the *Indarba* states that the Déisi set about dividing up their new territory into four units. Of the existing groups among the Déisi, half received land, while the other half did not. Those who did receive land were liable for rent and taxes to the ruling dynasty, referred to in the text as the Dál Fiachach Suigde. As Thornton demonstrates, the use of this term to refer to the ruling stratum of the Déisi is another attempt to link the Déisi with groups outside of Munster. Fiachu Suigde was an ancestor of Mess Corp, and the reference links the Déisi not only with groups in Laigin,

[85] Rev. Patrick Power, *Placenames of Decies*, Cork, 1952, 115. This enclosure is SMR number WA001-005.

but with the Déisi Breg from the area near Tara, to whom they were supposedly related.[86] The account of the division of the land and the division of the tribe into two tiers is difficult to construe, especially because although half of the tribe supposedly did not receive land, the *Indarba* says that Eithne the Dread gathered up groups of people from all over Ireland to replace the many men who died in the course of their wars with the Osraige. These are enumerated in the Rawlinson version of the text, which does not explicitly refer to these groups as Déisi, nor does the text explain the relationship between the newcomers and the existing members of the Déisi. The political intent of the author of the *Indarba* in the composition of these sections is challenging to determine, and this four-way division of the population of the Déisi kingdom into ruling, landowning, non-landowning and 'alien' classes is not reflected in any other surviving sources for Déisi history. However, the examination of the Déisi genealogies can help to shed further light on the political organization of at least the most important Déisi lineages.

Reference has already been made to a few agreements between the *Indarba* and the earliest group of genealogies, composed in the later eighth century and covering the period up to roughly the 760s. For the last few decades of the eighth century, the genealogies that are available were composed in the tenth and eleventh centuries or later. While the early materials present a 'wide' genealogical scheme, with several individuals named in most generations, the later genealogies become more narrowly focused on the lineages that held power when they were composed. Thus, in some ways, the genealogies offer a clearer picture of the first half of the eighth century than they do the second half.[87]

[86] Thornton, 'The Déisi Muman', 134.
[87] Thornton, 'The Déisi Muman', 127-31.

The earliest known genealogy of the Déisi is a fragment of a poem in praise of Bran Finn mac Máel Ochtraig from the Book of Laigin.[88] Bran Finn was a member of the Uí Briúin segment of the Uí Eogain lineage of the Déisi, and according to the annals, he died in the late seventh century.[89] The extant part of the poem traces his ancestry as far as Art Corp, although the surviving parts of the rest of the text indicate that it continued on with Mess Corp, all the way back to Tuathal Techtmar, the legendary high-king of Tara and ancestor of both the Uí Néill and the Connachta. Like the *Indarba*, this early genealogical scheme offers familial connections between the Déisi and non-Munster groups, an effort that Thornton views as highly intentional. He argues that, 'the purpose was clearly to provide the Déisi Muman with a suitable genealogical origin to complement their geographical origin among the Déisi Breg'.[90] It is possible that in addition to this goal, the compilers were attempting to emphasize the fact that the Déisi had been introduced to Munster, if the *Indarba* is to be believed, as allies of the Eóganacht. In a sense, the fact that the genealogists did not endeavour to create a link between the Déisi and the Eóganacht may indicate that they viewed their non-familial, contractual relationship with the kings of Cashel as satisfactory. The maintenance of possibly fictional ties between the Déisi and non-Munster groups may have been a way for the genealogists to express and bolster the status of the Déisi in the eyes of their Munster allies.

The next group, which Thornton terms his L-group, was written in the eighth century, but survives in several later manuscripts.[91] These genealogies, taken together, create a scheme of Déisi ancestry that is both symmetrical in its structure and skewed to favour some lineages over others (see Fig. 3.1). Just as in the *Indarba*, the genealogies emphasize the lineages deriving from Brecc's sons, Ross and Eogan, alongside those

[88] O'Brien, *Corpus Genealogiarum*, 395.
[89] AI671.1; AU670.5.
[90] Thornton, 'The Déisi Muman', 134.
[91] Ibid., 128; O'Brien, *Corpus Genealogiarum*, 394-402.

descending from their uncle, Oengus. In each generation starting with Art Corp, every individual has two sons. Yet in each generation, there is something of a weeding out of the lesser line. As in the *Indarba*, the Uí Oengusa are considered lesser contenders for the kingship than the sons of Brecc. The Uí Eogain and the Uí Rossa are both major contenders for the kingship, but each has a dominant strand. In the Uí Eogain, this is the Uí Briúin; in the Uí Rossa, the Uí Chormaic.

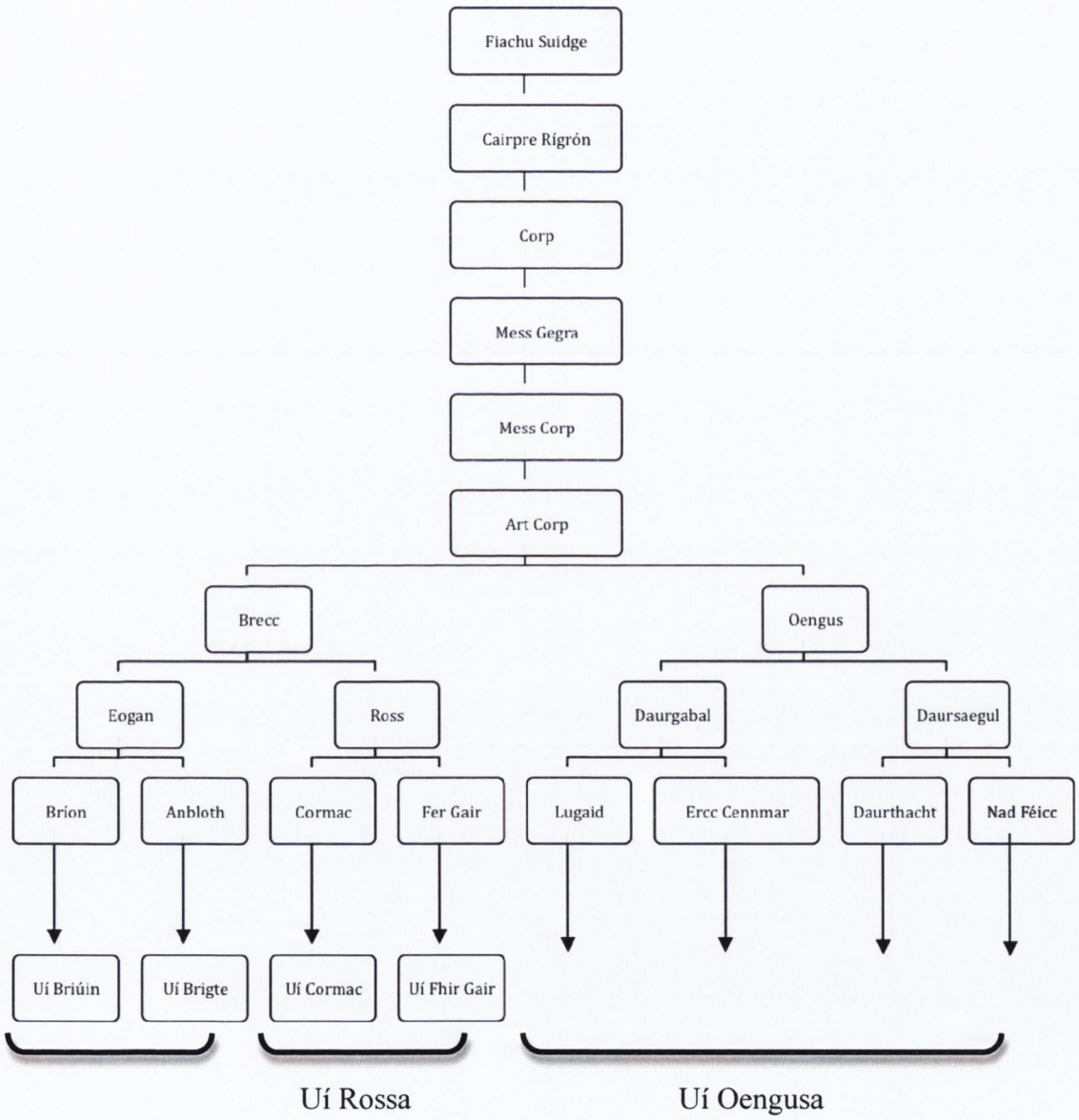

Fig. 3.1:

Reconstruction of the L-Group Genealogies (after Thornton 2003, 135)

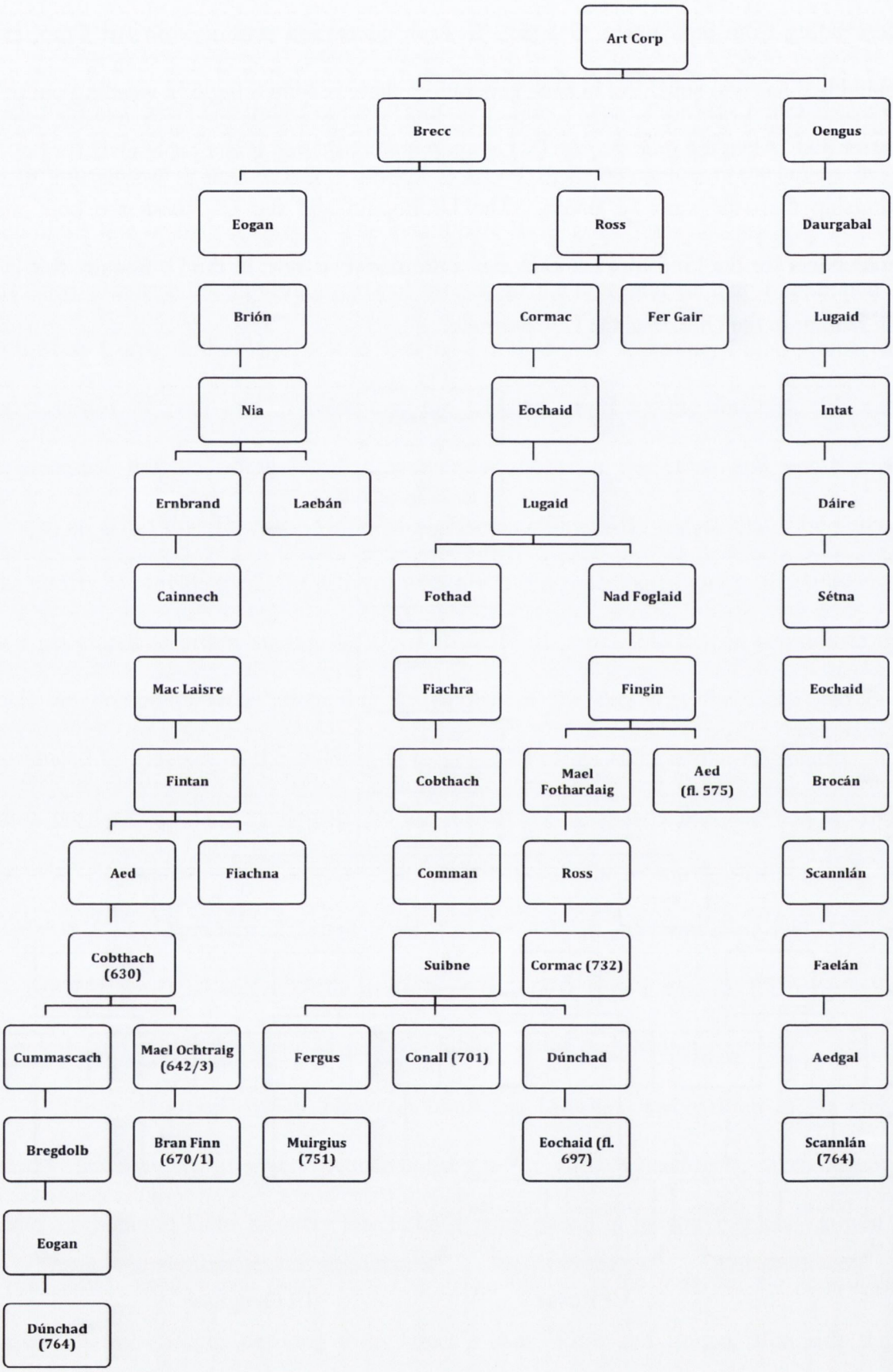

Fig. 3.2:

The Rulers of Déisi to c. 760 (after Thornton 2003, 129)

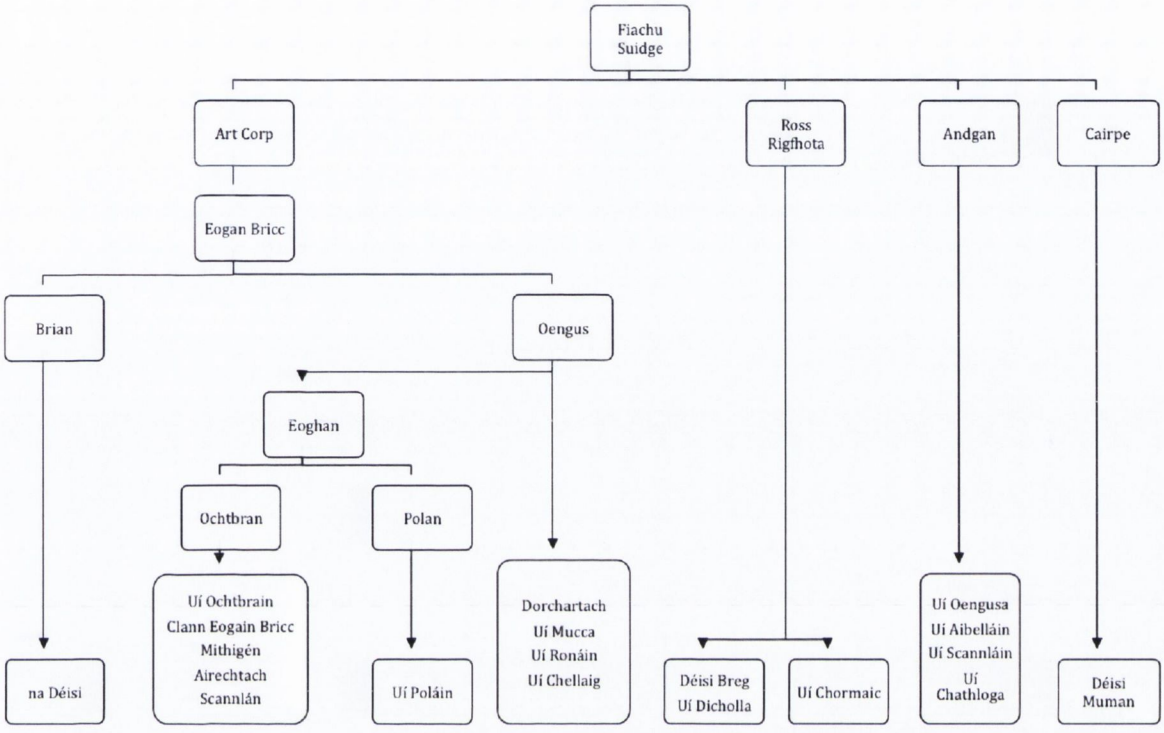

Fig. 3.3:

Reconstruction of the R-Group Genealogies (after Thornton 2003, 133)

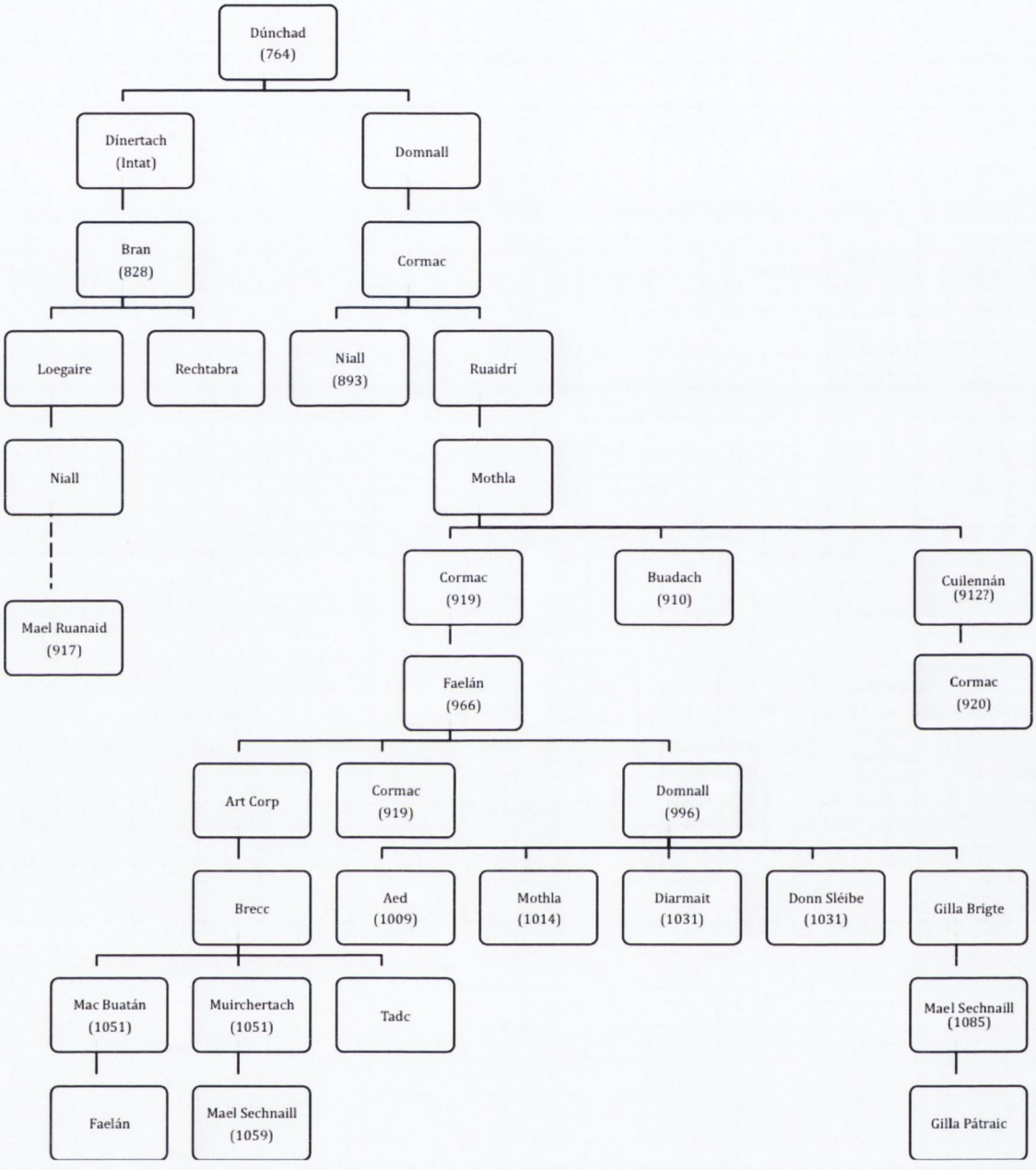

Fig. 3.4:

Rulers of the Déisi, c. 760 to 1100 (after Thornton 2003, 132)

During the seventh century, there seems to have been a period of about forty years when the Uí Briúin contributed the kings of the Déisi, from the reign of Cobthach (d. 630)[92] to that of Bran Finn, about whom the late seventh century praise poem was composed (see Fig. 3.2). After Bran Finn's death, several lineages of the Uí Rossa dominated, from the reign of Conall mac Suibne (d. 701)[93] until the death of Muirgius in 751.[94] At this point, there is some confusion as to whether there was an overlap between the reigns of another Uí Briúin king, Dúnchad, and the only known Uí Oengusa contender, Scannlán mac Aedgal, both of whose deaths are recorded in the annals in 764.[95]

This is the end of the first group of genealogies, and the second part of the eighth century must be reconstructed from a very different set of genealogical materials, which Thornton refers to as the R-group genealogies (see Fig. 3.3). Unlike the full, wide style of recording characteristic of this early group, with its carefully constructed symmetry, the next set of texts are largely restricted to linear pedigrees of the Uí Fhaeláin and Uí Bricc, composed in the tenth and eleventh centuries. The chronological relationships between the texts and the political relationships between the lineages they describe are both challenging to assess, and the overall impression is of inconsistency and contradiction.[96] As Thornton explains, this has an impact on the historian's perception of Déisi politics in this late eighth and ninth centuries.[97]

In other words, because the genealogical material is restricted to linear pedigrees, there are many mentions of kings in the annals that do not appear on the extant genealogies, and who thus appear to be 'outsiders' (see Fig. 3.4). The political reality in the late eighth and ninth centuries may have been quite similar to that in the previous

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[92] AI632.2.
[93] AU701.9.
[94] AT751.10.
[95] Dúnchad, AFM759 [764], Scannlán, AFM759 [764], AU764.9.
[96] Thornton, 'The Déisi Muman', 130-1.
[97] Ibid., 168.

decades, with several lineages contributing kings at various times. Thornton points to indirect evidence that lineages like the Uí Oengusa and the Uí Fhothaid continued to exist into the early tenth century, even if they did not necessarily continue to contribute kings of the Déisi.[98] In essence, the extant genealogies that include names of individuals living in the late eighth century are of little value in reconstructing the political realities of the time, and are better reflections of the tenth and eleventh century contexts in which they were composed. If nothing else, this major shift in the structure of the Déisi genealogies from the earliest, branching genealogies to the later linear pedigrees, demonstrates that the Déisi kingdom was undergoing the same process of restricting and consolidating their ruling dynasty as was happening in other kingdoms at the time.[99] This can be taken as an indication of increasing centralization in the Déisi kingdom between the late eighth and tenth centuries.

The *Indarba* and the Déisi genealogies provide a certain amount of information about the internal political organization and external alliances of the kingdom in the eighth century, but this can be difficult to collate with the wider historical events of the period. The *Indarba* emphasizes the good, if subordinate, relationship the Déisi enjoyed with the Eóganacht, their uncertain relationship with the Laigin, and their hostile relations with the Osraige. The genealogies reinforce the idea of ancestral ties between the Déisi and the Laigin, and highlight the importance of the Uí Eogain and Uí Rossa lineages among the rulers of the Déisi. These generalities are challenging to relate to the overall political history of this period as it appears in the annals, in which the Déisi feature only marginally during the eighth century.

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[98] Thornton, 'The Déisi Muman', 169; for the Uí Óengusa, FA318 [864], CGG c. 916; for the Uí Fhothaid, AU896.10, AI920.1.

[99] Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 202-4. Such consolidation was happening among the Uí Néill dynasties, for instance, and Byrne argues that the inability of the Eóganacht to establish a unified, dominant lineage contributed to their weakness starting during the later eighth century.

The earliest mentions in the annals of the Déisi and their kings are a series of unique entries in the *Annals of Inisfallen* dating to the 630s. These entries coincide with the date of the foundation of the monastic community at Lismore, and Grabowski has suggested that the entries may have been composed originally at that house.[100] The first of the entries records the death of a king of the Déisi named Cobthach, probably the individual named in the genealogies as the son of Áed mac Fintain, of the Uí Briúin segment of the Uí Eogáin lineage.[101] Next, a number of entries record the expulsion of St. Mochuda from Rahan, the foundation of Lismore, and the saint's death shortly thereafter.[102] Following this, the annals mention the death of Mael Ochtraig, whose lack of a patronymic makes him difficult to identify. The earliest genealogy, the praise poem to Bran Finn, refers to Mael Ochtraig as the son of the Cobthach just discussed, while other genealogies in the L-group attach him to the Uí Rossa lineage.[103] Thornton argues that Mael Ochtraig was probably Cobthach's son, and a member of the Uí Briúin, rather than the Uí Rossa, but was claimed by that lineage due to his supposed connections to a number of important ecclesiastical and secular figures.[104] Finally, the last of these unique entries records the death of an individual named Dub Tíre ua Mail Ochtraig.[105] Unlike the other two individuals discussed above, Dub Tíre is not referred to in this entry as a king of the Déisi. In the genealogies, Dub Tíre is listed as a grandson, not of Mael Ochtraig, but of his brother, Cummascach.[106] This may be a simple error on the part of the annalist, or it may have been an attempt to link Dub Tíre, ancestor of the later Uí Faeláin and Uí Bricc dynasties, to Cobthach and Mael Ochtraig, who were associated with the foundation of Lismore.

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[100] Grabowski and Dumville, *Chronicles and Annals*, 22-3
[101] AI632.2; O'Brien, *Corpus Genealogiarum*, 394, 395.
[102] These are found in several annals, but in AI, see AI638.1, AI638.2, AI639.3.
[103] Thornton, 'The Déisi Muman', 159-65.
[104] Ibid., 164.
[105] AI658.1.
[106] O'Brien, *Corpus Genealogiarum*, 394.

These entries in themselves offer only a small amount of information, but the connection they seem to indicate between Lismore and the Uí Briúin branch of the Uí Eogain may be of significance. The nature of the link is somewhat unclear: it may have been based simply on geographical proximity, or perhaps on a legal or familial relationship of some kind. In any case, this group of unique entries in the *Annals of Inisfallen* makes it clear that the compilers believed that the Uí Briúin were key players in the early history of Lismore.

After this point, mentions of Déisi figures become somewhat more common in the annals, and are no longer restricted to the *Annals of Inisfallen*. The death or killing of Bran Finn in the late seventh century is mentioned in a number of annals, as is that of Conall, son of Suibne at the beginning of the eighth century.[107] Bran Finn is identifiable as Uí Briúin, while Conall is of the Uí Fothaid branch of the Uí Rossa.[108] The next king mentioned in the annals, Cormac mac Rossa, is Uí Rossa as well, although not of the Uí Fothaid.[109] Cormac is at the head of the Uí Rossa genealogy, followed by a list of his sons. In addition, the text states that these Uí Rossa were associated with a place called *Ferta na Ríg* which is described as *i nAirthiur Femin*, or in the eastern part of Magh Femen, the plain south of Cashel in Tipperary. While *Ferta na Ríg* cannot be securely identified, the genealogist's comment suggests that the Uí Rossa were associated with this northwestern part of Déisi territory.

As mentioned earlier, the deaths of the next two kings mentioned, Dúnchad mac Eogain and Scannlán mac Aedgaile, are recorded in the same year, and they may have had overlapping reigns.[110] Dúnchad was of the Uí Briúin, while Scannlán was probably Uí Óengusa. These are the last kings of the Déisi mentioned until the second quarter of the

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[107] Bran Finn is mentioned in AU670.5, AI671.1, FA671. In addition, his death is recorded in three separate places in CS: CS667, CS670, and CS671. Conall's death is mentioned in CS700 and AU701.9.
[108] O'Brien, *Corpus Genealogiarum*, 400.
[109] AI731.1; O'Brien, *Corpus Genealogiarum*, 398.
[110] Scannlán's death is reported in: AU764.9; AT764.7; Dúnchad's death is reported in: AFM759.

ninth century. The reasons for this gap in the documentary evidence are uncertain, although there are a few logical possibilities that can be raised. The first is that the second half of the eighth century was a period of such political unrest that no king was capable of controlling the entire territory for long enough to attract the attention of annalists or to commission a genealogy for his lineage. The second is that what records there were for this period were lost, which would account for the abrupt end of both types of sources at the same point. Either way, once again, the later decades of the eighth century remain difficult to access through the documentary sources.

Aside from these bare obits, only two entries in the *Annals of Tigernach* allow us to connect the Déisi with events of the eighth century. The first states that the Déisi fought as part of Cathal mac Finnguine's forces against the Laigin in the battle of Belach Éile in 735, during the course of which two sons of Cormac mac Rossa were killed.[111] Their involvement is not mentioned in any of the other annalistic accounts of this event, but it does fit with the general picture of the relationships between the Déisi, the Eóganacht and the Laigin as revealed in the other eighth century sources. It is possible to assume that the Déisi would have participated in most of the large Munster campaigns and hostings, as an important subject kingdom, even when they are not specifically mentioned. Interestingly, the Osraige also fought alongside the Munstermen at this battle, and if the hostility between the Osraige and the Déisi portrayed in the *Indarba* reflects the eighth century reality, they may have been uncomfortable allies on that occasion. A second entry in the *Annals of Tigernach* again links the Déisi to eighth century events, but it does not help to clarify the relationship between the Déisi and the Osraige any further. The entry refers to a battle at *Rath Cuile* in which Anmchaid mac Cú Cherca was the victor, and during the course of which an individual named '*Uargus mac Fiachrach Enboth na nDési*' was

[111] AT735.3.

killed. It is not clear who Anmchaid was attacking during this battle, or on which side Uargus was fighting, and the individual himself remains somewhat obscure. Thornton notes that both the Uí Fhothaid and the Osraige genealogies list someone with a name similar to this, the Uí Fhothaid in a mid-eighth century position, and the Osraige in an indeterminate one.[112] O'Donovan identified this *Rath Cuile* as Rathcool, Co. Meath, in which case one might expect that Anmchaid's attack was on the Southern Uí Néill, or indeed on the Déisi Breg.[113] If this Uargus was indeed a member of the Munster Déisi, and if the location of the battle was in modern county Meath, it would be tempting to speculate that the Déisi fought alongside the Osraige in this conflict, undermining the notion that they were constant enemies. If, on the other hand, this battle was one between the Osraige and the Déisi, it might provide part of the eighth century context in which the *Indarba* was written, and would help to account for the negative portrayal of their relations. In any case, this event and its participants remain obscure.

In other words, although the outlines of Irish politics in the eighth century can be reconstructed in some detail, the foregoing discussion demonstrates that it is challenging to assess the place of the Déisi kingdom within that history. In general, it would appear that the Déisi in this period acted as allies of the Eóganacht kings of Cashel, unlike some of the smaller western Munster sub-kingdoms. Their position as a subject kingdom may have made them somewhat vulnerable to attack from the north and east, and may have also required them to give food renders or military service to the king of Cashel, but it seems also to have afforded them a certain amount of prestige.

This political history, while valuable, does not help to illuminate the internal functioning of the Déisi kingdom on a social and economic level. In order to approach that

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[112] Thornton, 'The Déisi Muman', 167.

[113] John O'Donovan, ed. and trans, *Annála Rioghachta Eireann: Annals of the kingdom of Ireland by the Four Masters*, Vol. 1, Dublin: Hodges and Smith, 1848, 343n. It is interesting to note that Rathcool, Co. Meath is very near the recently excavated early medieval agricultural settlement and processing complex at Raystown.

topic, it is necessary to examine the documentary and archaeological evidence for settlement distribution and social organization in early medieval Ireland.

3.5 Secular Settlement and Society in Early Medieval Ireland

The general structure of early medieval Irish society and its economy have been the subject of numerous studies over many years, most of which focus on the enormous amount of information to be gleaned from the Old Irish legal tracts of the seventh and eighth centuries. In the introduction to his *Guide to Early Irish Law*, Fergus Kelly discusses Binchy's famous description of early medieval Irish society, which he said was 'tribal, rural, hierarchical, and familiar (using this word in its oldest sense, to mean a society in which the family, not the individual, is the unit) – a complete contrast to the unitary, urbanized, egalitarian and individualist society of our time'.[114] Kelly argues that Binchy's assessment continues to serve as a valuable summary of the most important features of Irish society and political organization as depicted in the legal texts. The idea of Irish society as 'tribal' relates to its basic unit of political organization, the *túath*, translated in older works of scholarship as a 'tribe' or more recently as a 'petty kingdom'. Although the term 'tribe' has some problematic connotations, it is useful in that it makes clear that the *túath* was a population-based kingdom rather than a territorial kingdom.[115]

According to the legal tracts, the *túath* centred on its king, who could summon all the freemen of the *túath* to participate in military campaigns, presided over the *óenach* or assembly, and who collected a special tax from each householder in his kingdom.[116] Byrne estimates that as many as 150 such petty kings in Ireland at any given time in the early medieval period.[117] The relations between these kings were complex and personal. As Kelly explains, 'most kings recognize the overlordship of the king of a more powerful

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[114] D.A. Binchy, 'Secular Institutions', in *Early Irish Society*, ed., Miles Dillon, Dublin, 1954, 54.
[115] F.J. Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001, 7-8.
[116] Fergus Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1988, 4.
[117] Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 7-8.

neighbouring *túath*'.[118] This hierarchical relationship was established and demonstrated when the sub-king accepted gifts from his over-king, who could in turn demand tribute, hostages or both.

Hierarchical relationships pertained not only to kings, but to other grades of person as well, and several legal texts establish elaborate systems of legal privileges and liabilities associated with various levels of social status or prestige.[119] Kelly explains that 'native Irish law never subscribed to the Roman principle of all citizens being equal before the law', and indeed all of the legal tracts agree that a higher status person had inherently more rights and legal protection than a lower status person.[120] The most important distinctions seem to be between those who are *nemed* or 'privileged' and those or are not, and between those who are *sóer*, 'free', and those who are *doer*, 'unfree'.[121] The *nemed* included kings, lords, clerics and poets, all of whom had special immunity from certain kinds of legal penalties. Below them were the non-*nemed* freemen, whose status was related to how much wealth they owned, usually reckoned in terms of numbers of cattle, other livestock and agricultural structures and implements. Freemen entered into clientship relationships with lords, whereby the lord offered his client an advance of livestock or farmland, in return for a contractually agreed combination of agricultural produce, manual labour and military service during the year.[122] Below these *sóer* classes were the *doer* or 'unfree' people, including landless men, the *senchléithe* or 'hereditary serf', and slaves. Some amount of social mobility was possible, as the legal texts describe situations in which those of high status could be stripped of their rank, and ways in which those of lower status

[118] Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, 5.
[119] These include *Críth Gablach*, *Uraicecht Becc* and *Míadslechta*. See Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, chapters 1-3.
[120] Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, 7-8.
[121] Ibid., 9.
[122] Ibid., 29-32.

could rise through the ranks by amassing wealth or by being remarkable skillful in a profession or art.[123]

These hierarchical relationships were also set into interlocking systems of kin groups, the basic unit of social organization within the *túath*. When Binchy describes early medieval Irish society as 'familiar', he is referring to these kin-group relationships. The most common kin-group discussed in the law tracts is the *derbfine*, which denotes all of the descendents in the male line from a single great-grandfather. Each member of this kin-group has a certain amount of legal control over the other members.[124] For instance, the family holds a piece of kin-land (*fintiu*) in which all of the adult men of the kin-group have a share. None of the men can sell his share independently, and he is responsible for farming it properly.[125] The kin-group can veto members' contracts if they are not in the best interests of the family as a whole, and the family has a degree of liability for the debts or crimes of their members. Crimes against a member of the kin-group are considered crimes against the whole family, and each man receives a share of the fine paid in reparation.

This society developed in an agrarian economy, and the legal texts deal with many of the situations that can arise in agricultural communities, including damage caused by animals, the obligations to repair fences, and the relative value of different kinds of land or other natural resources.[126] The legal texts do not appear to discuss town life or its attendant legal problems, generating the impression of dispersed, self-sufficient farmsteads and a lack of settlement nucleation. Because status was directly tied to control of agricultural wealth, even kings were fundamentally tied to the agrarian economy. However, there are indications that high-status commodities like wine could still be

[123] Ibid., 11-2.
[124] Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, 12-3.
[125] Ibid., 99-100.
[126] Fergus Kelly, *Early Irish Farming*, 1998.

obtained from the Continent during this period, and that good kings were meant to foster long-distance trade.[127] This elite long-distance trade was marginal to the early medieval Irish economy, which was as Binchy noted, essentially rural and agrarian throughout the period under investigation.

As Kelly has thoroughly demonstrated, the legal texts provide a substantial amount of very detailed information about farming in early medieval Ireland, and about their organization and day-to-day life. They discuss the sizes and types of houses and outbuildings, livestock and tools different ranks should own. At the centre of the farm was the farmer's house, surrounded by the *les*, an enclosed farmyard delineated by an earthen bank or wall. Beyond this was the *airlise*, which seems to have been a group of surrounding fields or spaces associated with other agricultural or household activities. Kelly suggests that 'the *airlise* of a typical farm contained various enclosures for grazing and cultivation (including a garden). There may also have been a kiln (*áith*) for drying corn, and a barn (*saball*) for storing it. A prosperous farmer of *bóaire* rank is expected to own both a drying-kiln and a barn… a prosperous farmer might also have his own mill at a convenient site near his house'.[128] The higher a person's status, the more land, livestock and agricultural implements and structures he was expected to have, but one would expect that most farms were on the more modest end of the spectrum.

These detailed descriptions of farms and farm buildings in the legal texts stand in contrast to the limited nature of the available archaeological evidence. The most archaeologically 'visible' element of the farm mentioned above is the *les*, which is apparently equivalent to the archaeological monument type known as a ringfort, rath or cashel. Recent estimates suggest that around 45,000 ringforts are still visible in the landscape today, although only a tiny proportion of those have ever been investigated

[127] Kuno Meyer, ed. and trans., *Tecosca Cormaic*, Todd Lecture Series 15 (1909), 1.25.
[128] Kelly, *Early Irish Farming*, 369.

through archaeological testing or excavation.[129] Although there is evidence to suggest that some were used into the high and later medieval periods, most ringforts were apparently constructed between the seventh and the tenth centuries.[130] Due to their prevalence, wide distribution and high survival rate in the landscape, most studies of early medieval Irish settlement focus on ringforts as the primary settlement form.

Archaeologically, a ringfort is a circular or subcircular enclosure, generally between 25 and 35 meters in diameter, and enclosed by one or more sets of earthen banks and ditches or stone ramparts. Ringfort builders appear to have used the materials most readily available to them, meaning that stone-built cashels are significantly more common in the stony western counties than they are in other parts of the country. Overall, there are great variations, both between regions and from site to site, in the size and morphological characteristics of monuments that have been grouped together as ringforts.[131] Throughout Ireland, extant remains indicate that most ringforts were univallate, with only one set of enclosing features, but more elaborate examples have two or three courses of banks or ramparts. When geophysical survey and excavation are undertaken, it is apparent that many ringforts were more complex constructions than their surface remains would indicate; some have been shown to have undergone various phases of construction and improvement, such as recutting ditches, reinforcing earthen banks with stone facings, or raising the interiors with introduced material to create an internal platform.[132] It seems clear that ringforts were not forts in a military sense, although they certainly offered the occupants and their livestock some security from raiders, and even the most elaborate multivallate sites appear to have been intended to impress, more than to repel, passersby.

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[129] Matthew Stout, *The Irish Ringfort*, Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1997, 53.
[130] Ibid., 24-9.
[131] S. Ó Riordáin, *Antiquities of the Irish Countryside*, 5th edition, 1979, 29-30. For a summary of the findings of many studies, Stout, 1997, 15-6.
[132] Michael Monk, 'Early Medieval Secular and Ecclesiastical Settlement in Munster', in M. Monk and J. Sheehan, eds., *Early Medieval Munster*, 1998, 35, 41-2.

The time and manpower required to construct or renovate a ringfort may be indicative of its owners' prestige; the size and complexity of the structure would reflect the number of clients who owed service to the lord who owned the farm.

While some excavations inside ringforts have not produced significant evidence for occupation, others have revealed a variety of internal structures, like buildings of wood or wattles, pits, kilns, hearths or souterrains.[133] Souterrains are stone or wood lined underground chambers or passages found inside or outside a ringfort, and occasionally found in the absence of extant ringfort remains. These structures were built for some combination of storage and security, and like the ringforts themselves vary considerably in both size and complexity.[134] The buildings found in ringfort interiors tend to be round, there is some evidence to suggest that during the ninth century there was a shift toward building rectangular structures.[135] In addition to internal structures, there is evidence to suggest that ringfort sites could serve as foci for unenclosed settlement clusters. While these settlements are sometimes found by chance, some of the strongest evidence comes from the west, where a tradition of building in locally abundant stone and generally low removal rates have led to relatively good preservation of many unenclosed settlement sites.[136] Unenclosed settlement, either near ringfort sites or on their own in the landscape, were probably more common than current evidence suggests, but because many of these structures must have been built of wood, they leave little or no visible trace. Edwards suggests that 'from the ninth century onward, and with the gradual demise of the ringfort,

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[133] Nancy Edwards, 'The Archaeology of Early Medieval Ireland c. 400-1169: Settlement and Economy', in Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, ed. *A New History of Ireland, Vol. 1: Prehistoric and Early Ireland* (2005), 238-52.
[134] Mark Clinton, *The Souterrains of Ireland*, Wordwell, 2001.
[135] C.J. Lynn, 'Early Christian Period domestic structures: a change from round to rectangular plans?', *Irish Archaeological Research Forum* 5 (1978).
[136] Nancy Edwards, 'The archaeology of early medieval Ireland', 259-60.

it may be suggested that open settlements became more common'.[137] It is to be hoped that future excavations reveal more about these elusive, unenclosed settlements.

Ringforts are found throughout the country, but their distribution is strikingly uneven. While they appear in the greatest densities in fertile farming regions, the agricultural potential of a region is not a reliable predictor of the number of ringforts in the area.[138] Eastern Ireland exhibits a particularly low density of known ringforts, despite seemingly favourable environmental conditions. Given that basic environment cannot explain the uneven distribution of ringforts, archaeologists have put forward a number of alternative suggestions. It has been argued that the ringfort is only one settlement form, and that in areas of low ringfort concentration but high agricultural potential, other settlement forms, such as the unenclosed settlement clusters mentioned above, can account for the rest of the population.[139]

Because most known remains of unenclosed settlements are located in the west, they cannot resolve the problem of the seemingly 'missing' ringforts in eastern Ireland. In the absence of alternative settlement forms to explain the low density of ringforts in the region, scholars have looked to placenames in the hopes of establishing a new model for settlement in the east. Drawing on comparative studies from Welsh contexts and following Evans and MacAirt, Proudfoot suggested that low status groups would have settled in nucleated, unenclosed settlements identifiable today by the *baile* placename element. Based on evidence from Co. Down, he attempted to demonstrate that the distribution of *baile* placenames is densest in regions where ringforts are rarest, and vice versa.[140] Spatial arrangements similar to the one Proudfoot observed in Co. Down have failed to appear in

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[137] Ibid., 261.

[138] G. Barrett, 'Problems of spatial and temporal continuity of rural settlement in Ireland, AD 400 to 1169', *Journal of Historical Geography* Vol. 8, No. 3 (1982), 250-51.

[139] V.B Proudfoot, 'Clachans in Ireland', *Gwerin* 2 (1959), 110-22; B. J. Graham, 'Clachan Continuity and Distribution', in P. Flatres, ed., *Paysages Ruraux Européens* (1979), 147-57.

[140] Proudfoot, 'Clachans in Ireland'; E.E. Evans, 'Some Survivals of the Irish Open Field System', *Geography* 24 (1939), 24-36; S. MacAirt, 'Co. Armagh: Toponymy and History', *Proceedings of the Irish Catholic History Commission* 1 (1955), 1-5.

other areas of the country.[141] In addition, many scholars have demonstrated the level of caution necessary in interpreting the significance of *baile* placenames. The *baile* element did not always carry a connotation of nucleated settlement, and its distribution may have changed drastically over time, making it nearly impossible to use as an indicator for early medieval settlement.[142]

Environmental factors, unenclosed settlement forms and placename evidence cannot sufficiently explain the unevenness of ringfort distribution. Several scholars have hypothesized that the uneven spread may be related to differences in the intensity and pattern of Anglo-Norman settlement in the twelfth century and later. They argue that while in many rural areas, the folklore identification of ringforts as 'fairy forts' has protected them for centuries, in areas of more intensive settlement, tillage-based agriculture or landscape modification, this may not have been the case. Some scholars argue that the intentional removal of ringforts by Anglo-Norman settlers for military or agricultural purposes can account for the areas of lowest ringfort density. Others envision a phase of increased ringfort construction in areas outside Anglo-Norman influence during the medieval period, and suggest that this building boom masks the original pre-Norman settlement pattern.[143] However, while some excavated ringforts show evidence for occupation during the Anglo-Norman period, there is no evidence for a building boom as such. The observed pattern of low ringfort densities in areas of intensive Anglo-Norman settlement is important, but not yet fully explained, and therefore must be treated with some caution. It is still possible that regional or local differences in social organization,

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[141] Barrett, 'Problems of spatial and temporal continuity', 252-3.

[142] D. Flanagan, 'Common elements in Irish place-names: 'baile'', *Bulletin of the Ulster Place-Name Society* Series 2, Vol. 1 (1978), 8-13; T. Jones-Hughes, 'Town and baile in Irish place-names', in N. Stephens and R. E. Glasscock, eds., *Irish Geographical Studies* (1970), 244-58; D. McCourt, 'The Dynamic Quality of Irish Rural Settlement', in R.H. Buchanan, E. Jones and D. McCourt, eds., *Man and His Habitat* (1971), 158-60; L. Price, 'A note on the use of the word *baile* in place-names', *Celtica* 6 (1963), 119-26.

[143] Several hypotheses are offered and tested in: G.F. Barrett and B.J. Graham, 'Some Considerations Concerning the Dating and Distribution of Ring-forts in Ireland', *Ulster Journal of Archaeology* 38 (1975), 33-47; G. Barrett, 'Problems of spatial and temporal continuity', 254-6.

settlement types or even building materials can account for the uneven distribution of extant ringfort remains.

While there are obviously unresolved questions about the overall distribution of ringforts in Ireland, within a given region there are some observable patterns in the types of sites that ringfort builders preferred.[144] Some chose to build on hilltops or in low-lying areas, but in almost all regions, the majority of ringforts are sited part way up the slopes of hillsides. The upper limit on the altitudes of ringfort sites varies based on local environmental conditions, and is probably an indication of the connection between ringforts and their occupants' agricultural pursuits. Soil type also seems to have been a factor in site choice; ringfort builders sensibly avoided boggy ground and seem to have attempted to place their structures on well-drained soils, or soils most favourable to their agricultural purposes. However, the relationship between soil type and ringfort location breaks down in many cases; it seems that soil quality was frequently lower on the scale of priorities than other environmental, social or political site choice factors.[145] Just as in modern situations, the early medieval landowner would have to balance a variety of factors, not only soil quality and drainage, but also a convenient position within their landholding, proximity to a waterway or road, a sheltered site, a commanding view, closeness to friends and relatives, and distance from enemies. If each site is treated as a physical manifestation of the needs and priorities of an individual or group of individuals in a specific place and time, then a great deal of information can be extracted from a site even without the benefit of excavation.[146]

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[144] Edwards, 'The archaeology of early medieval Ireland', 239. Barrett points out the problems associated with generalizing about site selection factors across regions: Barrett, 'Problems of spatial and temporal continuity', 245-60.

[145] Stout, *The Irish Ringfort*, 107; Barrett, 'Problems of spatial and temporal continuity, 251.

[146] Charles Doherty, 'Settlement in Early Ireland: a review', in T.B. Barry, ed., *A History of Settlement in Ireland*, 2000, 72.

Site choice ultimately relates to the economic, social and political functions of ringforts. The role of the ringfort in Irish society has been the subject of several studies, the most influential of which is Proudfoot's 1961 'Economy of the Irish Rath',[147] which argued that ringfort occupants subsisted via mixed agriculture, and that cattle rearing was the most important of their activities. The documentary evidence, particularly the legal material, supports this view of the early medieval economy, stressing the value and prestige associated with cattle.[148] Recent osteo-archaeological investigations by McCormick on early medieval material have reconfirmed the idea of a cattle-based agricultural model.[149] He raises the further possibility that a change in cattle rearing practices, from a beef-oriented to a dairying strategy, may have precipitated a rapid population boom and an accompanying burst of ringfort construction in the pre-Viking period.[150]

Excavated ringforts also frequently have evidence for tillage and grain processing, such as iron tools, including plough parts, quern stones and grain drying kilns.[151] A horizontal mill, capable of processing a larger volume of grain than hand tools like querns, was found in association with the high-status raised ringfort at Deer Park Farms in Co. Antrim.[152] Recently, the discovery of a large settlement and milling complex at Raystown, Co. Meath has reconfirmed the links between milling and high-status secular settlements.[153] The presence of high-capacity grain processing equipment on or near a ringfort site may relate to its status, indicating that it functioned a central place for people

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[147] V. Proudfoot, 'The economy of the Irish rath', *Medieval Archaeology* 5 (1961), 94-122.
[148] Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, 8-10, 113-4.
[149] F. McCormick, 'Dairying and beef production in Early Christian Ireland; the faunal evidence', in T. Reeves-Smyth and F. Hammond, eds., *Landscape Archaeology in Ireland* 1983, 253-67.
[150] F. McCormick, 'Early faunal evidence for dairying', *Oxford Journal of Archaeology* 11, 1992, 201-9.
[151] Proudfoot, 'The economy of the Irish rath', table 1.
[152] C. Lynn, 'Deer Park Farms, Glenarm, county Antrim', *Archaeology Ireland* 1 (1987), 11-15.
[153] Matthew Seaver, 'Through the mill – excavation of an early medieval settlement at Raystown, County Meath', in Jerry O'Sullivan and Michael Stanley, eds., *Settlement, Industry and Ritual*, NRA Monograph Series 3, 2006.

to bring their crops, or that it had a significant amount of land under direct or tenant-farmed tillage.

In addition to evidence for their roles in the agricultural economy, several ringfort excavations have uncovered material associated with metalworking and other crafts, either for internal consumption or perhaps to be traded or exchanged. This includes the fashioning of a variety of wooden vessels and artefacts, tanning of hides for leather to make shoes, scabbards, bags and other leather goods, the carving of bone combs, pins or knife-handles, and textile production.[154] Both ordinary blacksmithing and higher status metalworking in copper alloys and precious metals apparently took place in or near some excavated early medieval sites, and the assemblage of known early medieval metal artefacts demonstrates the range and skill of these craftsmen.[155] Such craftworking activities highlight the possibility that some ringfort sites were focal points in a network of social and economic exchange rather than isolated, self-sufficient farmsteads. Some ringforts may have been the centres of their agrarian estates, but also served as local central places- gathering points for people, resources, and labour, at which a variety of political, administrative and judicial activities were carried out.[156] In other words, the documentary and archaeological evidence for ringfort morphology, distribution and functions in the early medieval period underscores their diversity, a fact that is often missed due to the vast numbers of these monuments that remain visible in the modern landscape.

3.6 Ecclesiastical Settlement and Society

What all ringforts have in common, however, are their enclosing features and their connection to the agrarian economy. They share these features with the ecclesiastical settlements of the same period, which naturally had additional spiritual features and

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[154] Edwards, 'The archaeology of early medieval Ireland', 276-83.
[155] Ibid., 283-7.
[156] B.J. Graham, 'Early Medieval Ireland: Settlement as an Indicator of Economic and Social Transformation, c. 500-1100', in B.J. Graham and L.J. Proudfoot, *A Historical Geography of Ireland*, 1993, 19-22.

functions, but which developed and existed within the same social, economic and political milieu as their secular counterparts. Moreover, like secular settlements, ecclesiastical settlements vary widely in size, form and function, both from region to region and from one site to the next. The early medieval Irish church has been the subject of numerous in-depth studies, most notably by Kathleen Hughes, and Tomás Ó Carragáin has recently published a new book on the archaeology of the church in this period.[157] This is an important and developing field requiring the input of both historians and archaeologists, and thanks to a renewed interest in the subject, many of the longstanding theories about the nature of the early church have recently been called into question.[158] While the first steps have been made towards characterizing and describing the early church in Ireland, each new study adds a great deal to the debate and changes the picture, and much work remains to be done.

As an institution, the early medieval Irish church was fully integrated into the fabric of society. Clerics appear in the Old Irish law tracts on personal status, and as Hughes has outlined, 'in spite of minor divergences, the combined legislation show that bishops, scribes, abbots, and priests held positions of dignity at the apex of an aristocratic society. They were the equals of kings'.[159] Indeed, she argues that if the church had been unified in this period, its power would have far surpassed that of any individual Irish king.[160] However, throughout this period, each foundation was led by its abbot, and although there were loose federations of monastic communities and churches that tended to act as allies, in practice each community was largely autonomous. This led to variations in

[157] Kathleen Hughes, *The Church in Early Irish Society*, 1967; Tomás Ó Carragáin, *Churches in Early Medieval Ireland: Architecture, Ritual and Memory*, Yale University Press, 2010.
[158] Ann Hamlin, 'The Study of Early Irish Churches', in Ní Chatháin and Richter, eds., *Ireland and Europe: The Early Church*, 1984, 117-26.
[159] Hughes, *The Church in Early Irish Society*, 136.
[160] Ibid., 142.

the form of religious observance at different monasteries, and in particular, the level of asceticism required of the clerics.[161]

Thus, while some communities may have maintained their strict religious character, there are indications that many clerics and many monasteries became increasingly involved in secular society and politics during the eighth century. For instance, it seems that from the mid-eighth century, abbots were not required to be celibate, or to be in holy orders, in order to take up their office, and indeed, abbatial succession at many monasteries passed from father to son.[162] As Hughes points out, this is in keeping with developments in Irish society at the time, and may even have been beneficial to the operation of the monastic community. The abbot's son would have the practical and spiritual training to perform the role of abbot, and his family's lands were most likely 'inseparably tied up with the property of the church'.[163] Contemporaries probably viewed the rise of ecclesiastical dynasties at certain churches as a natural development rather than an abuse, but it is certainly an indication of the influence of secular society on that of the church.

Clerics also took opportunities to be involved directly in the mainstream of Irish society. On occasion, they participated in hostings and battles, sometimes on their own behalf, or in alliance with a secular ruler.[164] Leading churchmen joined secular kings in promulgating *cána*, or special laws, which among other things protected 'non-combatants' like women, children and monks.[165] Some monasteries undertook to educate boys, both those destined for a life in the church, and those who would grow up to be secular leaders.[166] The church was also a major patron of the arts, in particular the fine metalwork

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[161] Ibid., 157.
[162] Mac Niocaill, *Ireland Before the Vikings*, 146-8; Hughes, *The Church in Early Irish Society*, 161-4.
[163] Hughes, *The Church in Early Irish Society*, 164.
[164] Ibid., 169-70.
[165] Mac Niocaill, *Ireland Before the Vikings*, 148-9; Hughes, *The Church in Early Irish Society*, 149-53.
[166] Hughes, *The Church in Early Irish Society*, 153-4.

that is so closely associated with the early medieval Irish church.[167] Perhaps even more importantly than any of these influences, churches were major landowners, and the saints' lives indicate the increasing extent to which an abbot needed to be a good estate manager.[168]

These 'secularizing' tendencies in the Irish church during the eighth century seem to have inspired a backlash in the form of the *Céli Dé* spiritual revival that began in the last decade of the eighth century.[169] Its leaders, especially Máel Ruain of Tallaght (d. 792), advocated a return to stricter and more ascetic forms of religious observance in monastic communities, and recommended that clerics avoid contact with secular society to the greatest possible extent.[170] Hughes argues that although many ecclesiastical leaders were sympathetic to the spirit of this reform, and although it had an influence on monastic literature and culture in this period, the *Céli Dé* reform movement had minimal impact on the structure or organization of the Irish church. The many rules, penitentials and other texts composed by the reformers during the late eighth and early ninth centuries were only able to persuade their fellow clerics to improve, because the infrastructure did not exist to make uniform adherence to such reforms mandatory.[171] Thus, although the reforming spirit was an important component of the Irish church, particularly in the ninth century, as an institution, the church was characterized by a diversity of practice.

Alongside the documentary evidence, the study of the physical remains of the early church helps to illuminate both its internal workings and its role in society. As is true of the study of secular settlement, the study of the early church is both helped and hindered by the sheer number of sites to be analyzed. However, in the case of the early

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[167] Hilary Richardson, 'Visual arts and society', in D. Ó Cróinín, ed., *A New History of Ireland, Vol. 1: Prehistoric and Early Ireland*, Oxford University Press, 2005, 688.
[168] Hughes, *The Church in Early Irish Society*, 166-7; Charles Doherty, 'Some Aspects of Hagiography as a Source for Irish Economic History', *Peritia* 1 (1982), 300-28.
[169] Peter O'Dwyer, *Céli Dé: Spiritual Reform in Ireland 750-900*, Dublin: Editions Tailliura, 1981, xi.
[170] Hughes, *The Church in Early Irish Society*, 176-8.
[171] Ibid., 181-4.

ecclesiastical sites, there are added problems of field identification and classification. Much effort has been expended in the attempt to develop a list of diagnostic features in order to avoid either over-identification or under-identification of sites as ecclesiastical. The most ubiquitous morphological characteristic of an early ecclesiastical site seems to be the curvilinear enclosure or series of concentric enclosures that surrounds the structures that comprise the settlement.[172] In many cases where settlement in the area has continued up to the present day, those early curvilinear boundaries have been incorporated into modern street layouts, townland boundaries, trackways or field fences.[173] The physical similarity between early ecclesiastical sites and contemporary ringforts or hillforts has long been noted,[174] and it would seem from both documentary and archaeological evidence that some early sites were established within abandoned or donated secular enclosures.[175] On the other hand, this morphological similarity means that misidentification is likely unless other diagnostic features are used to assign a definite ecclesiastical identity to a particular curvilinear enclosure. Swan proposes twelve distinguishing features of early ecclesiastical sites; he argues that after the curvilinear enclosure, the most consistent of these is evidence for human burial. Other features include holy wells, bullaun stones and cross-inscribed stones or slabs, as well as placenames or local tradition suggestive of ecclesiastical usage.[176] On excavated sites, other diagnostic artefacts can provide a firmer basis for the interpretation and perhaps dating of the site.

Even fully excavated sites can be difficult to characterize as strictly ecclesiastical or strictly secular in nature, particularly in the absence of a stone-built church structure.[177] If,

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[172] Leo Swan, 'Enclosed Ecclesiastical Sites and Their Relevance to Settlement Patterns of the First Millennium A.D.', in Reeves-Smyth and Hammond, eds., *Landscape Archaeology in Ireland*, 1983, 269.
[173] Swan, 'Enclosed Ecclesiastical Sites', 270.
[174] Ibid., 269.
[175] Lisa M. Bitel, Isle of the Saints: Monastic Settlement and Christian Community in Early Ireland. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990, 38-9.
[176] Swan, 'Enclosed Ecclesiastical Sites', 274.
[177] Ó Carragáin, *Churches in Early Medieval Ireland*, 17-19. Fig. 15 shows the challenges with reconstructing the ground plans of excavated non-stone churches.

for example, a small site has a curvilinear enclosure, a few graves, debris related to habitation and evidence for small-scale metalworking and agricultural activity, it is hard to say with certainty whether it is ecclesiastical or secular.[178] These problems of interpretation can be resolved in part if the goal is to arrive at a clearer picture of settlement as a whole, and if in doing so, less emphasis is placed on the distinction between secular and ecclesiastical sites. Such a hard line may not have been drawn in early medieval Irish society, and over the course of several generations of occupation, a given site may have been used for a variety of functions. This is perhaps especially true of smaller, less prestigious sites. In other words, problems of field identification of early ecclesiastic sites may not simply be an issue of recognition, but may reflect an actual ambiguity in early medieval Irish society. In terms of understanding change in settlement patterns through time, it may be useful to bear in mind the potential for sites to change function as well as size or significance over a given period. As is true with ringfort sites, excavation is the best, and perhaps only, way to gain a clear picture of such change through time on a given site, and it is to be hoped that future excavations will add to our understanding of the dynamic nature of the early medieval Irish church.

Most substantial ecclesiastical sites founded during the early medieval period were not abandoned, but were used and renovated for centuries after their construction, particularly if the dynasties associated with their founders or patrons continued to enjoy political success. Even when extensive excavation is not precluded by continued modern occupation of a site, successive periods of rebuilding, expansion and alteration frequently mar the earliest archaeological layers to the point of incomprehensibility. As Aidan Macdonald points out, 'possibly, we should more reasonably look for nothing at all. A large early ecclesiastical settlement that can be peeled back layer by layer, each layer

[178] Swan, 'Enclosed Ecclesiastical Sites', 277.

yielding itself intact, is most unlikely ever to be found'.[179] Future studies of the early Irish church might focus most profitably on smaller, less prestigious sites more characteristic of the norm, as these may have faced less alteration, and may even have been abandoned with their earliest features undisturbed. An understanding of these smaller, more typical sites is also integral to the wider picture of the early medieval church as a whole, and to our understanding of the role of the church in everyday life in early medieval Ireland.

While excavation remains one of the best ways to study the early church, several scholars have attempted to supplement the archaeological evidence through the examination of written sources like the legal tracts, annals and saints' lives, which provide physical descriptions of the early church, including size, layout, building materials and construction techniques. The sources indicate that the earliest churches and their outbuildings were constructed of wood, and that the use of mortared masonry was introduced in the eighth century at the very earliest. [180] On many sites, stone churches were built over the remains of earlier wooden churches,[181] although the use of wood as a building material on ecclesiastical sites did not cease even after building in stone became more prevalent in the ninth and tenth centuries; it is entirely likely that local variations occurred based on the availability of materials. The written sources make it possible to reconstruct the appearance of churches made from some of the more perishable materials that leave little trace on the landscape. Moreover, the descriptions contained in documentary sources help archaeologists to identify the remains they uncover. For instance, while most structures of the early medieval period in Ireland were circular or subcircular, the written sources describe the structures associated with ecclesiastical sites,

[179] Aidan Macdonald, 'Notes on Monastic Archaeology and the Annals of Ulster, 650-1050', in D. Ó Corráin, ed., *Irish Antiquity*, 1981, 304.
[180] C.A. Raleigh Radford, 'The Earliest Irish Churches', *Ulster Journal of Archaeology* 40 (1977), 5; Peter Harbison, 'Early Irish Churches', in H. Lowe, ed., *Die Iren und Europa*, vol. II, Stuttgart, 1982, 629.
[181] Harbison, 'Early Irish Churches', 627-9; Ó Carragáin, *Churches in Early Medieval Ireland*, 19-26.

aside from their curvilinear enclosures, as rectangular in plan.[182] In general, however, the documentary evidence emphasizes the wide variety of sizes, shapes and types of churches present in the early medieval Irish landscape.[183]

The written evidence related to the layout of early church sites also offers deeper insight into the functions of different features observable in the archaeological record. Ecclesiastical writers related the physical enclosure with concepts of sanctity, purity and saintly protection; successive concentric enclosures divide the site into increasingly sacred sections, from the most inclusive or least holy area at the outside, to the most sacred and restricted at the center. As discussed in Chapter 1, one of the important ramifications of such a layout was that it allowed the innermost areas to remain sacred and separate from everyday activity while the outer areas of the settlement could expand and take on increasingly 'secular' activities.[184] This is observable both in the archaeological and the written evidence; at many ecclesiastical sites, excavators have come across paved or cobbled areas at the outside of an enclosure. The saints' lives indicate that these patios or 'plateolas' were essentially public space, used for receiving secular figures and for commercial activities as needed.[185] Documentary evidence also describes subsidiary structures outside the ecclesiastical enclosure but maintained by the clerics as guesthouses for travellers or pilgrims. In this way, the clerics could offer a service to the secular population that was not strictly 'religious' in nature without compromising the sanctity or physical safety of their foundation.[186] This balancing act whereby the church tried to remain connected to secular society while retaining their spiritual sanctity is an important feature of both the intellectual and architectural output of the early medieval Irish church.

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[182] Harbison, 'Early Irish Churches', 618.
[183] Ann Hamlin, 'The Study of Early Irish Churches', in Ní Chatháin and Richter, eds., *Ireland and Europe: The Early Church*, Stuttgart, 1984, 117-9.
[184] Charles Doherty, 'The Monastic Town in Early Medieval Ireland', in Clarke and Simms, eds., *The Comparative History of Urban Origins in Non-Roman Europe* (1985), vol. 1, 57-59.
[185] Michael Herity, 'The Layout of Irish Early Christian Monasteries', Ní Chatháin and Richter, eds., *Ireland and Europe: The Early Church*, 1984, 105-16.
[186] Bitel, *Isle of the Saints*, 196-202.

The documentary evidence helps to shed light on criteria for site choice as well as on site layout, although problems of interpretation must be borne in mind. The hagiography composed in the ninth and tenth centuries about the early Irish saints has led scholars to believe that solitude and isolation were key factors in early founders' site selection processes. The hagiographers emphasized the withdrawal of the saints they venerated from secular society, and portrayed the earliest missionary saints as 'pioneers on the early Christian frontier'.[187] Many scholars have interpreted this, as Mytum puts it, as a desire to 'prevent the dilution of the faith' through a 'strong policy of non-association' with pagans. Yet as he admits, 'most monastic sites, however, are in areas containing large numbers of secular settlements such as ringforts. In such cases it was presumably not such an isolated style of monasticism that was intended'.[188] In some cases, scholars may have been influenced by the prevalence of the ecclesiastical placename element *dísert*, which many interpret as the name given to a hermitage site. It has been argued that this placename element may be a fashion or conceit associated with the *Céli Dé* reform movement, and thus in many cases may be a later renaming, rather than an original name referring to the intended function of the site.[189]

Nevertheless, even the most 'reformed' churches did not practice uniform avoidance of the secular population, and indeed many foundations associated with the *Céli Dé* were situated with access to main routes of travel and near other population centres. In their choice of sites, churchmen expressed a desire, 'not to escape, but to reorganize the settled landscape with themselves and their shrines at its centre', to turn the world around them into a Christian world.[190] In other words, their settlement strategy adopted pre-existing early Irish settlement patterns to give social significance and status to their new

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[187] Ibid., 11.
[188] Harold Mytum, *The Origins of Early Christian Ireland*, London: Routledge, 1992, 61.
[189] Deirdre Flanagan, 'The Christian Impact on Early Ireland: Place-names Evidence', in Ní Chatháin and Richter, eds., *Ireland and Europe: The Early Church*, 1984, 25-51.
[190] Bitel, *Isle of the Saints*, 12, 52.

foundations.[191] The question of whether to characterize early medieval ecclesiastic settlement as geared toward solitude or geared toward prominence and social significance is an important one, and is entangled with the whole concept of the role of the church in early Irish society. In general, it does not seem as though the reform movement had a lasting impact on the organization of ecclesiastical settlements. As with secular settlement patterns, ecclesiastical site choice was dictated by a combination of economic, social, political and religious factors.

Economically, ecclesiastical foundations were just as dependent on agriculture for subsistence as their secular neighbours. Their site choice strategies must have been at least partially dictated by the need for access to enough good land with which to support their population. While some early monastic founders reputedly came from wealthy families and may have been able to endow their foundations with lands of their own, the saints' lives record many instances in which saints established their communities either in unoccupied lands or on land donated by a convert. [192] Opening up new land, especially forested land, was a difficult business, and sites in upland areas or next to rivers may have been selected in order to avoid having to undertake large-scale clearance.[193] Lands donated by a founder, subsequent abbot or wealthy convert were often preferable to opening up a new area, especially if the donated lands were already suited to or in use for agricultural purposes. It is possible that some donations of land were land reclamation schemes in disguise. The family of the founder of a new monastery could endow the foundation with poor or forested lands, they would retain some stake in the lands through their clerical kinsman, and previously unused lands would come under cultivation.[194] Wealthy donors with no continuing familial claim to donated lands could often collect

[191] Doherty, 'The monastic town in early medieval Ireland', discusses the many ways in which early ecclesiastical settlement patterns incorporate symbols or features of the pagan past.
[192] D. Ó Corráin, 'Dál Cais- church and dynasty', *Ériu* 24 (1973), 52-63; Bitel, *Isles of the Saints*, 104-7
[193] Bitel, *Isle of the Saints*, 23.
[194] Mytum, *The Origins of Early Christian Ireland*, 173.

taxes from the church or monastery for the gifted lands.[195] In this way, again, lands donated to the church and cleared by the clerics could become a new source of revenue to the donor. Because kin-groups as well as individuals had a stake in land ownership, the alienation of land through donation to the church posed a curious legal problem. Some of the legal texts limited donations to the church to an individual's own personally acquired or purchased lands, making the donation of kin-lands illegal, but it would appear that under clerical influence, these laws loosened over time.[196] The legal texts and saints' lives indicate that monastic sites did expand their holdings over time through a variety of means, and that the larger sites were significant landholders with tenants of their own, not unlike secular lords.[197]

The modern phrase 'monastic tenant' is usually used to translate the term *manach*, an Irish word derived from the Latin *monachus*, or monk. While in some contexts it seems to refer to an actual monk, during the early middle ages, it seems to have become the term used to describe 'a class occupying an intermediate position between clergy and laity', obliged to render services, rents or labour to the church.[198] In addition, they were expected to be obedient to the abbot or bishop to whom they were subject, to follow the church's teachings on sexuality and marriage, and to attend mass, in return for which they were entitled to the spiritual services of the church, some degree of economic security and possibly education for some of their children.[199] The church's insistence on behavioural standards may have been a way of distancing *manaig* from their purely secular counterparts.[200] On the other hand, it may have been moralistic wishful thinking on the

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[195] Charles Doherty, 'Some Aspects of Hagiography as a Source for Irish Economic History', *Peritia* 1 (1982), 309-312.
[196] Colmán Etchingham, 'The Early Irish Church: Some Observations on Pastoral Care and Dues', *Ériu* 42 (1991), 103; Bitel, *Isle of the Saints*, 97-9.
[197] Bitel, *Isle of the Saints*, 115-24, 168-70.
[198] Donnchadh Ó Corráin, 'The early Irish churches: some aspects of organization', in D. Ó Corráin, ed., *Irish Antiquity: essays and studies presented to M.J. O'Kelly*, Dublin 1981, 334.
[199] Ibid., 333.
[200] Mytum, *The Origins of Early Christian Ireland*, 66.

part of ecclesiastical commentators, and the life of a *manach* may have been roughly the same as that of any other small farmer in early medieval Ireland. The written sources indicate that their major role in the church was to carry out the agricultural labour that would support the proportion of the population of an ecclesiastical foundation that was engaged in other, more spiritually oriented tasks.

People could become tenants of the church in two ways: either they were already bound to the land and came under the church's control as part of a land purchase or grant, or they submitted themselves and their lands to the church in exchange for economic or spiritual security. In other words, the *manaig* were a group composed of individuals and families of varying levels of status and wealth, and it is likely that those differences were preserved or diminished very slowly with the passing generations.[201] Unlike the secular model of clientship, which at least theoretically allowed free clients to terminate their contract with their lord at will, the church imposed penalties on *manaig* of any grade who abandoned their lands or violated the terms of their agreement with the church.[202] This was amplified by the fact that contracts made with the church, an institution, were perpetual and binding on subsequent generations, whereas secular clientship was a personal agreement limited to the parties' lifetimes unless renewed. Thomas-Edwards believes that the *manaig* may represent the start of a 'serf' class in Ireland, a group with nominally free status, but permanently bound to the land.[203] Hughes believes that the *manaig* retained some of the rights of monks, in that they had some say in their abbots' decisions on behalf of the community; although they primarily engaged in agricultural labour, their position relative to the abbot was more like that of a kin group than that of

[201] Thomas Charles-Edwards, 'The Church and Settlement', in Ní Chatháin and Richter, eds., *Ireland and Europe: The Early Church*, 1984, 173.
[202] Doherty, 'Some aspects of hagiography', 314-19.
[203] Charles-Edwards, 'The Church and Settlement', 173-4.

clients.[204] Bitel argues that *manaig* were defined by their material obligations to the monastic community and the protection and spiritual services they received in return, and perhaps more importantly, by their physical proximity to the foundation.[205]

This raises important questions about the possibility of nucleated settlement around ecclesiastical sites. Charles-Edwards has gone so far as to say that unfree tenants, secular and ecclesiastical alike, tended to live in a nucleated settlement near their lord's residence, satisfying the need for a centralized labour force, while the free population were dispersed on their own lands.[206] By contrast, Swift argues that the lower status tenants were located at a remove from the core of an ecclesiastical site. She believes that the arrangement of the population of a monastic centre was based on the concept of layers of status and spiritual purity referred to above. The most holy, the clerics, lived in the actual enclosure, surrounded by elite tenants, then by the common labouring *manaig*, and beyond them lived the wider secular population with whom the church interacted on an occasional basis and who could come to them for spiritual services like burial and baptism.[207] These divergent models are based primarily on written sources, and the inferred social factors governing settlement, rather than on archaeological evidence.

Leaving aside the debates as to the status of the *manaig* and their physical location in the areas around ecclesiastical sites, there is the question of the occupations of the church's labourers. It has been argued that the church's great advantages as an institution in the early middle ages were its ability to command both capital and a significant labour force, and its links to the Continent and the technological developments taking place there. These allowed ecclesiastical foundations to engage in tillage agriculture, a higher-input means of subsistence than the more common pastoral model. The saints' lives tend to

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[204] Hughes, *The Church in Early Irish Society*, 137-9.
[205] Bitel, *Isle of the Saints*, 115-24.
[206] Charles-Edwards, 'The Church and Settlement', 170.
[207] Catherine Swift, 'Forts and Fields: A Study of 'Monastic Towns' in Seventh and Eighth Century Ireland', *Journal of Irish Archaeology* 9 (1998), 119.

describe clerics engaged in tillage-based agriculture rather than cattle rearing, and the archaeological record suggests that horizontal mills and grain-drying kilns are more prevalent in association with ecclesiastical rather than secular sites.[208] Potentially, this could have an impact on the wider settlement pattern, in that sites with mills would become important locations for anyone engaged in even small-scale grain production. Taking advantage of their status as gathering places, these could eventually gain other central-place functions, becoming sites of trade or exchange of goods or services.[209] Such gatherings would represent the sort of links binding the wider settlement pattern together into one social and economic network.

While the relationships between neighboring secular sites are difficult to reconstruct, the rich body of written material on the church offers us a great deal of insight into the connections between even far-flung ecclesiastical foundations. The saints' lives and other clerical writings reveal that monastic communities could join themselves together in federations called *paruchiae*. While there has been some debate as to the nature and implications of these federations, it is apparent from the documentary evidence that there was a hierarchy of ecclesiastical sites, and that those hierarchical relationships had an economic component similar to the secular social structure.[210] In the early middle ages, hierarchies had to be established and maintained on a face-to-face basis, and many of the anecdotes in the saints' lives discuss the measures used by clerics to ensure the status of their church in relation to their neighbours, allies and competitors. One way was for an abbot or bishop to visit a neighboring foundation, requiring its leader to offer hospitality to

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[208] Niall Brady, 'Mills in Medieval Ireland: Looking Beyond Design', in Steve Walton, ed., *Wind and Water in the Middle Ages: Fluid Technologies from Antiquity to the Renaissance*, Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006, 39-68. It is worth noting that two of the largest complexes of mills discovered in Ireland are Church Island, Co. Wexford, and Raystown, Co. Meath, in ecclesiastical and secular contexts respectively. These large, centralized processing and redistribution centres must have been under the control of a central authority, and should be seen as indications of substantial spatial integration in their regions.

[209] Michael Monk, 'Early Medieval Secular and Ecclesiastical Settlement in Munster', in M. Monk and J. Sheehan, eds., *Early Medieval Munster: Archaeology History and Society*, Cork, 1998, 46.

[210] This debate is summarized well in Colmán Etchingham, 'The Implications of Paruchia' *Ériu* 44 (1993), 139-40.

the guest and his retinue. This was almost a way of extracting food rents, showing the visitors' high status. On the other hand, the host could demonstrate his prosperity by the ease with which he supported his guests. The detail with which the saints' lives record such hospitality-related incidents is a testament to the social significance of the encounters.[211] Similarly, an abbot or bishop could reaffirm and capitalize on the status of his church by initiating 'relics circuits'.[212] He would carry the most important relics held by his church or monastery from one ecclesiastical site to the next gathering tithes, donations or tribute. A large church could show favour to a smaller ally by giving them relics, allowing them to collect tribute themselves. The larger church might, however, require the smaller to allow them to conduct a circuit within their territory on certain occasions, as a sort of rent-payment. On the other hand, larger churches do seem to have helped to support, supply and staff smaller churches, so there were significant benefits even for those at the bottom of the hierarchy.[213] Again, the written sources provide us with information that would be impossible to obtain from physical remains alone, and help to fill in the gaps in our understanding of ecclesiastical settlement and social organization during this period.

3.7 Community Organization in Early Medieval Ireland

Because both secular and ecclesiastical settlements were tied to the agrarian economy during the early medieval period, it is misleading to imagine them as distinct spheres. Unfortunately, most archaeological studies deal only with one or the other, despite the fact that, as Monk says, 'the sheer mass of the data now available highlights the need to explore more fully the changing socio-economic relationships between secular and

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[211] Bitel, *Isle of the Saints*, 196-207.
[212] Hughes, *The Church in Early Irish Society*, 168-9; Mac Niocaill, *Ireland Before the Vikings*, 150.
[213] Charles Doherty, 'The Use of Relics in Early Ireland', in Ní Chatháin and Richter, eds., *Ireland and Europe: The Early Church*, 1984, 89-101.

ecclesiastical settlement'.[214] If secular and ecclesiastical settlements are viewed as part of a community, then it is possible to examine their roles and relationships within that community, and how changes in those roles could change community dynamics. As discussed above, there are indications that secular settlements could serve a variety of central place functions, both for their local area, and perhaps in some cases for their region. The same is true of ecclesiastical centres, which fulfilled both the spiritual and practical needs of their tenants and probably a wider community of laypeople.

The need for such local central places is clear. Although documentary and excavated evidence support the definition of early medieval Irish settlement as dispersed, they also reveal the necessity for intensive cooperation between individuals and groups during this period. As Kelly points out, 'in *Críth Gablach*'s portrayal of society, the *ócaire* has only one quarter of a ploughing outfit, so he would have to make a co-ploughing agreement with three others of the same rank'.[215] Similarly, there are discussions of the legal problems attendant on the system of *comingaire*, or joint-herding, where farmers arranged to graze their livestock together.[216] Brady argues that the construction, maintenance and use of mills required large inputs of time, effort and skill, and that the coordination of such efforts indicates that mills served a sizable, organized community, ecclesiastical, secular or both.[217] They must have served as a central place in that members of the community would likely have gone there to grind their grain. This is further confirmed by the concept of the *muilenn túaithe*, or mill of the *túath*, which was one of seven locations at which people had to go to report finding lost objects.[218] In other words, the impression created by the documentary sources is that these communities were

[214] Monk, 'Secular and Ecclesiastical Settlement', 46.
[215] Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, 101.
[216] Ibid., 101-2.
[217] Brady, 'Mills in Medieval Ireland', 39-68.
[218] Kelly, *Early Irish Farming*, 484.

held together by cooperative activity, and required central places at which they could carry out necessary economic, political and social transactions.

Moreover, there is evidence to suggest coordination of activities across longer distances. Kings led military hostings, clerics embarked on relics' circuits, and both secular and ecclesiastical leaders established and maintained their network of alliances by meeting face to face on a periodic basis. The royal fair or *óenach* was an occasion for all kinds of political and social activities, and seems also to have developed an economic component, with merchants and craftsmen selling their goods.[219] The gathering of pilgrims at monastic sites on certain holy-days acquired similar functions.[220] People undertaking journeys could take advantage of the hospitality provided either by monastic communities, with their purpose-built guesthouses, or by secular 'hospitallers' or *briugu*, freemen who demonstrated their wealth by offering to feed and house travellers.[221]

All of these activities required access to reliable local and long distance routes of travel. According to the early Irish legal codes, proximity to a road or trackway could raise the value of a piece of land considerably and it was the duty of clients to maintain their lord's roads.[222] Only a very few studies have focused specifically on tracing the major routeways of early Ireland, and Colm O Lochlainn's 1940 article, 'Roadways in Ancient Ireland' remains the only survey to date.[223] It was preceded by the Reverend Power's article on the *Rian Bó Phádruig*, Henry Morris' work on the *Slighe Cualann*, and has been discussed and drawn on by Linda Doran and Hermann Geissel in their more recent publications, but has yet to be superseded.[224]

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[219] Edwards, 'The archaeology of early medieval Ireland', 295.
[220] Charles Doherty, 'The monastic town in early medieval Ireland', 66-7.
[221] Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, 36-8; Kelly, *Early Irish Farming*, 321-2.
[222] M. Stout, *The Irish Ringfort*, 121; G. MacNiocaill, 'Tir Cumaile' *Ériu* 22 (1971), 81-6.
[223] Colm O Lochlainn, 'Roadways in Ancient Ireland', in J. Ryan, ed., *Féil-Sgríbhinn Éoin mhic Néill*, [1940], reprint, Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1995, 465-74.
[224] Rev. P. Power, 'The 'Rian bó Pádruig', the Ancient Highway of the Decies', *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 35 (1905), 110-29; Henry Morris, 'The Slighe Cualann' *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 68 (1938), 113-29; Linda Doran, 'Medieval Communication Routes

As O Lochlainn points out, in many of the early documentary sources, 'the roadways are taken for granted, as though some great system of trunk and branch roads were an integral portion of Ireland's physical make-up. Rarely do we read of roads being made or repaired. Only in the law tracts are such works mentioned, and then only to enumerate the advantage or worth of roads and the penalties for their neglect'.[225] He presents a set of suggestions on how to use placenames in the search for routes of communication and travel, focusing on words that specifically refer to such routes, or those with topographical components that indicate features conducive to road building.[226] While this method makes logical sense, placenames are a challenging way to study the past, in that they are difficult to date, and local tradition may ascribe antiquity to even relatively modern roads.[227] All the same, the observable settlement patterns and the individual settlement sites that comprise them could only have been viable if there were reliable ways of getting from one site to another. If there have been difficulties in reconstructing these routes, it should only encourage researchers to look for potential roadways during small-scale studies. It is to be hoped that further research will be conducted into this important, but largely neglected, aspect of early medieval settlement.

3.8 Settlement and Society in Early Medieval Ireland: Conclusions

In general, archaeological and documentary evidence confirm the portrayal of early medieval Irish society as dispersed, rural and agrarian. However, as has been demonstrated, dispersed does not mean isolated, and there are strong indications that cooperation and coordination of activities was integral to the functioning of both local communities and larger political units. As will be discussed further in later chapters of this

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Through Longford and Roscommon and their Associated Settlements', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 104C, no. 3 (2004), 57-80; Hermann Geissel, *A Road on the Long Ridge*, CRS Publications, 2006.

[225] O Lochlainn, 'Roadways in Ancient Ireland', 465.

[226] Placename elements specifically referring to routeways include: *áth*, *béal átha*, *droichead*, *bealach*, *bóthar*, *ród*, *tóchar*, *ceis*, *casán*, and *slighe*. Elements referring to topographic features associated with road building include: *bearna*, *eiscir*, *snámh*, *caol*, *coradh*, *fersait*, *scairbh*, and *carcair*. O Lochlainn, 'Roadways in Ancient Ireland', 466.

[227] Ibid., 473.

thesis, over the course of the ninth, tenth and eleventh centuries, twin movements occurred in the secular and ecclesiastic spheres: ecclesiastical sites continued to acquire economic significance and market or town functions, and similar meeting and market sites were established on non-ecclesiastical sites. Some of these settlements failed and faded in subsequent years, while others, both of ecclesiastical and of secular origin, continued to grow and develop as towns.

These generalizations must be examined in light of the evidence from smaller regions. The next section of this chapter will discuss early medieval settlement in the kingdom of the Déisi, and will then focus on one smaller sub-study area. The purpose of such a small-scale analysis is to attempt to make some suggestions about how early medieval communities were constituted within this limited area, dominated by its river-valley topography.

3.9 Early Medieval Archaeology in the Kingdom of the Déisi: Introduction

Archaeologically, the early medieval period is well represented in the kingdom of the Déisi. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, modern Co. Waterford represents the core area of the Déisi kingdom, and so for the sake of simplicity, this discussion will be restricted to the over 350 early medieval monuments in Co. Waterford, with reference to sites in neighboring counties as appropriate (see Fig. 3.5). The early medieval archaeology of Co. Waterford must be assessed almost entirely on the basis of surface remains, because very few excavations have taken place in the county. However, thanks to more recent pre-development testing and excavation, a number of extremely important sites have come to light that would otherwise remain undiscovered.

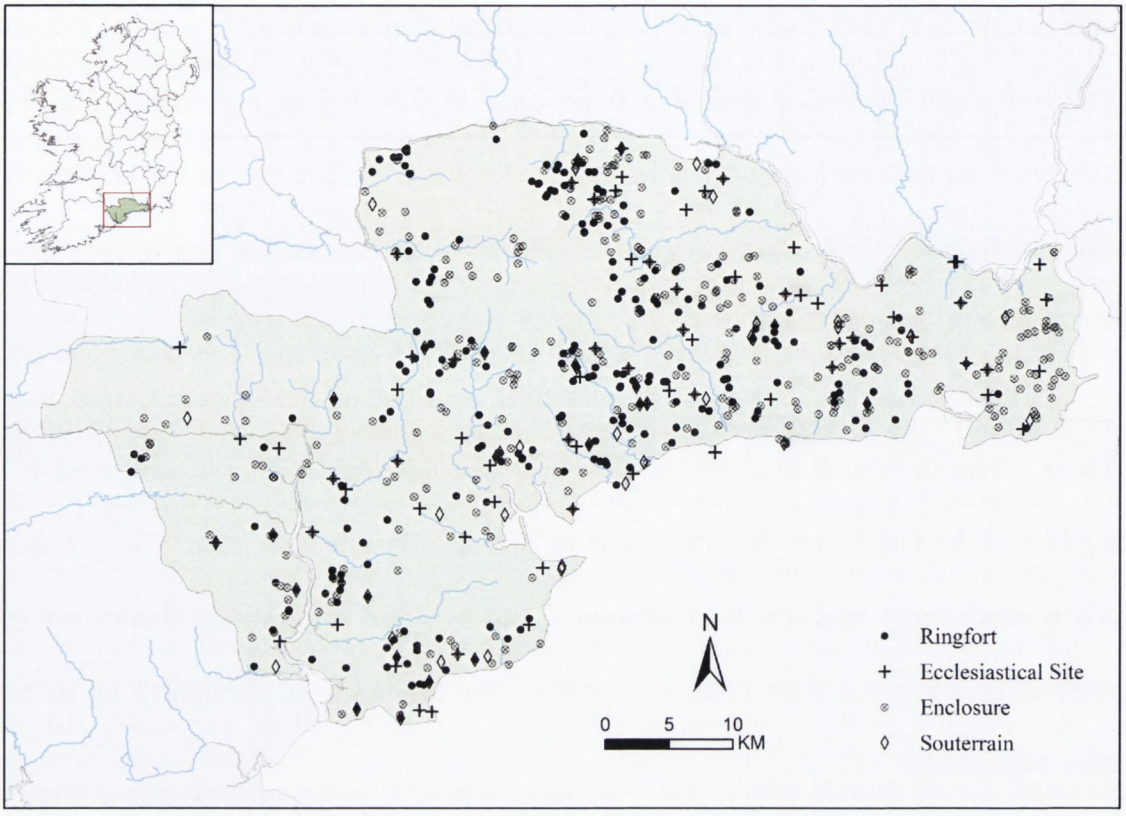

Fig. 3.5: Early medieval settlement in Co. Waterford

3.10 Secular Settlement in the Déisi Kingdom

There are at least 244 definite ringforts in Co. Waterford, and many other possible ringforts whose surface remains have been removed or damaged too badly to allow for field identification.[228] Morphologically, Co. Waterford's ringforts are similar to those in other parts of the country. The predominant, if not only, method of constructing ringforts in Co. Waterford was the digging of a ditch and the raising of an internal bank of the upcast earth and stones; there are no known stone-built cashels. Their average diameter is just over 34 meters, and over 80 percent are between 25 and 45 meters in diameter, comparable to the island wide average diameter of 25 to 35 meters.[229] The smallest ringfort in Co. Waterford is in the townland of Curraghkiely and measures only 17 meters

[228] Michael Moore, *Archaeological Inventory of County Waterford*, Dublin: Stationery Office, 1999, 71.
[229] Moore, *Archaeological Inventory of County Waterford*, 71; Matthew Stout, *The Irish Ringfort*, 1997, 15.

in diameter,[230] while the largest, at Ballynatray Demesne, is approximately 69 meters in diameter.[231] As is true elsewhere, most of the ringforts in Co. Waterford are univallate, although almost twenty percent have evidence for two sets of enclosing banks and ditches. There is only one possible example of a ringfort with more than two sets of enclosing elements in Co. Waterford.[232] While these statistics are again in line with national averages, it is challenging to assess these sites based on surface remains alone. Most of the ringforts in Waterford lie in the middle of cultivated fields, or within estate landscapes, and under these influences, banks and ditches are easily modified after abandonment.

Nevertheless, at many of these sites, the surface remains of some very interesting morphological features have survived. There is an example of a platform ringfort at Killowen.[233] The large bivallate ringfort at Tinnabinna has a square annex attached to one side and is surrounded by a system of radial field boundaries.[234] Similar radial earthworks surround another bivallate ringfort at Cluttahina.[235] There is at least one pair of conjoined ringforts, at Ballydermody,[236] and many other instances of clusters of ringforts in close proximity to one another. The univallate ringfort at Garranbaun is situated within an older hillfort, an apparent instance of site reuse by its builders,[237] while the enclosure at Tober may have been built originally as a ringfort, but was later reused for burial purposes, and possibly as an ecclesiastical site.[238] There is evidence for associated structures at many of Co. Waterford's ringfort sites, including at least 18 instances where ringforts are associated

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[230] Curraghkiely, WA002-036; Moore, *Archaeological Inventory*, 83, no. 616.
[231] Ballynatray Demesne, WA037-002; Moore, *Archaeological Inventory*, 76, no. 555.
[232] The enclosure at Tinnascart, WA034-010, is an enclosed area 26 meters in diameter, with three enclosing banks and ditches; Moore, *Archaeological Inventory*, 99, no. 750. Although in the *Inventory*, Moore classifies this site as a ringfort, in his discussion in the RMP file, he suggests that this is a possible barrow or other monument type, rather than a ringfort.
[233] Killowen, WA017-065; Moore, *Archaeological Inventory*, 91, no. 683.
[234] Tinnabinna, WA37-026; Moore, *Archaeological Inventory* 98, no. 746.
[235] Cluttahina, WA021-008; Moore, *Archaeological Inventory*, 80, no. 588.
[236] Ballydermody, WA025031; Moore, *Archaeological Inventory*, 73-4, no. 533.
[237] Garranbaun, ringfort, WA031-019001; hillfort, WA031-019; Moore, *Archaeological Inventory*, 86, no. 644 and 63, no. 488.
[238] Tober, WA028-002; Moore, *Archaeological Inventory*, 99-100, no. 751.

with one or more souterrains. At a few ringforts, there are indications of internal structures, perhaps huts, although without excavation, it is not possible to determine their nature or their relationship to the construction of the ringfort.

The distribution of ringforts in Waterford exhibits a few anomalies. They are generally found in clusters, and the bivallate examples are found in the same overall distribution as the univallate ringforts. They tend to be situated on gentle slopes at elevations ranging from 100 to 600 feet above sea level, although in at least two instances, they are located above 900 feet. While the foothills of the Comeragh and Monavullagh mountains have several ringfort sites, the southern foothills of the Knockmealdown mountains and the Drum hills have almost none. In the case of the Knockmealdowns, this may be partially explained by looking at the prevailing soil type in the local area, a peaty podzol that drains poorly and is unsuitable for most agricultural purposes. The reclaimed podzols of the Drum hills may also have been considered sub-optimal by ringfort builders.

Two other problematic distributions require explanation. The fertile valley between the Knockmealdown mountains and the Drum hills, running from Dungarvan past Lismore, has very few ringforts, as does the low-lying and agriculturally rich eastern-most part of the county. In eastern Waterford, the absence of ringforts appears to be related to higher rates of destruction attributable to the continued use of the lands for tillage agriculture. Many ringfort sites can be identified as cropmarks visible on aerial photographs, and when plotted on the map, the eastern gap in the ringfort distribution is filled. The low densities around Lismore, however, remain intriguing. One possible explanation is that the valley between the Knockmealdowns and the Drum hills was heavily forested right through to the early modern period, discouraging ringfort builders who would have had to clear the land in preparation.[239]

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[239] John Tierney, 'Wood and Woodlands in Early Medieval Munster', in Monk and Sheehan, eds., *Early Medieval Munster*, 1998, 53-8; C. Ketch, 'Landownership in County Waterford c. 1640: the evidence from

Similarly dense forest along the banks of the River Suir could explain the lack of ringforts right along the waterway, but the low densities in the area immediately around Lismore remain difficult to explain. The area of low density near Lismore roughly corresponds to the area identified by Paul MacCotter as the *trícha cét* of Tarmun. This placename derives from the Irish *termonn*, meaning the limits of church lands. If this area was, as MacCotter suggests, controlled by Lismore in the early medieval period, it is possible that settlement in the area was not characterized by ringfort building. The impact of church landownership on laypeople's settlement strategies is not well understood, and it would be interesting to see if this pattern appears in other church-controlled areas of the country. However, this part of Co. Waterford is also farmed quite intensively up to the present day, and it is possible that like eastern Waterford, this distribution anomaly is related to higher rates of destruction. One indication that ringforts were genuinely built in lower numbers here is that unlike in eastern Waterford, evidence for destroyed sites in the form of cropmarks or depictions on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey maps does not appear to fill in the gaps. This area will be discussed in greater detail in a later section of this chapter.

Soil type was evidently an important site selection factor for ringfort builders in Co. Waterford, but other considerations probably applied as well. Many ringforts cluster on the slopes of the various river valleys, and their sites may have been chosen for access to a fording place. The later motte at Ballyea West, for instance, was built on a natural promontory overlooking an important ford on the Blackwater, where the *Rían Bó Phádraig* crosses the river. Another early road, the *Bóthar na Naoimh* runs along the southern side of the motte. It seems possible that the motte was built on the site of an earlier ringfort that would have taken similar advantage of this strategic meeting of roadways, although

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the Civil Survey', in W. Nolan and T. Power, eds., *Waterford History and Society*, 1992; E. McCracken, *Irish Woods Since Tudor Times: their distribution and exploitation*, London, 1971, 48-9.

without excavation this is impossible to prove.[240] The association between routes of travel and ringfort distribution in the Blackwater valley will be discussed in more detail below.

The ringforts in Co. Waterford are noticeably clustered, and few appear to be completely isolated. In some areas, this gives the impression of a neighbourhood, one that is reinforced by and reinforces the ideas about early medieval community organization discussed above. The major problem with discussing these potential neighbourhoods in greater detail is that of chronology. There is at present no way to tell whether neighboring ringforts were in use simultaneously, or the sequence in which they were constructed. As discussed above, the period of ringfort building probably stretched from the seventh to the tenth centuries, with some sites remaining in use into the high or later middle ages. However, it is by no means certain that every site built in the seventh century was in use in the eighth century, let alone for centuries after that. One of the major problems facing the study of early medieval secular settlement is the difficulty of seeing change through time in the settlement pattern as a whole. Ringforts are, at present, the best indicator of secular settlement patterns for the entire early medieval period up to the coming of the Normans in the late twelfth century. Clearly, this is problematic, and it is to be hoped that targeted future excavation can help to resolve the issue.

3.11 Ecclesiastical Settlement in the Déisi Kingdom

Even with these problems in mind, the picture of early medieval settlement in Waterford as intentionally clustered, if not nucleated, is further reinforced by examining secular settlements in relation to early church sites. There are over 30 probable early medieval ecclesiastical sites in Co. Waterford, and a number of other possibly early medieval sites. Of those that have visible remains of enclosing elements, two are larger

[240] Mottes built over pre-existing ringforts has been observed on a number of sites; see T.B. Barry, *The Archaeology of Medieval Ireland*, London: Routledge, 1988, 40.

than Swan's estimated average of 90 to 120 meters in diameter,[241] and three are comparable in size to this average. All of the others are apparently much smaller, ranging from 27 to 85 meters in diameter. As discussed, many of the site selection factors influencing ringfort builders also influenced the founders of ecclesiastical sites. Both secular and ecclesiastical society were part of the same agricultural economy, and the same political and social environment. Not surprisingly, therefore, the greatest concentrations of ecclesiastical sites in Co. Waterford are to be found in areas with the highest concentrations of ringforts. However, they tend to be situated on lower ground or on river islands, rather than on hillsides, a trend that has been noted throughout the country.[242] While on the whole, ecclesiastical and secular settlement appear to go hand in hand, there are some local differences. In the area around Dungarvan Harbour, for instance, there are very few ringforts, but a group of early medieval ecclesiastical sites.

Most of the early church sites identified on the basis of surface remains like circular enclosures or the presence of ogam stones or bullaun stones are not mentioned in the documentary sources. However, some churches are mentioned, either in the annals, the *Life* of St. Mochuda of Lismore, or in the texts associated with the *Céli Dé* reform movement. The most obvious of these is Lismore, the most important church in Déisi territory in this period. Two others that are mentioned in the annals during the eighth century are *Inis Teimle*, or Great Island, Co. Wexford, and *Dairinis*, or Molana Abbey, an island monastery in the Blackwater river.[243] The *Life* of St. Mochuda mostly discusses churches outside Déisi territory, but does mention places like Ardfinnan, Co. Tipperary, which it claims, was one of Lismore's subsidiary churches. It also discusses Mochuda's journey from his original foundation at Rahan to his eventual monastery at Lismore,

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[241] Leo Swan, 'The Early Christian Ecclesiastical Sites of Co. Westmeath', in J. Bradley, ed., *Settlement and Society in Medieval Ireland: Studies Presented to F.X. Martin*, 1988, 5.
[242] Swan, 'Enclosed Ecclesiastical Sites', 273.
[243] AU781.3; AFM777.6

providing a number of stops along the way.[244] The author says that despite dangerous tides, the saint crossed the Blackwater at Affane, five miles downstream and east of Lismore.[245] However, the description of the miracle required to allow this crossing to proceed safely makes it seem unlikely that this was a typical fording point on the river.

The texts of the *Céli Dé* reform movement also provide evidence for the existence and importance of some Déisi churches at the end of the eighth century and early ninth century. Among these are again, Lismore and *Dairinis*, and the text the *Monastery of Tallaght* contains perhaps the only reference to the ecclesiastical site at Ardmore before the twelfth century.[246] The author makes reference to one Siadal mac Testa, evidently a reforming abbot of Ardmore who is otherwise unknown, although he may be identical with the Siadal mac Tinne of *Cenn Lacha* and Sedulius filius Thesdae of Lismore mentioned in the *Acta Sanctorum* and the *Martyrology of Donegal* respectively.[247] Rev. Patrick Power, the most prolific scholar on the subject of early Déisi history, believed that Ardmore was one of the most important early church sites in Waterford, if not in the whole country, but the fact remains that its history prior to the twelfth century is essentially unknown. The monastery is not mentioned in Mochuda's *Life*, and other than the small eighth or ninth century shrine-chapel, the architectural remains on the site relate to the twelfth century or later.[248] This reference, therefore, in the *Monastery of Tallaght* is tantalizing. In general, it has been demonstrated that the texts associated with the reform movement indicate that its early development took place in the western Waterford and south Tipperary region, based

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[244] The itinerary is Rahan, Drumcullen, Seirkieran, Roscrea, Cashel, Ardfinnan, Kilcloher, Affane, Lismore. Rev. Patrick Power, ed. and trans., *Life of St. Declan of Ardmore (edited from MS. In Bibliothéque Royale, Brussels), and Life of St. Mochuda of Lismore (edited from MS. In Library of Royal Irish Academy)*, London, 1914, 134-43.
[245] Ibid., 138-40
[246] O'Dwyer, *Célí Dé*, 35-49.
[247] Ibid., 58; Westley Follett, *Céli Dé in Ireland: Monastic Writing and Identity in the Early Middle Ages*, 2006, 110.
[248] Ó Carragáin, *Churches in Early Medieval Ireland*, 66-8.

around Lismore, *Dairinis* and Derrynaflan, before spreading north and eastward.[249] This should be taken as an indication of the influence that Lismore and its subsidiary churches had on the intellectual and spiritual life of the church in Ireland as a whole.

In addition to these documentary sources, two substantial excavations of possible early medieval ecclesiastical sites have taken place in Déisi territory. The first is *Cill Tíre*, in the townland of Dromore, which was excavated by Macalister in the 1930s. Prior to excavation, Macalister described the site as enclosed by an eroded earthen bank approximately 120 meters in diameter and the interior was 'covered with a growth of bracken, which did not extend over the rest of the field'.[250] He notes that it was locally regarded as a cemetery, with 'some lingering but moribund traces of superstitions connected with it', but with no standing remains of a church visible on the surface.[251] Prior to excavation, a number of ogam stones had already been discovered and examined at the site.

Macalister cut a number of large trenches across the interior of the enclosure, and uncovered evidence for approximately 52 burials, some extended and some crouched. The bones were in a poor state of preservation, and Macalister reports that 'the total absence of personal ornaments, beads, rings, bracelets, amulets or the like was one of the most remarkable characteristics of the cemetery'.[252] Other features in the interior of the enclosure included a large pit with some iron slag and two parallel ditches.[253] One part of the interior had apparently been paved with stones, and there were several stone artifacts including fragments of quern-stones, two spherical stone balls, and several incised and

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[249] O'Dwyer, *Céli Dé*, 54-9.
[250] R.A.S. Macalister, 'The Excavation of Kiltera, Co. Waterford', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, C 43 (1935-1937), 1.
[251] Ibid.
[252] Ibid., 4.
[253] Ibid., 5-6.

pecked stone slabs and fragments.[254] The three ogam stones from the site were built into a later wall that ran across the western part of the enclosure, but two of them are now on display at the site, while the third is in the National Museum.[255] The excavator believed that they were probably originally set up as grave markers. Overall, the evidence suggests that this site was a late prehistoric or early Christian cemetery. It is possible that the enclosure once contained a church structure, but if so, it was probably wooden rather than stone, and was therefore not identified by Macalister. On the other hand, the site could very well never have had a church, and was simply used for burial from an early period.

The second excavated Déisi church site is Kill St. Lawrence, which was investigated recently in conjunction with the realignment of the R708 airport road.[256] Prior to investigations at Kill St. Lawrence, the site consisted of an overgrown graveyard containing the remains of a small medieval church and several eighteenth and nineteenth century grave slabs. Most of the enclosure was defined by a nineteenth century stone wall, although part of the graveyard was enclosed by an earthen bank, which the excavators suggested would have had a complete diameter of 110 meters. Archaeological assessment revealed two concentric enclosure ditches which seemed to pre-date the existing graveyard. No burials were found during testing, although there was evidence for disturbance from plowing of the topsoil. Radiocarbon dating of the ditch fill from the outer enclosing ditch obtained a date range of 650-780 CAL AD, indicating that the enclosure was in use during the early medieval period. The excavators argue that the inner ditch is probably broadly contemporary with the outer ditch.

The interior of the enclosure contained indications of settlement activity in the form of pits, postholes and hearths, and slag was recovered from two contexts, which may

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[254] Macalister, 'The excavation of Kiltera', 9.
[255] Moore, *Archaeological Inventory of County Waterford*, 712.
[256] Aidan O'Connell, 'Recent Archaeological Investigations at Kill St. Lawrence, Waterford, Carried Out as Part of the Realignment of the R708 Airport Road', *Decies* 80 (2004), 27-64.

indicate some metalworking activity on the site. Geophysical survey outside the enclosed area raised the possibility of an enclosed settlement site of unknown date immediately to the south. Given the large size of the enclosure, and the possibility of associated settlement, the excavators argue, perhaps over-optimistically, that Kill St. Lawrence may have been 'an important regional ecclesiastical centre'.[257] In this instance, there is no documentary evidence related to this site, but the archaeological evidence indicates its existence and possible status as a centre of regional importance.

A third excavation at Killoteran, in northeastern Co. Waterford on the banks of the Suir, uncovered the remains of a complex, vertical-wheeled watermill which has been radiocarbon dated to around the sixth century.[258] The Killoteran townland boundary juts out into the marshy ground to include the site of the mill, and the excavators hypothesize that the mill may have been associated with Killoteran church,[259] located on drier ground to the west. Although the only extant church is an early modern structure with no evidence for older features, Harrison has argued that it may stand on the site of an older foundation. Considering the proximity of a holy well, and the townland's *cill-* placename, Harrison speculates that there must have been a church in Killoteran during the early medieval period. He believes that the church probably survived, and may have prospered during the Viking Age and perhaps up to the Reformation.[260] While this theory cannot be tested conclusively at present, the idea of an early medieval church on this site remains a possibility. Although the mill is much earlier than the eighth century focus of this chapter, it is worth noting the evidence for technological sophistication and the kind of centralized authority needed to construct and operate a mill of this kind in the early medieval period.

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[257] O'Connell, 'Recent Archaeological Investigations at Kill St. Lawrence', 51.
[258] Isabel Bennett, ed., *Excavations 2004: summary accounts of archaeological excavations in Ireland*, Dublin: Wordwell, 2007, 426-7.
[259] Ibid., 427. See also below, Chapter 4.
[260] Stephen Harrison, 'Academic review of Woodstown 6- the identification, contextualization and interpretation of an early Viking Age site in Co. Waterford', in ACS Limited, *Woodstown 6 SRP*, 2007, 8-11.

The evidence provided by these three excavations is invaluable, but somewhat challenging to interpret in isolation. The roles of these sites within their local areas and regions cannot be assessed without taking into account their wider context, and their links to both ecclesiastical and secular settlements nearby. Because there are hundreds of known early medieval settlements in Déisi territory, the next section will focus on attempting to reconstruct the community or communities in a more restricted area, the Blackwater valley in western Co. Waterford (see Fig. 3.6). It is to be hoped that by examining settlement dynamics in a small study area, insights can be gained into the bigger questions about settlement and community organization in early medieval Ireland as a whole.

3.12 Early Medieval Settlement and Community in the Blackwater Valley

The river Blackwater enters the sea between Youghal to the west and Ardmore to the east. The Blackwater is tidal as far inland as Lismore, and it runs through a fertile valley whose slopes still support prosperous farms today. Along its banks and those of its small tributaries are a number of possible early medieval church sites, including *Dairinis*, or Molana Abbey, associated with the *Céli Dé* ascetic reform movement. Evidence for early medieval secular settlement in the Blackwater valley is abundant, and some of the largest and most impressive ringforts in Co. Waterford lie within this area.

The entire valley can be viewed as a corridor linking Lismore with the sea via the navigable waterway, and perhaps linking that important ecclesiastical centre with the older but less well-documented monastery at Ardmore. In addition to this natural route of travel, a number of man-made long distance roads run through this region (see Fig. 3.6). These are mentioned in several saints' lives, and by the eighteenth-century antiquarian historian Charles Smith, but the work of determining their probable routes was undertaken in the early twentieth century by Canon Power.[261] Using a combination of local knowledge,

[261] Patrick Power, "The 'Rían bó Pádruig,' The Ancient Highway of the Decies', *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland 35* (1905), 110-29.

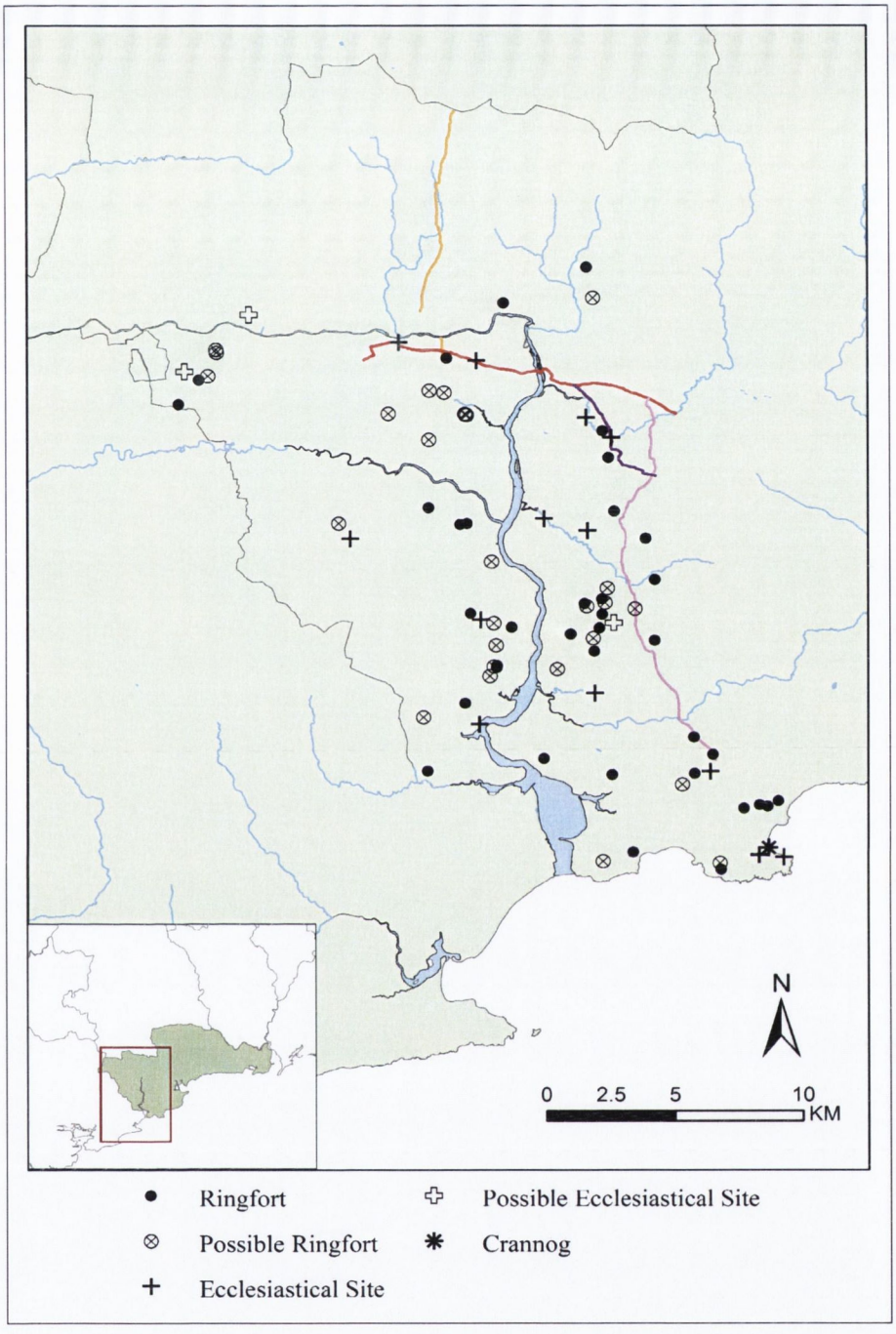

Fig. 3.6: Early medieval archaeology in the Blackwater valley, Co. Waterford

documentary evidence and field survey, Power managed to reconstruct three long-distance roads that he believed to be very early in date. The first, known as the *Rían Bó Phadraig*, is a long-distance north-south route connecting Cashel in Co. Tipperary with Lismore and then Ardmore.[262] The second is an east-west road called the *Bóthar na Naoimh*, along which St. Declan is said to have travelled.[263] Branching off this road is another north-south route called the *Bóthar na Bílog* or St. Declan's Road, which runs south towards Ardmore.[264] While there are, as yet, no solid dates for these roads, their relationship to early medieval sites, particularly ecclesiastical sites, is striking.

In a sense, the entire valley may have considered itself a unified region or community. However, the following discussion will break the study area down into smaller communities on the basis of concentrations of known settlement sites, in an effort to reconstruct early medieval community organization on the most local level. The relationships between secular and ecclesiastical settlement sites, and evidence for the routes of travel and communication that held the settlement pattern together, are the main objects of investigation in this section. While this must remain somewhat speculative due to the challenges of chronology discussed above, it is hoped that the following discussion will, if nothing else, raise new questions about community organization in early medieval Ireland.

Lismore in many ways dominates this region, and it seems likely that the monastery represented the largest landowner and most powerful political authority in the Blackwater valley in the eighth century. There are several other possible or probable early medieval ecclesiastical sites in this valley that were likely subsidiary to Lismore during this period, and the maintenance of the relationships between these sites may help to

[262] Marked in yellow of Fig. 3.6.
[263] Marked in red on Fig. 3.6.
[264] The purple road on Fig. 3.6 is known as St. Declan's Road, and the road in pink on Fig. 3.6 is known variously as St. Declan's Road or the *Bóthar na Bílog*. The course of this route is uncertain for the final stretch just north of Ardmore.

explain the presence of long-distance routes of travel in the region. The ecclesiastical sites at Lismore, Drumroe Upper, Bewley, Kilmolash and Ardmore lie directly on known long-distance roads, and several other ecclesiastical sites are within a mile of the road. On the western side of the Blackwater, no early roads have been identified, but sites like Molana Abbey were clearly selected for access to the river.

The ecclesiastical network in the Blackwater valley seems to have fostered, if not directly initiated, the development of a system of long-distance roadways, and it seems that these roadways helped to increase spatial integration in the region. They connected the locality with important sites in outlying areas, like the Eóganacht royal site of Cashel, and linked the churches with one another. This may indicate cooperation or a sense of community among the inhabitants of the ecclesiastical sites, and it may indicate that most long journeys would have involved stops at ecclesiastical sites. In addition, most of the ecclesiastical sites linked by the roads were also in close proximity to ringfort sites, perhaps indicating a local level of spatial integration as well.

The association between ecclesiastical sites and clusters of ringforts can be seen very clearly in several parts of the Blackwater Valley. One settlement concentration is on the western bank of the Blackwater, extending north from Molana Abbey[265] towards a possible ecclesiastical site at Kilcockan (see Fig. 3.7).[266] The largest ringfort in Co. Waterford is in Ballynatray Demesne,[267] on the slopes immediately overlooking Molana Abbey. Several other secular settlement sites are also situated on this ridge, and at the midpoint in this group of sites is a cluster of ringforts in the townland of Newport West,

[265] Ballynatray Demesne, Molana Abbey, WA037-011; Moore, *Archaeological Inventory*, 167-8, no. 1326.
[266] Kilcockan, ecclesiastical site, WA034-019; Moore, *Archaeological Inventory*, 177-8, no. 1372.
[267] Ballynatray Demesne, ringfort, WA037-002; Moore, *Archaeological Inventory*, 76, no. 555.

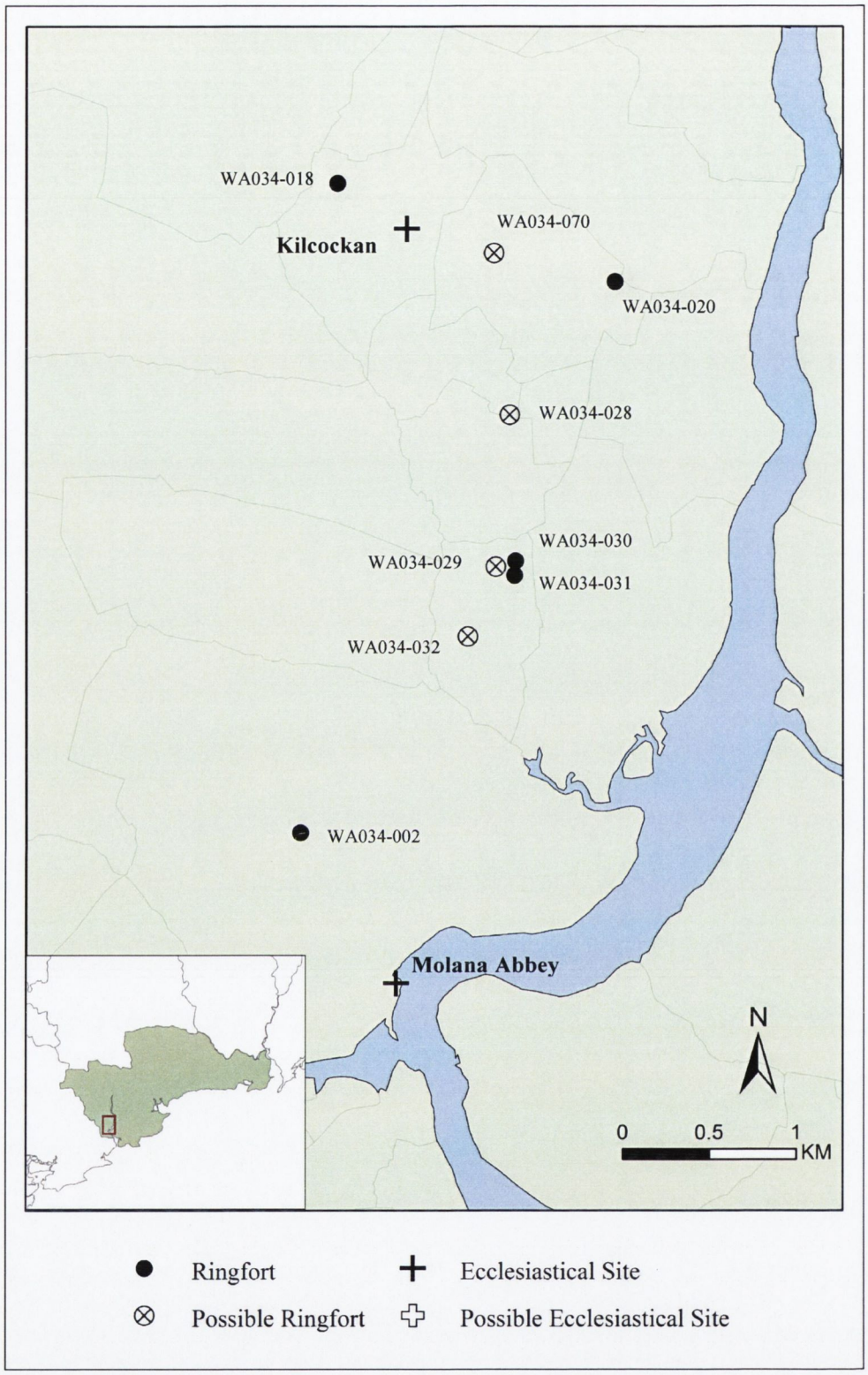

Fig. 3.7: Clustered settlements on the western side of the Blackwater River

two of which are still standing, and one of which is levelled.[268] There is a fourth possible ringfort marked on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey maps, shown in the same field as the two standing ringforts.[269] All of the enclosures are quite small, approximately 30 meters in diameter or less, and are therefore likely to be lower in status than the Ballynatray Demesne site, for instance. North of this Newport West cluster, the possible church site at Kilcockan is within a kilometre of two ringfort sites and another possible ringfort site. The Kilcockan ringfort is northwest of the ecclesiastical enclosure, and is approximately 40 meters in diameter, although truncated at north and east by field boundaries.[270] East of the ecclesiastical site at Kilcockan, in Crossery townland, there is a badly damaged enclosure that was probably originally a ringfort,[271] and another definite ringfort, an oval enclosure approximately 36 by 31 meters across, with a souterrain in its interior.[272] Another possible ringfort, referred to locally as a 'lios' is apparently located southwest of this ringfort, but is barely visible at ground level. Moore reports that this enclosure was much larger, nearly 50 meters in diameter, and it is situated at the convergence of three townland boundaries.[273] Overall, the western Blackwater settlement cluster provides an impression of secular settlement in association with ecclesiastical sites. The largest ringfort is associated with the important monastery, Molana Abbey, at the southern end of this cluster, while the densest group of sites in Newport West are also the smallest. This may represent efforts on the part of modestly wealthy free farmers to pool their agricultural resources in some of the types of cooperative farming practices described in the legal texts.

A similar situation can be seen in a second settlement concentration on the eastern bank of the Blackwater, just west of the southern end of St. Declan's road, between

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[268] Newport West, ringfort, WA034-030; ringfort, WA034-031; possible ringfort, WA034-032; Moore, *Archaeological Inventory*, 96, 122, nos. 727, 728, 937.
[269] Newport West, possible ringfort, WA034-029; Moore, *Archaeological Inventory*, 144, no. 1202.
[270] Kilcockan, ringfort, WA034-018; Moore, *Archaeological Inventory*, 90, no. 678.
[271] Crossery, possible ringfort, WA034-070; Moore, *Archaeological Inventory*, 112, no. 847.
[272] Crossery, ringfort and souterrain, WA034-020; Moore, *Archaeological Inventory*, 81, 151, nos. 600, 1257.
[273] Ballybrack, Ballyroe, possible ringfort, WA034-028; Moore, *Archaeological Inventory*, 73, no. 527.

Clashmore and Dromore (see Fig. 3.8).[274] Clashmore and Dromore are both relatively isolated on the southern and northern ends of this cluster, which consists of six definite ringforts and a further four possible ringfort sites, now levelled.[275] There may be another early ecclesiastical enclosure in the townland of Knockanearis, although the evidence for its identification is slight.[276] If the Knockanearis earthwork was a church, it was at the centre of the settlement cluster, halfway between Clashmore and Dromore. The secular settlement sites in this 'neighbourhood' were all approximately average size, around 30 meters in diameter, and most appear to be univallate. The only definite bivallate ringfort in this cluster is at Craggs, which also has a souterrain in its interior.[277] This may represent a certain amount of stratification in this settlement cluster, where the highest status secular site was at Craggs. Because the majority of the ringforts grouped here are of average or smaller size, it is possible once again to hypothesize that the purpose of their clustering was to facilitate economic cooperation.

As Fig. 3.8 also shows, this cluster to the west of St. Declan's road is very close to a line of four ringforts and another possible ringfort that follow the line of the road.[278] In addition, both Dromore and another ecclesiastical site, Aglish, are situated along one of the Blackwater's tributaries. This would seem to reinforce the idea that routes of travel are an important component in these early medieval settlement patterns on the most local level.

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[274] Clashmore, ecclesiastical site, WA037-008; Dromore, ecclesiastical site, WA029-42; Moore, *Archaeological Inventory*, 170, no. 1334, and 172, no. 1347.

[275] Lackensillagh, possible ringfort, WA034-011; Moore, *Archaeological Inventory*, 120, no. 919; Tinnascart, ringfort, WA034-013; Moore, *Archaeological Inventory*, 99, no. 750; Tinnascart, possible ringfort, WA034-014; Moore, *Archaeological Inventory*, 124, no. 957; Curradarra, ringfort, WA034-015; Moore, *Archaeological Inventory*, 82, no. 605; Curradarra, possible ringfort, WA034-016; Moore, *Archaeological Inventory*, 135, no. 1080; Knockanearis, ringfort, WA034-021; Moore, *Archaeological Inventory*, 92, no. 700; Craggs, ringfort, WA034-022; Moore, *Archaeological Inventory*, 81, no. 597; Knockanearis, ringfort, WA034-023; Moore, *Archaeological Inventory*, 92-3, no. 701; Coolbagh, ringfort, WA034-025; Moore, *Archaeological Inventory*, 80, no. 591; Knockanearis, possible ringfort, WA034-026; Moore, *Archaeological Inventory*, 120, no. 911.

[276] Knockanearis, possible ecclesiastical site, WA034-024; Moore, *Archaeological Inventory*, 142, no. 1169.

[277] Craggs, ringfort and souterrain, WA034-022; Moore, *Archaeological Inventory*, 81, no. 597.

[278] Ballindrumma, ringfort, WA035-010; Ballynaparka, ringfort, WA029-043; Curradarra, possible ringfort, WA035-004; Killatoor, ringfort, WA035-001; Monagally West, ringfort, WA035-003; Moore, *Archaeological Inventory*, 72, no. 521; 75, no. 544;135, no. 1081; 90-1, no. 681; and 95, no. 723.

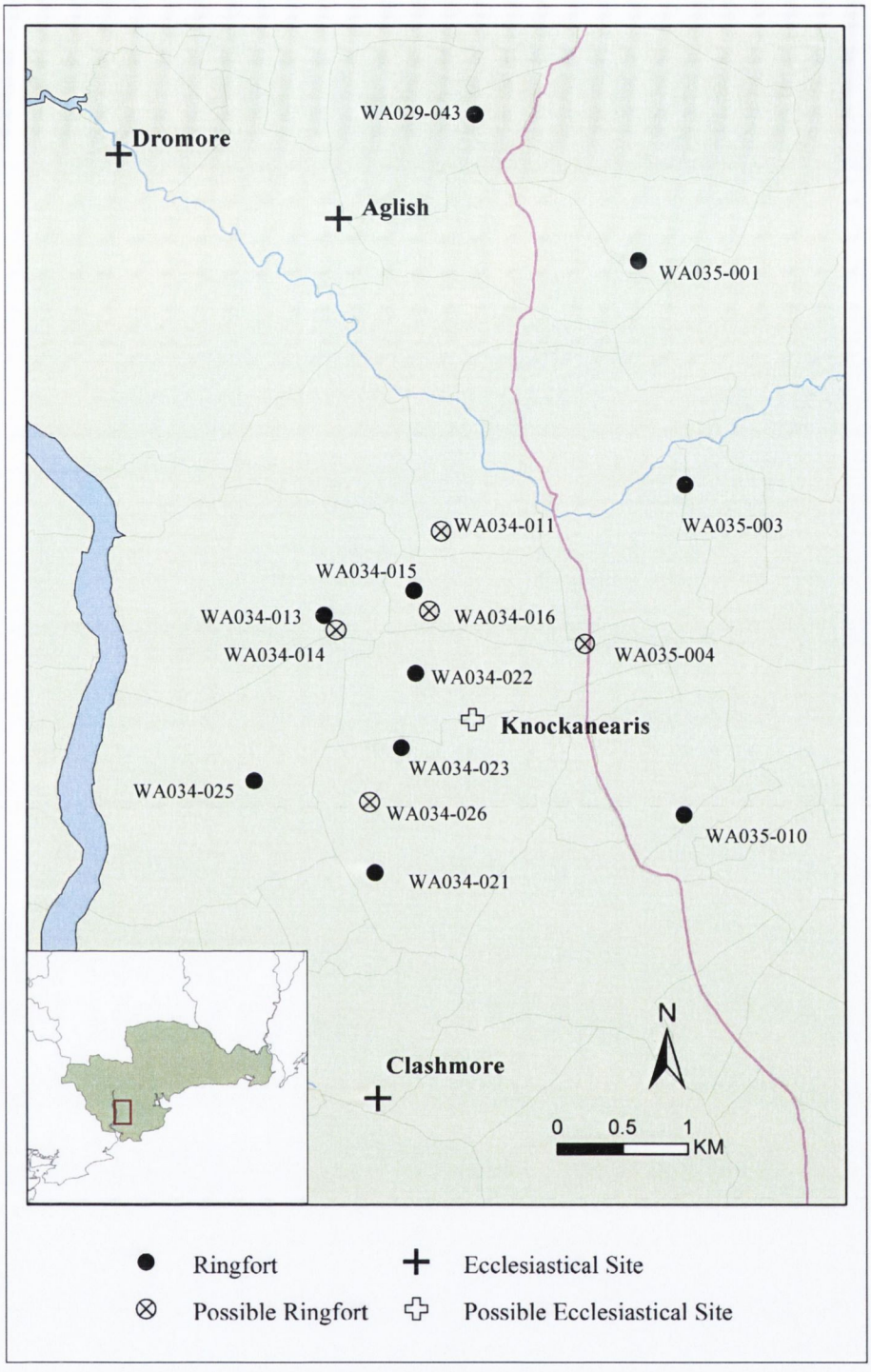

Fig. 3.8: Clustered settlements on the eastern side of the Blackwater River

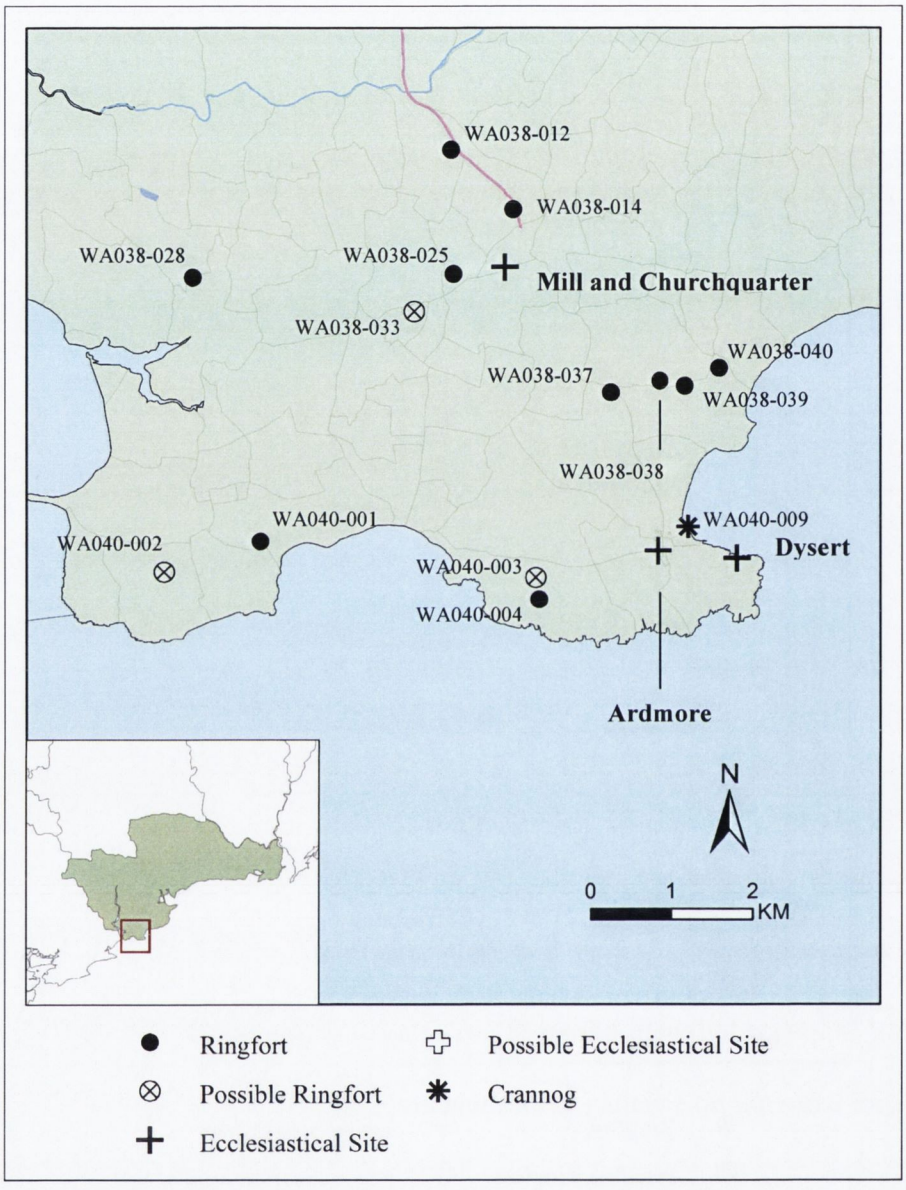

Fig. 3.9: Clustered settlements near Ardmore

A third, looser concentration is based around Ardmore, somewhat further from the shores of the Blackwater (see Fig. 3.9). This cluster includes eight definite ringforts, five of which are within two kilometres of the ecclesiastical centre at Ardmore. There is also a possible crannóg site, formerly located in a lagoon or inlet just below Ardmore, but now completely destroyed by coastal erosion. Crannógs are usually interpreted as high-status secular sites, perhaps indicating an association between secular and ecclesiastical authority in this locality.[279] Finally, in addition to the ecclesiastical monuments at the main site at Ardmore, there is a possible early church site at Dysert, further along the peninsula, as well as an ecclesiastical site in Mill and Churchquarter, about three or four kilometres inland. Although the ringforts in this cluster are of approximately average size, three of the eight are bivallate. The univallate ringfort at Monea lies just beside the southern extent of St. Declan's road, which theoretically terminated at Ardmore. If the bivallate ringforts and possible crannóg site are considered indications of a concentration of wealth in this location, then again the question of Ardmore's early history must be raised. The standing monuments at Dysert are too disturbed to evaluate its existence or role in the eighth century, and although the oratory at Ardmore is usually considered to be early medieval, the cathedral and round tower were both built in the early twelfth century. There was very likely an ecclesiastical centre of some kind here in the eighth century, but it is challenging to assess its importance in the region. The later *Life* of St. Declan describes boats and trade plying the coast below Ardmore, and it is possible to speculate that the apparent wealth of this local area was related to their control over whatever trade took place between the Déisi kingdom and places further afield in the early medieval period. However, until further evidence comes to light, this must remain purely speculative.

[279] Edwards, 'The archaeology of early medieval Ireland', 255-9.

Outside these settlement clusters, a number of individual secular sites in the Blackwater valley stand out as particularly impressive, although their roles in the local area are not easily determined.[280] This includes the large bivallate ringfort and radial field system at Tinnabinna, which stands on a height with commanding views over the Blackwater estuary towards Youghal.[281] This site is isolated in the landscape, but on the basis of its surface remains, it seems likely that it was built by a powerful lord. A similar interpretation may apply to the bivallate ringfort and souterrain at Cluttahina, which is also surrounded by radial field boundaries.[282] Again, this site is relatively isolated in the landscape, rather than built in close proximity to other ringfort sites. While it is probably dangerous to make assumptions on the basis of only a few sites, it is possible to suggest that these isolated, substantial ringforts with their associated field systems represent an upper echelon of the landed classes in the Déisi kingdom. Their wealth may have made it less important for them to live in close association with their neighbours, because they may have been able to command the labour of slaves or clients to a greater extent than lesser nobles.

Nevertheless, if these were noble estate centres, it would seem that they should also be linked to long-distance routeways, along which they could travel for military hostings, councils, and other purposes. This offers perhaps another way of interpreting the known roads in the Blackwater valley. While they seem to link ecclesiastical sites, secular lords may also have taken advantage of access to reliable routes of travel. A line of ringforts run along the eastern side of St. Declan's road, south of Kilmolash, outside the Blackwater valley proper, and the association appears unlikely to be coincidental. Although the northern reaches of St. Declan's road remain challenging to trace, it is possible that

[280] For further details about the early medieval sites of the Blackwater valley, see the appended gazetteer in Volume 2 of this thesis.
[281] Tinnabinna, WA37-026; Moore, *Archaeological Inventory* 98, no. 746.
[282] Cluttahina, WA021-008; Moore, *Archaeological Inventory*, 80, no. 588.

Cluttahina lay in reasonable proximity to it. Tinnabinna is perhaps best interpreted as related to the river rather than to any known road.

Both the known routes of travel and the known secular and ecclesiastical sites in the Blackwater valley probably relate only to the higher status portion of the early medieval population. What is missing from the picture are the homes of the lower classes, and the intensive network of short-distance routes of travel that served their low-level traffic from home to the fields and to local meeting places. These unenclosed groups of lower-status settlements may have been located in the midst of higher status settlement clusters discussed above, or they may have been the predominant settlement form in the apparently 'empty' landscape in the area around Lismore. Perhaps most of this land, owned by Lismore, was farmed by *manaig*, who tended to build unenclosed, rather than enclosed settlements. It is to be hoped that future excavations will help to prove or disprove these suggestions.

In general, early medieval settlement in the Blackwater valley certainly relates to an agrarian economy, but it is challenging to consider the settlement pattern 'dispersed', without qualification. There seems to be real evidence to suggest that many of the moderately prosperous farmers in the area built their homes in close proximity to one another, perhaps in order to facilitate cooperation in agricultural activities. Moreover, there are also indications that both secular and ecclesiastical settlements were oriented toward access to natural and man-made routes of travel and communication. All of these hints taken together create an impression of this region as a series of interlocking local communities, which exhibited spatial integration on the small scale, and which were also linked to wider social and political networks. The major ecclesiastical center at Lismore was probably the dominant force that facilitated this larger-scale spatial integration, perhaps exercised in part through her subsidiary churches in the valley.

The question of secular authority in the Blackwater valley is more challenging to assess, partly because the documentary evidence for early medieval Déisi politics cannot easily be equated with the archaeological monuments on the ground. Paul MacCotter has attempted to link the names of the high medieval cantreds or *trícha cét*s of Waterford to the names of Déisi lineages, and argues that these probably represent their areas of control.[283] However, these names do not correspond to the eighth-century ruling lineages of the Déisi to any great extent, and therefore do not assist in the reconstruction of early medieval political geography in the kingdom. For instance, as discussed above, the Uí Briúin branch of the Uí Eógain seems to have been associated with Lismore in some way, while the Uí Rossa are linked to *Magh Feimin*, the plain south of Cashel in northwestern Déisi territory. This highlights the importance of the western part of Déisi territory during the pre-Viking period, but neither of these lineages' names are preserved in the names of the high medieval cantreds. The names of the cantreds of Offath, in eastern Déisi and Ohenwys, just east of Dungarvan, preserve the names of the Uí Fhothaid and Uí Óengusa lineages who seem to have been suppressed by the dominant Uí Eógain and Uí Rossa from the eighth century onward.[284] Overall, what little information exists for the political geography of the kingdom in this period emphasizes the significance of the Blackwater valley as the political heartland of the ruling dynasties, and it is possible to attribute their strength in this period to their association with Lismore and its subsidiary churches. Unfortunately, it is not possible at this point to make any more specific links between those lineages and the extant archaeological monuments in the valley.

3.13: The Déisi Kingdom in the Eighth Century: Conclusions

From the foregoing discussion, it is possible to draw some conclusions about the Déisi kingdom in the eighth century. Politically, the kingdom's alliance or tributary status

[283] MacCotter, *Medieval Ireland: Territorial, Political and Economic Divisions*, 245-9.
[284] Ibid., 245-6, and appendix 2, map 2.

in relation to the Eóganacht kings of Cashel provided the Déisi with stability and, it would appear, with prestige. The Déisi were able to mobilize their situation on the borders of Osraige and Laigin territory to influence Uí Néill conflicts, perhaps to a greater extent than would be expected of a small kingdom. The Déisi kings in the earlier part of the eighth century seems to have been drawn from several eligible lineages, although from the second half the eighth century, there was a shift towards increasing limitation and centralization of the ruling dynasty, and several lineages, like the Uí Óengusa, apparently became politically marginalized. This ability and willingness to create a unified ruling dynasty may have contributed to the strength of the Déisi in this period.

Settlement in the Déisi kingdom is similar in character to that found in other parts of the country, insofar as statistics about settlement sizes and locations are concerned. The case study of the Blackwater valley sought to demonstrate that even in the absence of excavation, it is possible to gain insights into the relationships between various settlement sites, and particular attention was drawn to the apparent clustering of settlement sites. As discussed, the documentary sources demonstrate that at all levels of society in early medieval Ireland, people needed to participate in communal labour and engage in a variety of activities that would require face-to-face meetings at local central places. On the basis of the evidence from the Blackwater valley, it is suggested that these local central places may have been churches, or certain large and central ringforts. Moreover, the examination of possible natural and man-made routes of travel in relation to the settlement pattern indicated the possibility that this was a local area with a high degree of local and regional spatial integration. Again, this may have been facilitated by the church network centred on Lismore, but the relationship between the routeways and secular sites suggests that all parts of society benefited.

The lack of chronological evidence makes it hard to say anything further about community organization in the Blackwater valley, or about changes in that organization over time. The next two chapters discuss settlement, economic and political organization in the ninth through eleventh centuries, and the indications are that spatial integration on many levels was increasing in the Déisi kingdom over this period. As a prime factor in this process of developing spatial integration, the routeways of the Blackwater valley may prove to be a fruitful area for further study when more detailed chronological data becomes available.

Chapter 4

The Viking Age in Ireland and the Déisi Kingdom, 795-1014

4.1 Introduction

As discussed in the introduction, the start of Viking raids in Ireland in the year 795 has often been viewed as marking a watershed in Irish history, and the Vikings have been blamed or given credit for bringing about tremendous economic and political changes in Irish society. Most importantly for this thesis, the concept and impetus for urbanism in Ireland are usually attributed to the Vikings. Even in recent studies that recognize the contributions of the Irish to the foundation and maintenance of their early towns, the Scandinavians are seen as providing, at a minimum, a catalyzing influence. This chapter is intended to assess those impressions, particularly as they relate to Viking age activity in southeastern Ireland and the Déisi kingdom.

4.2 The Chronology of the Viking Age in Ireland

The ninth and tenth centuries in Ireland are commonly referred to as the Viking Age, but this overarching designation is usually subdivided into a number of phases, based on the nature of the interactions between the Norse and the Irish. The first phase is typically the period from the earliest Viking attacks on Ireland in the late 790s up to the late 830s or early 840s, and is characterized as a period of 'hit-and-run' raiding by small, mobile, independent bands of Vikings. They generally restricted their raids to islands and coastal areas, and Ó Corráin notes that according to the annals, raiders in this period never travelled more than about twenty miles inland.[1] This initial raiding phase is generally considered to end in the late 830s and early 840s, when the annals start to report groups of Vikings building and staying in winter encampments.

[1] Donnchadh Ó Corráin, *Ireland Before the Normans*, Gill and Macmillan, 1972, 82.

The start of Viking settlement marks the beginning of the second phase of their involvement in Ireland, which lasted until the early tenth century. From their established bases, the Vikings began to use major waterways to gain access to inland areas, and it is evident that they employed an increasingly detailed knowledge of the local geography to target specific population centres.[2] Although Viking raids seem to have become more damaging during this period, both Byrne and Ó Corráin have argued that the raiders themselves became more vulnerable once they established permanent settlements.[3] No longer 'mobile and elusive', the raiders came into more frequent armed conflict with local forces, and were often defeated.[4]

While Ó Corráin argues that the evidence provided by the annals indicates that Viking bands were still operating independently of one another, Byrne suggests that during this second phase of Viking activity in Ireland, 'the Norse came no longer as mere marauders, but in larger hosts under powerful jarls with political and, no doubt, territorial ambitions'.[5] The nature of the available evidence makes it challenging to assess the intentions of the various Viking groups operating in the Irish Sea region during this period of time, although the establishment of settlements or encampments in Ireland during the second half of the ninth century does seem to demonstrate a degree of 'territorial ambition'. Similarly, although the political goals of the Viking leaders are impossible to reconstruct at this remove, it is clear that during this second phase, many individual Norse war-leaders and their bands became involved in native Irish political manoeuvring. In the annals, they appear as the allies of Irish kings and take the field alongside them during dynastic warfare, although it is unclear whether they acted purely as mercenaries or whether they pursued specific political goals of their own.[6]

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[2] F.J. Byrne, 'The viking age', in Ó Cróinín, ed., *A New History of Ireland, Vol. 1: Prehistoric and Early Ireland*, 2005, 614-6.
[3] Byrne, 'The viking age', 614-5; Ó Corráin, *Ireland Before the Normans*, 90-2.
[4] Ó Corráin, *Ireland Before the Normans*, 92; Byrne, 'The viking age', 619.
[5] Ó Corráin, *Ireland Before the Normans*, 90; Byrne, 'The viking age', 615.
[6] Ó Corráin, *Ireland Before the Normans*, 92-3; Byrne, 'The viking age', 616-7.

The arrival of new Viking forces in the middle of the ninth century seems to have marked something of a change.[7] During late 840s and early 850s, there was significant conflict between rival Viking groups, which was effectively quelled by two new leaders of the Dublin Vikings, Amlaíb and Ímair. Under their leadership, the focus of Viking attention seems to have shifted outwards across the Irish Sea, while their activities in Ireland became restricted to the areas immediately surrounding their settlements. At this point, Ó Corráin argues, Dublin in particular looked and acted 'like any petty Irish state'.[8]

The cessation of in-fighting between rival groups did not bring peace, however, and throughout the second half of the ninth century the annals report clashes between various Viking groups and the forces of local kings. Moreover, Downham has argued that the departure of large numbers of Vikings from Ireland to Britain during the 860s emboldened the Irish kings, who took the opportunity to destroy Viking settlements, including Youghal, Clondalkin, and some in Northern Uí Néill territory.[9] Ó Corráin points out the apparent intensity of the warfare in Munster during this period, which may relate to a lack of stable leadership among the Munster-based Vikings as compared to Dublin at this time.[10] However, the internal stability of the Viking group based at Dublin was threatened by Ímair's death in 873.[11] In the two decades after his death, the Dubliners were weakened by power struggles between various Viking leaders, and soon became vulnerable to attacks by Irish kings. By 902 they were sufficiently divided and defenceless that they were defeated by the kings of Laigin and Brega, and according to the annals, were expelled from Dublin.[12]

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[7] Emer Purcell, 'Ninth-century Viking entries in the Irish annals: 'no 'forty years' rest'', *The Viking Age: Ireland and the West*, ed. John Sheehan and Donnchadh Ó Corráin, Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2010, 322-37. She demonstrates a quantitative decline in annal entries about Vikings starting in the late 850s, which she attributes to resistance by strong Irish kings, the arrival of Amlaíb and Ímair, and the foundation of permanent settlements by the Vikings.

[8] Ó Corráin, *Ireland Before the Normans*, 94.

[9] Clare Downham, 'The historical importance of Viking-Age Waterford', *The Journal of Celtic Studies* 4 (2004), 76. AFM864.7; AFM865.12; AU866.4; AU867.8.

[10] Ó Corráin, *Ireland Before the Normans*, 95.

[11] AU873.3; CS873.

[12] AU902.2; CS902.

To some extent, the annalistic accounts of this event probably exaggerate the decisiveness of the Irish victory over the Dublin Vikings, and it seems unlikely that all of the Scandinavian settlers in Dublin were 'expelled' as a result of the battle. Many of them must have remained, and those expelled were probably the leadership and their core contingent of fighting men. However, Ó Corráin has also argued that by this point in the early tenth century, Ireland had ceased to be an easy place for Vikings to settle. During the late ninth century, 'secondary migrations' were taking place from Ireland to Iceland and to the less densely populated parts of northwestern England.[13] Although they seem to have preserved their Norse identity, the Viking settlers who did remain in Ireland were probably well assimilated into Irish society. Intermarriage and fosterage between the Irish and the Vikings were common, and it has been suggested that the Vikings were largely Christianized by as early as the 860s.[14]

Despite the strong evidence for the continuation of Viking settlements in Ireland during the intervening period, the third phase of the Irish Viking Age is typically regarded as starting with the 'return' of the Vikings between 914 and 917. The renewed raids and settlements of this part of the tenth century were not launched by newcomers directly from Scandinavia, but by men who were well established in the Irish Sea region or on the Continent. Ó Corráin notes that during the early tenth century, there were strong links between the kings of Dublin and York, for instance.[15] In other words, neither the 'expulsion' of 902 nor the 'return' of 914 should be taken to mean that during the decade in between, Ireland was 'free' from Viking influence, or had ceased to participate in wider regional politics.

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[13] Ó Corráin, *Ireland Before the Normans*, 95-6.
[14] Ibid., 96.
[15] Ibid., 101-2.

The initial focus of renewed Viking activity in Ireland was Waterford, where the presence of large new fleets is mentioned in the annals in the year 914.[16] During the late 910s and 920s, Viking raids launched from Dublin also become widespread, and Ó Corráin notes that raiding appears to push quite far inland, as it had during the mid-ninth century.[17] The 920s and 930s were also a period of serious rivalries between the Vikings based at various coastal settlements, particularly between Dublin and Limerick. This jockeying for position weakened both rival groups, and left them vulnerable to increasingly frequent conflicts with Irish kings from the middle of the tenth century onwards.[18] Downham notes that competition among Viking groups in Ireland may have been exacerbated by Dublin's loss of influence in Britain, where the dynasty of Ímar had been in power from the late ninth century to the middle of the tenth century.[19] From the middle of the tenth century onwards, Ó Corráin argues that the Vikings ceased to be a major threat to the strongest regional kings, and that although the forces of the coastal towns played a role in inter-regional conflict, their political position was analogous to that of any other Irish sub-kingdom.[20] However, Byrne points out that the growing wealth concentrated at the coastal towns made them disproportionately important allies during power struggles between Irish kings. As he puts it, 'the Irish provincial king who could milk Dublin, Waterford or Limerick for tribute was far more powerful than his peers who extorted allegiance from twenty tribal kings'.[21] This became a central feature of eleventh-century politics, as will be discussed in the next chapter, but the groundwork for the role of the coastal towns in Irish politics was established during the second half of the tenth century.

This third major phase of the Viking Age in Ireland is often considered to last until the start of the Anglo-Norman period in the early 1170s. However, the validity of this

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[16] AU914.5; CS914; FA458; AFM910.2.
[17] Ó Corráin, *Ireland Before the Normans*, 102.
[18] Ibid., 103-4.
[19] Downham, 'The historical importance', 86.
[20] Ó Corráin, *Ireland Before the Normans*, 104.
[21] F.J. Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 2001, 268.

model is open to question, particular as regards shifts in cultural identity.[22] While terms like 'Ostman' are used to denote people of known Norse or Scandinavian descent in Irish sources into the high middle ages and beyond, these people should clearly not be referred to as Vikings. Others, including eleventh and twelfth century Irish authors, considered the Battle of Clontarf in 1014 to be the end of the Viking Age. Many commentators have demonstrated that the Battle of Clontarf was not truly a battle between the Irish and the Vikings, nor did it result in a major exodus of people of Scandinavian ancestry from Ireland. The career of Brian Boru does, however, mark the start of a new era of Irish kingship and politics, as will be discussed further below. Thus, although there are many strands of continuity between the late tenth and eleventh centuries, for the purposes of this thesis, the Battle of Clontarf and Brian Boru's death are taken as the end of the Viking Age.

4.3 Shifting Regional Politics in Ninth and Tenth Century Ireland

At the start of the ninth century, the two most powerful regional kings were the Uí Néill kings of Tara and the Eóganacht kings of Cashel. The struggles for dominance between the kings of these two regions are major features of Irish politics in the ninth century, and had an impact on the political geography of the tenth and eleventh centuries. During this period of ongoing conflict, the Eóganacht weakened, which allowed for the expansion of a new powerful dynasty in Munster, the Dál Cais. Both Ó Corráin and Byrne have argued that the Eóganacht were at a disadvantage in their long-standing rivalry with the Uí Néill, in that they lacked 'dynastic cohesion' and were less successful in generating dynastic propaganda.[23] Therefore, although the kings of Cashel accepted the concept of

[22] Clare Downham, *Viking Kings of Britain and Ireland: the Dynasty of Ívarr to AD 1014*, Edinburgh: Dunedin Academic Press, 2008, xv-xx.
[23] Ó Corráin, *Ireland Before the Normans*, 111; Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 202-3.

high-kingship invented and promoted by the kings of Tara and their ecclesiastical allies, they rarely managed to make a successful claim to reign as high-kings themselves.[24]

At the beginning of the ninth century, Áed mac Néill, king of Cenél Eógain and of Tara, had a reasonable claim to be the high-king of at least the northern half of Ireland.[25] He is referred to in regnal lists and in the annals as Áed Oirdnide, 'the ordained', and Byrne states that he may have been the first king of Tara to be inaugurated by the church.[26] The start of his reign is announced in the *Annals of Ulster* in 797,[27] although it is possible that his 'ordination' actually took place in 804.[28] In that year, the annals record a council at Dún Cuair at which, 'the clerics of Ireland were freed by Aed Oirdnide...from the obligation of attendance on expeditions and hostings'.[29] This had both symbolic and practical significance to the Irish churches, in that it signalled their elevated status over secular lords, and relieved them of a substantial financial and logistical burden. In addition to gaining the support of the church, Áed made efforts to secure his claims to supremacy, both militarily and politically. In 802 and 805, he partitioned Mide and Leinster and selected their new kings himself.[30] This represented an, 'unprecedented and drastic assertion of sovereignty by a high-king',[31] and may indicate that Áed considered his kingly powers to be fundamentally different from those of his predecessors. Ultimately, however, his efforts to divide and rule Mide and Leinster failed; Mide rebelled, while Leinster's deposed king soon returned to power.[32] Nor was Áed able to maintain consistently good relations with the church. Although he, 'sought to pose as the champion of the church', proclaiming the law of Patrick in 806 and campaigning on behalf of Armagh in 809, Áed's

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[24] Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 203.
[25] Ibid., 162.
[26] Ibid., 159.
[27] AU797.5.
[28] Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 159.
[29] AU804.8. Byrne follows *Onomasticon Goedelicum* in identifying Dún Cuair as Rathcore, north of Enfield, Co. Meath. Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 159.
[30] AU802.2; 805.7
[31] Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 160.
[32] AU803.5; AU806.4; AU808.4

fair at Teltown was boycotted by the monastic community of Tallaght in 811, and he was excommunicated by the Columban *familia* in 817.[33] Towards the end of his reign, Áed made further attempts to subdue Leinster, marching his forces once more to Dún Cuair to divide the kingdom between rival lineages, and in following year ravaging the province.[34] Following this campaign, Áed apparently died, at *Áth dá Ferta* in Louth.[35]

After Áed's death, Conchobar mac Donnchada, the king of Clann Cholmain who had been Áed's chief Southern Uí Néill rival, attempted to take over as the dominant king in the northern half of Ireland. According to the annals, although he had the backing of the Southern Uí Néill and the Leinstermen, he faced opposition from the Northern Uí Néill.[36] Just at this moment of conflict among the Uí Néill, Feidlimid mac Crimthann became king of Cashel.[37] One of the most successful of the kings of Cashel in the early medieval period, Feidlimid reigned from 820 until his death in 847.

Little can be said about his route to the kingship of Munster, although the annals say that he 'took' the kingship, and the *Annals of Inisfallen* record the death of his predecessor in the following year.[38] This may mean that he had abdicated his power, and there are no indications in the annals that Feidlimid's accession was violent. Byrne argues that when Feidlimid came into power, the kingship of Munster was at its 'low ebb', and presented no challenge to the authority of the kings of Tara.[39] One of the reasons for this was the internal fragmentation of the Eóganacht, and the limited nature of the power the king of Munster held over his sub-kings.[40] One of Feidlimid's major achievements, according to Byrne, was the unification of the various Eóganacht lineages under his authority, which was made simpler by the decline of the Eóganacht Locha Léin and their

[33] AU806.5; AU809.7; AU811.2; AU817.8; Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 161-2.
[34] AU818.6; AU819.1.
[35] AU819.2.
[36] AU820.2.
[37] AU820.5; AI820.2
[38] AU AI821.1.
[39] Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 215.
[40] Ó Corráin, *Ireland Before the Normans*, 111-2.

hold over western Munster.[41] Having this firm base made it possible for Feidlimid to look beyond Munster, and his consolidation of power in southern Ireland coincided with the period of upheaval among the Uí Néill mentioned above.

Much of Feidlimid's legacy revolves around the fact that he was an ecclesiastic of some kind, and was certainly strongly associated with the Céli De movement.[42] While there is little concrete evidence in the annals about his career in the church before 820, once he came to power in Munster, his focus was on the church just as much as on exercising secular authority. Byrne argues that Feidlimid understood the potential of the concept of high-kingship of Ireland that was already being promoted by Armagh at this point, and that he intended to put Cashel forward as an alternative to Tara as the centre of the high-kingship.[43] This ambition may have been the motivation behind Feidlimid's decision to proclaim the *Lex Patricii* in Munster in 823. Although the annals make no mention of where this event took place, they do note that Artrí mac Conchobar, the bishop of Armagh, was there alongside Feidlimid.[44] Byrne notes that Artrí was the *de facto* abbot of Armagh during the later years of Mac Loingsig's abbacy, and suggests that he joined forces with Feidlimid to further his own ambitions.[45] In 825, Artrí again proclaimed the *Lex Patricii*, this time in Connacht.[46]

Feidlimid seems to have been determined to gain control over Clonmacnoise in 823, and *Chronicum Scotorum* provides what appears to be a detailed account of the events of that year.[47] The tanist-abbot of Clonmacnoise died, and then Feidlimid and Artrí proclaimed the *Lex Patricii*. Following this, although perhaps not as a direct result, the abbot of Clonmacnoise resigned. Then the monastery came under attack by Cathal mac Ailill, king of Uí Maine, who evidently drowned one of its clerics, or perhaps a contender

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[41] Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 216-7, 220-1.
[42] Ibid., 211-3.
[43] Ibid., 220.
[44] AU823.5; CS823; AFM822.10.
[45] Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 220.
[46] AU825.14; AFM824.11.
[47] CS823; AU823.5, AU823.6, AU823.9.

for the vacant abbacy, in the Shannon. *Chronicum Scotorum* reports that Clonmacnoise was awarded several churches in reparation for the crime, but when Feidlimid attempted to retaliate further, he was defeated by Cathal's army. Finally, he also burned *Gailinne na mBretan*, now Gallen, Co. Offaly, just south of Athlone and east of Clonmacnoise.[48] Parts of this chronology are supported by the *Annals of Ulster*, although they make no mention of the murder of the cleric or of the conflict between Feidlimid and Cathal.[49] The *Annals of the Four Masters* report this material a decade later under the year 834.[50] Leaving aside the problematic chronology, the annals also report that just a few years later, in 826, Feidlimid took a Munster army to ravage the entire kingdom of Delbna Bethra. Byrne suggests that this small kingdom, 'must in practice have been an ecclesiastical state ruled by the abbots of Clonmacnoise', and that Clonmacnoise almost certainly controlled Gallen.[51]

Despite Feidlimid's at least partial success in gaining control over Clonmacnoise, the alliance between Artrí and Feidlimid experienced a major setback when, after the death of Mac Loingsig in 826, Artrí failed to secure the abbacy of Armagh.[52] Artrí, supported by his half-brother, Cummascach, the king of Airgialla, had claimed the abbacy, but according to the annals, his rival, Eógan Mainistrech sent a dire threat and call for help to Niall Caille mac Áeda, king of Cenél Eógain. At the battle of Leth Cam, Niall Caille and the Cenél Eógain defeated the Airgialla and installed Artrí's rival Eógan Mainistrech as abbot of Armagh.[53] In doing so, the Cenél Eógain made a renewed claim to primacy in the north, and by extension, to control over Armagh. Perhaps in response to this defiance from the north, Feidlimid and the king of Tara, Conchobar mac Donnchada met at Birr later in the

[48] AU823.9; CS823.
[49] AU823.5, AU823.6, AU823.9.
[50] AFM834.13, AFM834.14.
[51] AU826.8. Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 221.
[52] AU826.3; CS826;
[53] AU827.2; AU827.4; CS827; AFM825.5

same year.[54] Although the annals do not give an indication of what agreement they may have made, the location and timing of the council suggests that it may have been a decision to join forces in resistance to Niall Caille.[55] Although *Chronicum Scotorum* does not mention this meeting, it does state that after the battle of Leth Cam, 'the vice-abbacy of Clonmacnoise was given to the Munstermen, which was not so previously'.[56] Perhaps this was one of the conditions under which Feidlimid agreed to an alliance with Conchobar, or under which he consented at least to cease his attacks on Clonmacnoise and its territory.

If Conchobar and Feidlimid did form an alliance, it did not last. In 830, Conchobar's brother was apparently killed by the Munstermen, and Feidlimid is said to have campaigned against the southern Uí Briúin of Connacht.[57] The link between these events is made explicit in the entry in the *Annals of Inisfallen*, and certainly signals the end of any truce between Conchobar and Feidlimid.[58] The annals for the following year record further conflict between the two kings, when Feidlimid apparently gained the backing of the Laigin, whom he led on a campaign into Brega alongside his own Munster forces in 831.[59] In 832, Conchobar died, and Feidlimid launched a series of attacks on Delbna Bethra, Clonmacnoise and Durrow.[60]

Feidlimid then became entangled with events in Armagh, where there was a renewed struggle for control following the death of Eógan Mainistrech in 834.[61] Once again, Feidlimid faced resistance from Niall mac Áeda, more powerful than ever following

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[54] AU827.10; AFM825.6.
[55] Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 220-1. Ó Corráin has argued that Feidlimid was essentially accepting Conchobar's submission to him, and that by this point in his career, Feidlimid was making a real bid for supremacy over the Uí Néill. Ó Corráin, *Ireland Before the Normans*, 98. However, other than his attacks on Clonmacnoise, there is little evidence to suggest that he presented a military threat to Conchobar, who must have been more concerned about Niall Caille at this time.
[56] CS827.
[57] AU830.5, AU830.6.
[58] AI830.1.
[59] AU831.9, AU831.10, CS831, AFM829.7. AU and AFM say that he went via *Fiambur* or *Finnabhair* to attack Brega. Byrne identifies this as Fennor, on the south bank of the Boyne opposite Slane. Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 221. The two are connected by a crossing point, now a stone bridge with a possible medieval section (ME019-024).
[60] AU833.1, AU833.7, CS832, AFM831.5, AFM831.6, AFM831.10.
[61] AI834.1, AU834.2, AU835.6, CS834, AFM833.14, AFM834.15.

Conchobar's death. Of the two contenders for the abbacy, Diarmait and Forindán, Feidlimid supported Diarmait, while Niall backed Forindán. Both Niall and Feidlimid sought to put their candidate into the abbot's chair, in the hopes that Armagh would then support them in their claims to primacy over all of Ireland.[62] Feidlimid attempted to decide the contest by sacking Kildare and capturing Forindán in 836,[63] but ultimately, it seems that the two contenders managed to come to some agreement. Their joint obit in the *Annals of Ulster* in the year 852 reads, 'two successors of Patrick—two bishops of Ard Macha, i.e. Forannán, scribe, bishop and anchorite, and Diarmait, the most learned of all the teachers of Europe, rested'.[64]

Feidlimid may have been frustrated by his efforts to gain control over the church by manipulating monastic successions. During the last decade of his career, he took direct abbatial control over Cork in 836 and Clonfert in 838.[65] Only the *Annals of Inisfallen* report his takeover of Clonfert, and state that it happened in the context of a council at which Niall submitted to Feidlimid. According to that annalist, Feidlimid 'became full king of Ireland that day'.[66] As will be discussed later, this joint claim to secular and ecclesiastical authority on the part of Munster kings became a visible trend in the tenth century, and Byrne suggests the possibility that the pattern of 'ecclesiastical kingship' in Munster started with Feidlimid.[67] During this period of his career, Feidlimid does seem to have had a great deal of success, ravaging Mide, Brega, Delbna Bethra and Cenél Fiachach, and he even went so far as to seize Niall's queen and her retinue.[68] However, when he attempted to demonstrate his authority in Leinster by holding the *óenach* at

[62] Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 822-3.
[63] CS836.
[64] AU852.1.
[65] AU836.2; AI836.1; AI838.1. On the basis of the entry in AU, Byrne hypothesizes that Feidlimid may have held the former abbot of Cork prisoner until he died in 836; Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 224.
[66] AI838.1.
[67] Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 214-5.
[68] AI840.1; AU840.4; CS840; AFM839.15.

Carman, Niall surprised and defeated him.[69] After this point, Feidlimid's ambitions seem to collapse, and although he launched one final raid on Clonmacnoise in 846, he was no longer a contender for the high-kingship.[70] He died in 847, and *Chronicum Scotorum* gives the credit for his death to St. Ciaran, who apparently stabbed Feidlimid with his crozier during his raid on Clonmacnoise in the previous year.[71] Nevertheless, *Chronicum Scotorum*, like most of the other annals, provides him with an effusive eulogy, in which he is referred to as a scribe and anchorite as well as king of Munster.[72]

Just before Feidlimid died, Niall mac Áeda also met his end, by drowning in the River Calann.[73] The resulting power vacuum was immediately filled by a new southern Uí Néill king, Máel Sechnaill mac Máel Ruanaid of Clann Cholmáin. Máel Sechnaill is first mentioned in the annals at the end of the 830s during the last years of his father's reign as king of Mide.[74] His father, Máel Ruanaid, died in 843, and during the next few years, Máel Sechnaill seems to have made a bid for power within his father's kingdom and even beyond it.[75] This included attacks on dynastic rivals and the capture and drowning of the Viking leader, Turgeis.[76] After Niall and Feidlimid died, Máel Sechnaill's ambitions shifted north. In 847, he attacked an island on Lough Ramor, near Virginia in Cavan, and drove out a band of Luigni and Gailenga who had been raiding 'in the manner of the heathens'.[77] In the following year he attacked Dublin alongside the king of Lagore, Tigernach, and also defeated a group of Vikings at *Forach*, near Skreen.[78] He decisively ended a year-long rebellion by Cináed mac Conaing, king of Brega, in 851, by defeating his Dublin Viking allies and drowning Cináed.[79] At a council held at Armagh in 851, Máel

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[69] AU841.5; AFM840.5.
[70] CS846.
[71] CS846.
[72] CS847; AI847.1; AU847.1; AFM845.4. Of these, AI is the most restrained, or abbreviated.
[73] AI846.1; AU846.3; CS846; AFM844.16.
[74] AU839.6; AU841.2.
[75] AU843.1; AU845.7; AU845.8; AU846.7.
[76] AU845.8.
[77] AU847.3
[78] CS849; AU848.4
[79] AU850.3; AU851.2

Sechnaill gained the submission of Matudán, king of the Ulaid, and thereby demonstrated his control over the north.[80]

Having established his authority in the northern half of Ireland, Máel Sechnaill began to extend his authority into the southern kingdoms. Following Feidlimid's death, the next two kings of Cashel were both weak and short-lived. Feidlimid's successor, Ólchobar mac Cináeda, was both abbot of Emly and king of Cashel, but died in 851 after only a few years as king.[81] He was succeeded by Áilgenán mac Donngaile, whose reign was also quite short; he died in 853.[82] During this period, various groups of Viking were raiding heavily in Munster, and the kings of Cashel were unable to defend their territory. The kingship was therefore again vulnerable to interference both from outsiders, and from its own sub-kings. Among the strongest of these sub-kings was Cerball mac Dúnlainge, the king of Osraige, who used his control over the Nore and Barrow river valleys to interfere in events in both Leinster and Munster.[83] Cerball and the Osraige presented a major challenge to Máel Sechnaill's efforts to consolidate and expand his authority, and Máel Sechnaill spent much of the 850s on a series of southern campaigns. Ultimately, Máel Sechnaill was successful; at a council in 859, Cerball formally submitted to him, and the kingdom of Osraige was supposedly transferred from Leth Moga to Leth Cuinn.[84]

During the later years of his reign, Máel Sechnaill faced opposition from other Uí Néill dynasts, especially Áed mac Néill, the Cenél Eógain king of Ailech, and his ally Flann, the brother of Cerball mac Conaing. In 860, Máel Sechnaill led the men of the southern Uí Néill, Leinster, Connacht and Munster to Armagh to confront Áed, demonstrating the reality of his claims to be the most powerful king in Ireland.[85] Although

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[80] AU851.5
[81] AI848.1; AI851.1; AU851.1; CS851.
[82] AI852.1; AI853.1; AU853.1.
[83] Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 263-4.
[84] FA268; AU859.3; CS859.
[85] AU860.1; CS860;

Áed continued to raid into Mide in the next two years, he was content to wait until Máel Sechnaill died in 862 before mounting a serious claim to the kingship of Tara.[86]

Máel Sechnaill's legacy portrays him as a staunch enemy of the Viking invaders, but Ó Corráin argues that his major achievements were the extension of the powers of his dynasty and the further destabilization of the weakened Eóganacht.[87] Máel Sechnaill's opposition to the Vikings or their Irish allies should be seen as pragmatic rather than patriotic. For instance, when he defeated Cináed mac Conaing and his Dublin Viking allies in 851, Máel Sechnaill effectively removed a threat to his own kingdom.[88] He was also not averse to employing *Gallgoídil* mercenaries to supplement his own forces during his campaigns against Amlaíb and Ímair in the mid- to late 850s. These *gallgoídil* are described in the *Fragmentary Annals* as wandering bands of Irishmen who had become pagans and Vikings, but many modern historians hypothesize that they represent the first generation of the offspring of marriages between the Irish and Norse.[89]

Whether or not Máel Sechnaill should be understood as the high-king of Ireland is, according to Ó Corráin, open to question. The role of the Vikings in Irish politics was complex during this period. Certainly, their depredations helped to further weaken vulnerable dynasties and kingdoms, like the Eóganacht, which allowed stronger kings to gain control over larger and larger portions of the island. On the other hand, the need to campaign against Viking forces may have, 'diverted the attention and the resources of the Uí Néill and other overkings from the extension of their power and the creation of greater paramountcies'.[90] For this reason, Ó Corráin argues that the development of high-kingship, as a concept and as a reality, should be understood as a natural outgrowth of the

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[86] AU861.1; CS861; AU862.2; AU862.3; AU862.5; AI862.1; CS862.
[87] Ó Corráin, *Ireland Before the Normans*, 99-101.
[88] AI850.3; AU851.2.
[89] FA247; FA260. For a summary of the discussion on the *gallgoídil*, see Downham, *Viking Kings of Britain and Ireland*, 17.
[90] Ó Corráin, *Ireland Before the Normans*, 101.

political centralizing tendencies of the eighth and ninth centuries, rather than as a direct result of the Viking invasions.[91]

In either case, Máel Sechnaill's reign went a long way towards reestablishing the prestige of the Uí Néill kings of Tara as the most powerful of the Irish kings. This was maintained during the reigns of Máel Sechnaill's immediate successor, Áed mac Néill, from 862 to 879, and of his own son, Flann Sinna mac Máel Sechnaill, from 879 to 916. Byrne argues that after Máel Sechnaill's death, Áed mac Néill still faced all of the challenges of securing the high-kingship, because 'Máelsechnaill's victories had established no legal rights'.[92] In other words, although Máel Sechnaill had established his authority over most, if not all, of Ireland by the end of his reign, he could not and did not pass on any kind of territorial kingdom to his successor.

Both the *Annals of Ulster* and *Chronicum Scotorum* provide a specific entry in 862 to announce Áed's assumption of power, and *Chronicum Scotorum* reports that in the following year, Áed launched an attack on Connacht.[93] Áed's power base was in the north, and he took steps to maintain his authority there. In 864, he campaigned against the Ulaid.[94] Two years later, he led a major expedition into the north and 'plundered all the strongholds of the foreigners'.[95] According to the annals, in 871, Áed allegedly engineered the murder of one of the kings of Ulaid.[96] However, much of his attention was occupied by events in Brega and Leinster, where he faced both Viking raids and local rebellions. In 864, he blinded the king of Mide, Lorcan mac Cathal, for forming an alliance with the Viking leaders, Amlaíb and Ímair.[97] The annals provide an account of a battle at Killineer, Co. Louth, in which Áed defeated the combined forces of Brega, Laigin and their Norse

[91] Ó Corráin, *Ireland Before the Normans*, 101
[92] Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 266.
[93] AU862.3; CS862; CS863.
[94] AU864.3; CS864.
[95] AU866.4; CS866.
[96] AU871.1; CS871.
[97] AU863.4; AU864.1.

allies in 868.[98] In 870, he ravaged Leinster, and his attack from the north was evidently supplemented by an attack from the west by the Osraige under their king, Cerball mac Dúnlainge.[99] Áed was allied by marriage to Cerball, and as will be discussed further below, he essentially left his brother-in-law to his own devices in Munster. In the case of this campaign against the Laigin, it is unclear whether Cerball was acting in concert with Áed, or whether he was simply taking an opportunity to harass his vulnerable eastern neighbour.[100]

On the basis of the surviving annalistic accounts, the later years of Áed's reign seem to have been quiet, if not peaceful. Aside from a raid on Laigin during which he burned many churches, Áed is not reported to have campaigned during the 870s. The *Annals of Ulster* also report that in 873, 876 and 878, the *óenach* at Teltown was cancelled, 'although there was no just and worthy reason for this'.[101] It is possible to imagine that during these years, Áed was in retirement, or simply in his decline; he reportedly died peacefully in the monastery at Dromiskin, Co. Louth, in 879.[102]

After Áed's death, Máel Sechnaill's son, Flann Sinna, took over the kingship, and again the annals contain specific entries to that effect under the year 879.[103] *Chronicum Scotorum* reports that in the first year of his kingship, Flann attacked the Laigin and took their hostages.[104] In the following year, Flann led a raid into the north and 'invaded' Armagh, apparently for the purposes of taking hostages from the Cenél Conaill and the Cenél Eógain.[105] According to one set of annals, he led an expedition into Munster in the same year to take their hostages as well.[106] All of this hostage-taking was intended to

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[98] AU868.4; CS868; AI868.3. The account in AI is very abbreviated.
[99] AU870.2; CS870; FA387. FA377 offers an almost certainly fictitious account of the Laigin driving away one of their kings out of jealousy, and FA387 suggests this as a possible reason for Áed's attack.
[100] The account in FA387 makes it seem as though Cerball's attack was unauthorized, and may even have jeopardized Áed's efforts to take hostages from the Laigin.
[101] AU873.6; AU876.3; AU878.7.
[102] AU879.1; CS879; AI879.1.
[103] AU879.2; CS878.
[104] CS880.
[105] AU882.1; CS882.
[106] CS882.

confirm Flann in his new position as king of Tara, and was also a way of laying claim to the high-kingship that his father, and perhaps his predecessor, Áed, had held. If the silence of the annals in the next several years is indicative of peace, this seems to have worked, but towards the end of the 880s, Flann began to face conflicts from a number of different quarters.

Flann was soundly defeated by a group of Dublin Vikings in 888, and the list of the slain included the king of Connacht, the bishop of Kildare, and the superior of Kildalkey.[107] In 901, one of Flann's sons was burned to death by the Luigne, in what appears to be the continuation of a feud from his grandfather Máel Sechnaill's generation.[108] As discussed early, two of Flann's subkings, those of Brega and Laigin, were responsible for the 'expulsion' of the Vikings from Dublin in 902, an incident in which Flann was evidently not involved. There is no reason to believe that this would have gone against Flann's interests, but it is an indication of the strength of the kings on whose continued submission and good will Flann depended. Other concerns continued to occupy Flann's attention; having lost one son already, Flann was forced to attack another of his offspring at Kells in 904.[109] Based on the account of this event in the annals, it is possible to infer that Flann's son Domnall was mounting some sort of rebellion, and that Flann marched to Kells to dissuade him from continuing. During the next two years, Flann focused on the south, where he mounted an expedition to Osraige in 905 and a major attack on Munster in 906.[110] Flann's activity in the south during this time was probably related to the advent of a strong new king of Cashel, Cormac mac Cuilennáin, who came into power in 902.

Byrne has argued that Cormac mac Cuilennáin had a strong belief in a scheme of history and political geography that pitted the north, dominated by the Uí Néill, against the

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[107] AU888.5; CS888. AI888.2 only reports the death of the king of Connacht with no mention of the battle.
[108] AU901.1; CS901; AI901.2.
[109] AU904.2; CS904.
[110] AU905.2; AU906.3, CS906.

south, dominated by the Eóganacht under the king of Cashel. As the leader of Leth Moga, Byrne argues, Cormac mac Cuilennáin was determined to challenge the might of the Uí Néill and their allies.[111] Cormac perceived Flann's attack on Munster in 906 as a direct challenge, and his determination to avenge this action is visible during 907 and 908, when he repeatedly challenged the king of Tara, either directly, or by attacking the monastery of Clonmacnoise.[112] Cormac's campaign against Clonmacnoise continued an old pattern of Cashel's hostility towards that monastery, but was a significant departure from earlier attacks because Cormac seems to have brought a substantial army to occupy, rather than simply raid, the ecclesiastical centre.[113] Clonmacnoise was pivotal to the concept of the north-south divide, in that the line of demarcation was perceived to run along the Esker Riada, a road along a glacial ridge, which meets the Shannon at Clonmacnoise. That Flann saw himself as a patron of Clonmacnoise is apparent in an entry in *Chronicum Scotorum* under the year 909, when Flann is said to have built a new oratory for the community.[114] Thus Cormac's invasion or occupation of the ecclesiastical centre and settlement can be viewed as a calculated act of aggression against the king of Tara.

The *Cath Belach Mugna*, fought in 908, was the final, decisive battle in this period of antagonism.[115] Cormac mac Cuilennáin led the Munster forces, in conjunction with one of his strongest allies and successor to the kingship of Cashel, Flaithbertach mac Inmainén, the abbot of Scattery Island in the Shannon estuary. Flaithbertach, whose power was likely directly related to the strategic location of his island monastery, had participated in the Clonmacnoise campaign, and seems to have been as ambitious to destroy the might of the king of Tara as was Cormac mac Cuilennáin himself. As will be discussed further below, the king of the Déisi, Cormac mac Mothla, was also a named participant. Cormac mac Cuilennáin's defeat at Ballaghmoon at the hands of Flann Sinna marked the beginning of

[111] Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 202-3, 266.
[112] AU906.3; AI907.3; AI907.4; AI908.2; AU908.3; FA908.
[113] AI907.4.
[114] CS909.
[115] AI908.2; AU908.3; FA908.

the end for Eóganacht prestige, both in the island as a whole and within Munster. In the chaos following this battle, the weakened south coast became the focus of renewed Viking activity.[116]

Following the death of Cormac mac Cuilennáin at the battle of Ballaghmoon, Flann was free to expend his energies elsewhere. In 910, he defeated the forces of Breifne, and in 914, he campaigned through Brega and southern Connacht.[117] However, in the years just prior to his death in 916, Flann seems to have suffered something of a reverse of fortunes at the hands of the Northern Uí Néill. Domnall mac Áeda retired from the kingship of Ailech in 911 and his brother, Niall Glúndub, took over his position.[118] During the next few years, he seems to have worked to extend his sphere of influence, often at the expense of Flann Sinna and his sons.[119] They engaged in a confrontation in Mide in 914, and on this occasion, Flann and his forces overcame Niall Glúndub, the Northern Uí Néill and the Ulaid.[120] Although during this battle, Flann and his sons seem to have been in accord, for unspecified reasons, this relationship broke down, and in the following year, the annals report that two of Flann's sons raided Mide in rebellion against their father.[121] It is perhaps revealing that, according to the *Annals of Ulster*, Flann was not the one to end their rebellion; rather, Niall Glúndub brought his forces down from the north to quell the uprising. One wonders whether this had something to do with the future of the kingship of Tara, which passed to Niall Glúndub after Flann's death in 916.[122]

Much of Niall Glúndub's short reign was occupied by wars against the new wave of Viking attacks. He campaigned against the Vikings in Munster in 917, but was eventually driven back.[123] The annals make a bare notation to the effect that Niall was

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[116] Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 266.
[117] AU910.1; CS910; AU914.1.
[118] AI911.1; AU911.4; CS911.
[119] CS912; AU913.6; CS913.
[120] AU914.7; CS914.
[121] AU915.3.
[122] AI916.1; AI916.3; AU916.1; AU916.5; CS916.
[123] AU917.3; CS917.

engaged in warfare against Sitric grandson of Ímair in 918, and then in 919, Niall was killed in another battle against the Vikings at Dublin.[124] Resistance to the renewed Viking presence was continued in the following year by Flann Sinna's son Donnchad Donn.[125] Much of Donnchad's reign, however, was overshadowed by ongoing conflict with Muirchertach, son of Niall Glúndub. Tensions persisted between the two kings during the late 920s and 930s, although they launched a number of joint attacks on the Vikings in the late 930s and 940s.[126] The major crisis for the Uí Néill came in the mid 940s, when Muirchertach, Donnchad and Donnchad's son, the king of Mide, all died within a few years of one another.[127] The ensuing struggle over the succession was chaotic, and featured two main contenders, Congalach mac Máele Mithig, king of Brega and Ruaidrí ua Canannáin, king of Cenél Conaill.[128]

This succession crisis created an opportunity for a resurgence of power in Munster. During the early decades of the tenth century, following the death of Cormac mac Cuilennáin in 908, the weakening of the Eóganacht continued, and as mentioned above, their control over northern and eastern Munster became increasingly tenuous.[129] The next strong king of Cashel was Cellachán Chaisil mac Buadacháin, who was active in Munster from the late 930s until he died in 954. Like Cormac, he was successful because he was able to capitalize on a period of division and rivalry among the Uí Néill lineages. Nevertheless, he was portrayed as a larger than life hero in the twelfth century text, *Caithréim Chellacháin Chaisil*, which bears little resemblance to the actual events of his reign.[130] In reality, like many ambitious regional kings before him, Cellachán sought to expand his sphere of influence, and challenged the Uí Néill dominance over Leinster and Connacht in particular. Far from being an implacable enemy of the Vikings, he was

[124] AU918.6; AU919.3; CS919; AI919.3.
[125] AU920.2; CS920.
[126] AU927.4; AU929.4; AU938.4; AU938.6; AU940.1
[127] AU943.2; AI943.1; CS943; AU944.4; AI944.2; CS944.
[128] Ó Corráin, *Ireland Before the Normans*, 117-9.
[129] Ibid., 112-3.
[130] Donnchadh Ó Corráin, '*Caithréim Chellacháin Chaisil*: History or Propaganda?', *Ériu* 25 (1974), 1-69.

frequently allied with the Norse of Waterford, and only opposed Viking forces when it suited his wider purposes.

Cellachán is first mentioned in *Chronicum Scotorum*, which reports that he led a raid on Clonmacnoise in 936, while the community was still reeling from an attack by the Norse Dubliners.[131] While this can be seen as an indirect attack on Donnchad Donn's authority, Cellachán campaigned even more aggressively in 939, when he led the men of Munster and the Vikings of Waterford into Mide.[132] Perhaps as a direct result, in the following year Muirchertach and Donnchad Donn took hostages from Laigin and Munster.[133] Renewed rebellions required further campaigning by Muirchertach through Mide and Uí Fhailge, into Osraige and Déisi territory in 941.[134] In the course of this expedition, Muirchertach captured Cellachán and presented him to Donnchad, perhaps as a way of demonstrating that he did not intend his interference in Munster to be taken as a sign of aggression.[135]

After Muirchertach's and Donnchad's deaths in 943 and 944, Cellachán reappears in the annals, no longer captive, and trying to hold his own against a new threat from the Dál Cais, a formerly minor kingdom who had expanded their authority from their home territory on the Shannon into a secure hold over western Munster. Byrne argues that the 'brutal new age' of the tenth and eleventh centuries 'demanded kings whose dynastic power rested on compact and strategically placed territorial lordships', precisely like that of the Dál Cais kingdom.[136] The Dál Cais are first referred to by that name in 934, at the death of Rebacháin mac Mothla, the abbot of Tomgraney, Co. Clare, and king of Dál Cais.[137] After his death, Cennétig mac Lorcáin took over the kingship, and as Ó Corráin

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[131] CS936.
[132] CS939; AFM937.14; AFM937.15.
[133] AU940.1; CS940.
[134] AU941.3; CS941.
[135] AU941.3; CS941.
[136] Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 266.
[137] AI934.1

puts it, 'by the middle years of the tenth century Dál Cais had become a power to be reckoned with in Munster politics'.[138]

Initially, Cellachán was evidently able to contain Cennétig mac Lorcáin and the Dál Cais. He defeated Cennétig in a confrontation in 944, and killed two of his sons.[139] Soon, however, even the Uí Néill saw the Dál Cais as a threat, and in 950, Congalach defeated the Dál Cais and killed two more of Cennétig's sons.[140] At his death in 951, Cennétig is referred to as the 'king of Tuadmumu'[141] or the 'royal heir of Munster',[142] 'both high-sounding titles which indicate that Dál Cais had become politically significant in the reign of Cennétig'.[143] Dynastic rivals killed Lachtna, another of Cennétig's sons, in 953.[144] Ultimately, yet another of Cennétig's sons, Mathgamain, succeeded him as king of the Dál Cais.

Cellachán only outlived Cennétig by a few years. After Cennétig's death, he may have taken advantage of the chaos to launch attacks on Clonmacnoise and Clonfert, which perhaps were also a response to Congalach's interference in Munster in the previous year.[145] Although the annals report a further raid on Clonmacnoise in 953, it is attributed to the men of Munster and the Limerick Vikings, and Cellachán's leadership is not mentioned.[146] It is probable that he did not lead this raid, and it may even have been a Dál Cais effort. In 954, the annals record Cellachán's death, although none give him a particularly distinguished eulogy, referring to him simply as the king of Cashel.[147] Although during parts of Cellachán's career, he seemed poised to restore the prestige of the Eóganacht kings, by the time his reign ended, the political situation was very different.

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[138] Ó Corráin, *Ireland Before the Normans*, 114-5.
[139] AU944.7; CS944.
[140] CS950.
[141] AU951.4
[142] AI951.2.
[143] Ó Corráin, *Ireland Before the Normans*, 115.
[144] AI953.4. Ó Corráin suggests that Lachtna was Cennétig's intended heir. Ó Corráin, *Ireland Before the Normans*, 115-6.
[145] AI951.1; AFM949.10.
[146] AU953.1; CS953.
[147] AI954.2; AU954.7; CS954.

Not unlike Cormac mac Cuilennáin, Cellachán was succeeded by a series of weak and short-lived kings; their ineffectiveness allowed for the continued rise of the Dál Cais as the most powerful kings in Munster.

Cellachán's successors were Máel Fathardaig mac Flainn, d. 957, Dub-dá-Bairenn mac Domnaill, d. 959, and Fer Gráid mac Clérig, d. 961.[148] The annals do not indicate foul play in Máel Fathardaig's death, but they state that both Dub-dá-Bairenn and Fer Gráid were killed 'by their own people'. After Fer Gráid's death, the kingship passed to Cellachán's son, Donnchad. Like the three kings of Cashel before him, Donnchad enjoyed only a short reign, and was killed in 963.[149] Although the *Annals of Inisfallen* and the *Annals of Ulster* merely report his death, *Chronicum Scotorum* says that he was 'mortally wounded', and the *Four Masters* supplement this with the suggestion that he was attacked by 'his own kinsman'.[150] These years of violence, discontinuity and upheaval left the Eóganacht vulnerable, and Donnchad's death created a major succession crisis.

The two leading claimants were Máel Muad mac Brain of the Eóganacht Raithlind, and Mathgamain mac Cennétig, king of Dál Cais. As Ó Corráin points out, these rivals were 'both members of west Munster dynasties which had grown greatly in power at the expense of the east Munster peoples'.[151] Although both candidates were based in the west, Mathgamain seems to have obtained the backing of the Déisi. Máel Muad had the support of the Vikings of Limerick, an alliance that posed a major threat to Mathgamain's home territory. Mathgamain attacked Limerick and its surrounding lands in 967, and then over the next few years engaged in a series of campaigns in an effort to establish control over western Munster.[152] Nevertheless, his main allies were in eastern Munster; in 969, when

[148] AI957.3; AU957.2; CS957; AI959.1; AU959.3, CS959; AU961.4; CS961.
[149] AI963.3; AU963.4; CS963; AFM961.12.
[150] CS963; AFM961.12.
[151] Ó Corráin, *Ireland Before the Normans*, 116.
[152] AI967.2; AU967.5; AI968.1; AI969.2; AFM967.13.

he attacked the king of Leinster in retaliation for raids on Osraige, his forces included the Déisi and the men of Waterford.[153]

Although relations between Mathgamain and Máel Muad were never good, Mathgamain managed to coerce his rival into participating on a campaign against the Limerick Vikings in 972.[154] In annal entries under the following year, Mathgamain is portrayed acting like the king of Munster by serving as a peacekeeper between the abbots of Armagh and Emly.[155] By the next year, however, the Eóganacht Raithlind and the Uí Fidgente had allied themselves once again with Limerick and began attacking Mathgamain.[156] It was Mathgamain's bad luck that in 976, he was captured by the king of Uí Fidgente, Donnubán, who immediately handed him over to be executed by Máel Muad.[157]

In the meantime, the Uí Néill also experienced a period of instability. As mentioned earlier, during the 940s, there was major conflict between Congalach mac Máele Mithig, king of Brega and Ruaidrí ua Canannáin, king of Cenél Conaill, both of whom had risen to prominence after the deaths of Muirchertach and Donnchad Donn in 943 and 944. This conflict was also tied to changes in the leadership of Dublin. A change of power in Dublin in 945 had real consequences for the balance of power throughout Ireland. In this year, Blácaire mac Gofrith, the leader of the Dublin Vikings who was responsible for the death of Muirchertach mac Néill, was ousted by his rival, Amlaíb Cuarán.[158] As Downham has demonstrated, Blácaire had succeeded in defeating Muirchertach by forming an alliance with one of his rivals, Ruaidrí ua Canannáin of the Cenél Conaill. Unfortunately for Blácaire, his ally, Ruaidrí, was not strong enough to gain kingship over all of the Uí Neill, which was seized by Congalach mac Máel Mithig

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[153] AFM967.12
[154] AI972.1
[155] AI973.3. The event is also recorded in AU973.5, although there is no mention of Mathgamain's role.
[156] AI974.5
[157] AI976.3; AU976.1; CS976.
[158] AU945.6.

following the death of Donnchad Donn. Therefore, when Congalach and his allies attacked Dublin in 944, as mentioned above, Blácaire's position was substantially weakened. This opened the door for his rival, Amlaíb Cuarán, to take control over Dublin in 945, backed, as one might expect, by Congalach.[159] Amlaíb's arrival is not mentioned in the *Annals of Inisfallen*, and both these annals and the *Annals of Ulster* refer to Blácaire as 'king of the foreigners' at his death in 948.[160] The entry in the *Annals of Inisfallen*, which lists Blácaire's demise in a list of miraculous events from that year, may offer some indication of the extent to which he was personally disliked, at least in certain clerical circles.

From his arrival in Dublin in 945, Amlaíb Cuarán set about securing his position, initially by fighting alongside Congalach against his various enemies. Immediately after Amlaíb took control of Dublin, he and Congalach launched a campaign to the north, attacking Ruaidrí Ua Canannáin in his own kingdom of Cenél Conaill.[161] In the following year, the Dublin Vikings raided Clonmacnoise and the churches of Mide.[162] The first major setback for the alliance between the Southern Uí Neill and the Dublin Vikings came in 947, when they lost a battle to Ruaidrí ua Canannáin at Slane.[163] In that same year, the king of Laigin, Braen mac Máel Morda, was killed on a raid into Osraige.[164] Braen had been Congalach's ally, and it is possible to speculate that his raid was intended to help prevent Osraige from becoming a threat to the Waterford Vikings. His death might have been a further blow to Congalach, forcing him to turn his attention to the southeast just as his enemy in the northwest was becoming stronger. Unfortunately, the *Annals of Inisfallen* offer no local Munster perspective on these events, leaving many questions about the repercussions of these rivalries unanswered.

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[159] Downham, *Viking Kings of Britain and Ireland*, 45-6.
[160] AI947.1; AU948.1.
[161] AU945.7.
[162] AU946.1.
[163] AU947.1.
[164] AU947.4.

As mentioned earlier, Blácaire seems to have continued to fight against Amlaíb after his removal from power in Dublin. He was killed in a battle against Congalach, which, based on the description in the *Annals of Ulster*, seems to have resulted in the death or capture of most of his force of 'foreigners'.[165] This year, 948, may have been a particularly successful one for the Dublin and Southern Uí Neill alliance, who were also in a position to retaliate against the monastic community at Slane for cooperating with Ruaidrí in the previous year.[166] Despite the death of his ally, Blácaire, Ruaidrí maintained his resistance against Congalach right up to his death in 950.[167] At his death, the *Annals of Ulster* refer to Ruaidrí as the 'heir designate of Ireland', and inform us that he died in battle against the 'foreigners' after a long series of successful campaigns in Mide and Brega.[168]

The entries referring to this set of events in the *Annals of the Four Masters* are similar, and present a picture of Ruadrí as gaining in power over Congalach in the lead-up to his death, raiding in Mide and Brega.[169] In the decisive battle, Congalach is not mentioned; like the *Annals of Ulster*, the *Annals of the Four Masters* simply state that Ruadrí died in battle against the 'foreigners' of Dublin, led by someone named Gothfrith, who escaped.[170]

The account of this event in the *Chronicum Scotorum* is quite different, referring to the battle as a general one between the Irish and the 'foreigners', in which Ruaidrí died, a Viking leader named Gothfrith fled, and Congalach was regarded as the victor. From this account, it is unclear who was allied to whom, and Downham has suggested that Ruaidrí and Congalach had formed an alliance against this new leader of Dublin, Gothfrith. She cites an entry in the *Annals of Connacht*, which states that Amlaíb Cuarán had departed for England following Blácaire's death, and hypothesizes that Gothfrith was his

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[165] AU948.1.
[166] AU948.4. Slane was burned by the Dublin Vikings again two years later: AU950.7.
[167] AU949.2, AU950.5.
[168] AU950.5.
[169] AFM948.14.
[170] AFM948.15.

replacement.[171] While this reconstruction of the events may be correct, it is difficult to prove conclusively, due to the problems of chronology surrounding Amlaíb's departure. Moreover, there is no definite evidence to suggest an alliance between Ruaidrí and Congalach, and based solely on the entry in *Chronicum Scotorum*, it would be equally possible to suggest one between Gothfrith and Ruaidrí. However, on balance, it seems likeliest that having weakened Congalach, Ruaidrí attempted to overwhelm the Dublin Vikings, and was killed in the process.

Following this battle, the surviving kings made an effort to reconfirm their positions within their territories and within the overall political and military hierarchy of the island. After Ruaidrí's death in 950, Congalach consolidated his authority by attacking the Dál Cais and west Munster.[172] The timing of the raid would seem to indicate that subduing that part of Munster was a critical step in Congalach's recovery of power. Similarly, despite his apparent defeat in this battle in 950, Gothfrith, Amlaíb's replacement as leader of the Dublin Vikings, was able to dramatically demonstrate and secure his control over the Dublin region in the following year. According to the *Annals of Ulster*, he led a series of campaigns against the wealthy churches of the region, including Kells and Ardbreccan, from which the raiders captured large numbers of people and huge quantities of moveable wealth.[173] Congalach's alliance with Dublin broke down by the mid 950s, and he became vulnerable to a new northern aggressor, Domnall ua Néill. Domnall challenged Congalach's authority both in his core territory, and in Connacht.[174] Struggling, Congalach attacked and gained the submission of the Leinstermen in 956, but was then killed by the Leinstermen and the Dubliners, allowing Domnall to take over the kingship of Tara.[175]

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[171] Downham, *Viking Kings of Britain and Ireland*, 47.
[172] AU950.5; CS950; AI950.1; AFM949.8.
[173] AU951.3.
[174] AU955.3; CS955; AFM952.17; AFM953.14.
[175] AU956.3; AI956.1; CS956; AFM954.7; AFM954.8. AI956.3 says that he also blinded two of Donnchad Donn's brothers or cousins, probably in an effort to eliminate possible rivals.

Domnall ua Néill's reign was by no means peaceful, however, and throughout the 960s, he faced continuous conflict with other Irish kings and their various Norse allies, and campaigned in Ulaid, Connacht, Laigin and Mide.[176] He was also enmeshed in dynastic conflict with the Southern Uí Néill and their Dublin allies in the 960s and 970s.[177] He held onto the kingship until his death in 980, but as Ó Corráin has argued, the internal conflict between the Northern and Southern Uí Néill lineages in the mid- to late tenth century generally weakened and distracted them. While they struggled for dominance over one another, regional kings from Leinster and Connacht gained power, and as discussed earlier, the Dál Cais were free to establish their authority in Munster.[178]

After Mathgamain was killed by Máel Muad in 976, his brother Brian Bóruma took over the kingship. During the first few years of his reign, he focused on eliminating the group of individuals responsible for Mathgamain's death. In 977, he attacked and killed Ímair, the leader of the Limerick Vikings, and his sons in Inis Cathaig, and led a raid on the Uí Fidgente and their Norse allies.[179] The following year, he successfully campaigned against Máel Muad, killing him and taking his hostages.[180] While much of this may have been motivated by revenge, Brian was also solidifying his control over western Munster and clearing away possible rivals. The annals are silent as to his actions in the next few years, during which Ó Corráin argues he was probably focusing on securing his alliances in Munster.[181]

During this apparent quiet period in the early years of Brian's reign, a new king of Tara came to power following the death of Domnall ua Néill in 980.[182] This new king, Máel Sechnaill mac Domnaill, was the grandson of Donnchad Donn and a member of the

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[176] AU960.1; AU963.1; AU965.5; AU966.4; AU967.6; AU968.3; AU971.6.
[177] AU964.5; AU967.3; AU970.4; AU970.6; AU971.2. See also Ó Corráin, *Ireland Before the Normans*, 119-20.
[178] Ó Corráin, *Ireland Before the Normans*, 120.
[179] AI977.2; CS977; AFM975.7; AI977.3.
[180] AU978.2; AI978.2; CS978; AFM976.4.
[181] Ó Corráin, *Ireland Before the Normans*, 120-1.
[182] AU980.2; AI980.3; CS980.

Clann Cholmáin dynasty of the Southern Uí Néill. Upon taking the kingship of Tara, he engaged in a battle with the Dubliners, led by the sons of Amláib, in which he succeeded in taking tribute from Dublin and hostages from the Laigin.[183] An emotional entry in *Chronicum Scotorum* also says that he freed all of the Irish slaves held by the Dubliners and told them to 'depart thence to his own land in peace and rejoicing', and action that the annalist regarded as the end of the 'Babylonian captivity' of the Irish people.[184] The major result of this battle was that Máel Sechnaill secured his control over Dublin and the Laigin, and although the Laigin frequently rebelled, this set of alliances made Máel Sechnaill a dangerous opponent for Brian.

Having established his primacy in western Munster, Brian reappears in the annals in 982, when he ventured beyond his base of power to attack the Osraige.[185] In the same year, the men of Waterford attacked Kildare, although the two campaigns may or may not have been related.[186] Máel Sechnaill countered Brian's raid into Osraige by invading Dál Cais and destroying their sacred tree, and in the following year he and his Dublin allies attacked the Laigin and the men of Waterford.[187] According to the *Annals of Inisfallen*, Brian's depredations in Osraige and Laigin continued in 983, and he also led a campaign into Connacht.[188] He remained on the offensive in 984, when he led the men of Munster and Waterford against the Laigin and Dubliners, and then raided the Osraige and western Mide.[189] Ó Corráin argues that the entry in the *Annals of Inisfallen* regarding Brian's raid on the Osraige indicates that they submitted to his authority in that year.[190]

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[183] AI980.4; CS980.
[184] CS980. This is repeated, with further editorial comments, by the Four Masters: AFM979.6.
[185] AI982.2; AFM981.10.
[186] AU982.4; CS982; AFM981.9.
[187] AI982.4; CS982; AFM981.8; AU983.2; CS983; AFM982.5.
[188] AI983.2; AI983.4.
[189] AI984.2; AFM983.9.
[190] AI984.2; Ó Corráin, *Ireland Before the Normans*, 121-2.

Máel Sechnaill responded to this encroachment in the following year, 985, by campaigning into Connacht.[191] Brian was unwilling, or perhaps unable to answer this challenge, because the *Annals of Inisfallen* indicate that he was struggling to quell an uprising among the Déisi in this year.[192] Evidently, Brian continued to have difficulties in Munster in 987, and the *Annals of Inisfallen* report that he took hostages from Lismore, Cork and Emly in an effort to convince them not to harbour 'robbers and lawless people'.[193] In the previous year, he may have attempted to achieve the same goal by deposing the abbot of Emly and replacing him with his own candidate, Cétfaid.[194] He was apparently sufficiently confident of his control over Munster by the following year to launch an ambitious new campaign. The *Annals of Inisfallen* reports that he had a large fleet on Lough Ree, with which he attacked Mide and Connacht.[195]

Throughout the late 980s and early 990s, Máel Sechnaill and Brian continued to campaign in Connacht and Leinster, as well as attacking each other's home provinces. By 996, however, the balance had shifted in Brian's favour, and Ó Corráin argues that by this point, Brian dominated not only Munster, but the southern half of Ireland.[196] The annals under this year report that Brian was constructing fortifications in Munster, and that he had taken hostages from the Laigin.[197] Perhaps in recognition of Brian's strength, and out of a desire to re-establish peace, Máel Sechnaill met Brian at a council in Clonfert in 997, and the two kings agreed to divide the island between them.[198] Máel Sechnaill, as king of Tara, would have control over the northern half, while Brian, as king of Cashel, would hold the southern half.

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[191] AU985.2; CS985.
[192] AI985.2.
[193] AI987.2.
[194] AI986.3. Ó Corráin suggests the possibility that Cétfaid was linked to one of the Dál Cais lineages: D. Ó Corráin, 'Dál Cais: church and dynasty', *Ériu* 24 (1973), 53 n 4. Brian's brother, Marcán, became the next abbot of Emly in 990: AI990.2.
[195] AI988.2.
[196] Ó Corráin, *Ireland Before the Normans*, 123.
[197] AI995.6; AI996.2;
[198] AI997.2

Dublin and the Laigin do not appear to have appreciated this scheme, and the two kings' first sign of cooperation was a joint hosting to take hostages from Dublin and then from Connacht 998.[199] Nevertheless, Dublin and their Leinster allies rebelled again in 999, and Brian defeated them in the Battle of Glenn Mama.[200] In the following year, Brian again marched on Dublin, forced out the king, Sitric, and took hostages from the town.[201] Emboldened, and perhaps enriched, by this victory and his possession of Dublin in its position of strength in the east, Brian broke his peace with Máel Sechnaill that same year. He led the men of Munster, Osraige, Connacht, Leinster and Dublin to Tara, but then withdrew without a fight.[202] The annals report that in 1001, Brian continued to try to attack Máel Sechnaill, who is portrayed as taking defensive measures. He built a 'causeway' or 'great obstruction' across the Shannon at Athlone, apparently in an effort to prevent Brian from using the waterway to attack him.[203] Brian successfully attacked Athlone in 1002, and took hostages from Máel Sechnaill and his Connacht allies.[204]

At this point, as Ó Corráin points out, only the Northern Uí Néill, Ulaid and the Airgialla had avoided submitting to Brian's authority.[205] He spent the years between 1004 and 1007 campaigning in the north, in an effort to make his claims to pre-eminence a reality throughout Ireland. In 1004, he took advantage of conflict between Cenél Eógain and the Ulaid and invaded the north, but ultimately retreated.[206] The next year, he led an expedition to Armagh, where he gained their support with a large donation of gold, and took hostages from the northern kings.[207] Brian carried out a royal circuit of Ireland,

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[199] AU998.1; AI998.2; CS998.
[200] AU999.8; AI999.4; CS999. CS says that Máel Sechnaill fought alongside Brian.
[201] AU1000.4; AI1000.2; CS1000.
[202] AU1000.7; CS1000.
[203] AU1001.5; AU1001.6; AI1001.5; CS1001.
[204] AU1002.1; AI1002.2; CS1002.
[205] Ó Corráin, *Ireland Before the Normans*, 124.
[206] AU1004.7.
[207] AU1005.7; AI1005.3; AI1005.6; CS1005.

including the north, in 1006, and he took hostages from the Cenél Eogain and the Ulaid again in the following year.[208]

Between 1008 and 1012, Brian's authority throughout Ireland faced few serious challenges. The only rebellion was that of Máel Ruanaid ua Maíl Doraid, the king of Cenél Conaill. In 1010, Brian had reconfirmed his supremacy over the kings of Leth Cuinn, but in the following year, the annals report that he led a large force comprised of the men of Munster, Cenél Eogain, Laigin, and the southern Uí Néill to attack Cenél Conaill.[209] Although this attack was apparently a success, Cenél Conaill was not subdued, and Brian was forced to lead another, smaller raid later in the year. In the course of this, Brian captured Máel Ruanaid and brought him back to his stronghold at Kincora, where the king of Cenél Conaill supposedly decided to pledge his loyalty to Brian.[210]

By this point in his career, Brian had a legitimate claim to be the high-king of Ireland. Coming from the Dál Cais dynasty, rather than from the traditional Eóganacht or Uí Néill lineages, he was something of a novelty as high-king, but his kingship itself was not radically innovative.[211] According to Ó Corráin, 'it is to be doubted if his [Brian's] authority was much greater than the greatest of the Uí Néill kings in the three previous centuries... He did not create a national monarchy or the institutions of such a monarchy, but he did contribute greatly to advancing the idea of a kingship of the whole island'.[212] Brian's successes are mainly attributable to his ability to capitalize on divisions among his rivals, his willingness to interfere in ecclesiastical politics, and his recognition of the strategic and economic value of control over the coastal towns.[213]

However, starting in 1012, the power that he had laboriously acquired during the first decades of his reign started to deteriorate. In this year, the king of Cenél Eogain,

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[208] AU1006.4; AI1006.2; CS1006; AU1007.7; AI1007.3.
[209] AU1010.4; AI1010.4; AU1011.2; AI1011.2.
[210] AU1011.7; AI1011.5; CS1011.
[211] Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 167.
[212] Ó Corráin, *Ireland Before the Normans*, 125.
[213] Ó Corráin, *Ireland Before the Normans*, 127-8; Ó Corráin, 'Dál Cais- church and dynasty'.

Flaithbertach ua Néill, attacked Cenél Conaill and Ulaid, in what Ó Corráin argues was a prelude to a full-scale challenge of Brian's supremacy in the north.[214] At Brian's request, Máel Sechnaill launched a counter-raid against Cenél Conaill in 1013, but they were both soon distracted by fierce conflict with the Laigin and their allies, the men of Dublin.[215] The ensuing chaos involved skirmishes all over eastern and southern Ireland, culminating in one of the most famous battles in Irish history, at Clontarf in the spring of 1014. [216] Brian called upon the forces of Munster and Connacht, but immediately before the battle, Máel Sechnaill and the men of Mide decided not to take part. The Osraige, in their strategic position between Leinster and Munster, are not reported to have fought on either side. Brian's opponents included the Laigin, the Dubliners, as well as allies from Orkney, Man and the Isles.

The battle is reported not only in the annals and in the Uí Briain saga, *Cogadh Gáedhel re Gaillibh*, but also appears in mythic form in the high medieval Icelandic sagas. There were heavy casualties on both sides, and although Brian was victorious, he, his son, and many other dynasts were killed during the battle. Many scholars have pointed out that although the conflict came to be portrayed as the Irish against the Vikings, in reality it was no such thing.[217] Ó Corráin argues that, 'Clontarf was part of the internal struggle for sovereignty and was essentially the revolt of the Leinstermen against the dominance of Brian, a revolt in which their Norse allies played an important but secondary role'.[218] In his view, the battle's most immediate impact was that it neutralized the dominance of the Dál Cais for a generation. However, Byrne argues that the Uí Néill lineages failed to capitalize on this opportunity, and continued to allow their power to be eclipsed by aggressive newcomers to the high-kingship. He suggests that after the battle of Clontarf,

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[214] AU1012.2; Ó Corráin, *Ireland Before the Normans*, 128.
[215] AU1013.2; AU1013.3; AU1013.5; AU1013.7; AU1013.12; AI1013.2; CS1013.
[216] One of the best overviews is provided by Ó Corráin, *Ireland Before the Normans*, 128-30.
[217] For a good summary of the Clontarf tradition, D. Ó Cróinín, *Early Medieval Ireland 400-1200*, 1995, 266-8.
[218] Ó Corráin, *Ireland Before the Normans*, 130.

the major stepping stone to the high-kingship of Ireland was control over Dublin and the other coastal towns, something that the northern kings in particularly rarely achieved.[219] The causes and consequences of this new feature of Irish kingship will be explored in greater detail in the next chapter.

4.4 The Déisi in Munster, 795-1014

Only the outlines of local politics in the Déisi kingdom in the ninth and tenth centuries can be reconstructed from the evidence in the annals, but the available information becomes much easier to interpret in light of the foregoing discussion of the wider political machinations in Ireland during this period. The fortunes of the Déisi kingdom were tied to those of the kings of Cashel, to whom they generally owed their loyalty, although certain Déisi kings sought a degree of autonomy during their reigns. They were best able to achieve this at times when power in Munster was fragmented, but paradoxically, these were also the periods in which the Déisi were most vulnerable to Viking attacks. The existence and developing importance of the Viking forces based in Waterford is critical to understanding Déisi politics during this period. Waterford was in the Déisi kingdom, but not of it, and although the Déisi kings were sometimes allies of the leaders of the Waterford Vikings, they never controlled Waterford.

The first mentions of Viking raids in Déisi territory are recorded in the *Annals of Inisfallen* and the *Annals of Ulster* during the year 833.[220] The *Annals of Inisfallen* states that both Lismore and Kilmolash were subjected to raids, while the *Annals of Ulster* says that Lismore was burned as part of a wider devastation of south Munster. As discussed above, these raids were part of a general intensification of Viking activity throughout Ireland starting in the 830s, which involved raids far into the interior via major rivers as well as attacks on coastal areas.

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[219] Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 168.
[220] AI833.1; AU833.10

Aside from these bald reports of violence, the Déisi do not appear in the annals for this period until the 850s, when Máel Sechnaill, king of Tara, was embroiled in conflict with the newly arrived Viking leaders Amláib and Ímair. Máel Sechnaill's chief concern was to secure the loyalty or tribute of the other major Irish kings, in order to prevent the possibility of their joining the Norse newcomers. Following the death of Feidlimid mac Crimthann in 847, the kings of Cashel were short-lived and weak. During this period, one of the most powerful kings in Munster was Cerball mac Dúnlainge, the king of Osraige. His rise to power can be explained both by the weakness of the Eóganacht during the 850s, and by his marriage alliance with Máel Sechnaill. Cerball was not an easy or reliable ally for Máel Sechnaill, but the king of Tara had little choice but to keep trying to maintain their relationship. Without a secure ally in the southeast, Máel Sechnaill would have been extremely vulnerable during this period.

After death of Áilgenán, the king of Cashel, in 853, Máel Sechnaill sent Cerball mac Dúnlainge, king of Osraige to *Inneóin na nDéise*, between Cashel and Lismore, in order to take hostages from the people of Munster.[221] The accounts of this meeting in the *Fragmentary Annals* and in *Chronicum Scotorum* are brief, but a few suggestions can be made about the significance of the timing and location of the hostage taking. It seems possible that the meeting took place at this location because Máel Sechnaill required hostages from the Déisi as well as from Cashel. Moreover, Máel Sechnaill's ally Cerball had a personal interest in the submission of the Déisi, with whom the Osraige shared a border. Like the Osraige, the Déisi were probably looking for chances to expand their influence in Munster during this period of weak oversight by the kings of Cashel. Because he was allied to Cerball, Máel Sechnaill's timing was likely designed to coincide with, influence or disrupt the selection or inauguration of the new king of Cashel, Áilgenán's

[221] CS854; FA246.

brother, Máel Guala. Anything Máel Sechnaill could do to prevent the Eóganacht from regaining their former authority within Munster was in Cerball's best interests.

Both sets of annals state that the Munstermen did surrender hostages to Máel Sechnaill in 854, but that only four years later, they rebelled against him.[222] In the their accounts of the rebellion, the annals report the death of Máelchrón mac Muiredaig, said to be one of two kings of the Déisi. His death occurred in the course of a hosting by Máel Sechnaill in which he raided all the way to the River Blackwater, and forcibly took hostages from Munster once again. Just as in 854, the real conflict seems to have been between Máel Sechnaill and the king of Cashel, Máel Guala, and the Déisi simply became caught in the middle.

Although the other annals make no mention of the Osraige and Cerball in their accounts of this set of events, the *Fragmentary Annals* claims that Osraige was as much a target of Máel Sechnaill's campaign as the Eóganacht, although for different reasons. The king of Cashel's rebellion was limited to a refusal to provide hostages, while Cerball had been extracting excessive tribute from the Laigin, who complained to Máel Sechnaill.[223] Based on the *Fragmentary Annals*, it would seem that between 854 and 858, Cerball and the Osraige turned away from Máel Sechnaill and formed an alliance with Munster, and more importantly, with Amlaíb and Ímair. The reasons for this change of allegiance on Cerball's part are unclear, but the implications of the alliance for Máel Sechnaill are obvious.

According to the long account of these events in the *Fragmentary Annals*, [224] Cerball and his allies were mustered at Gabrán, in Osraige, but Máel Sechnaill and his forces came south by an unexpected route and established themselves at *Carn Lugdach*, somewhere south of the Blackwater in Déisi territory. Máel Guala and his followers

[222] CS858; FA260; AU858.4.
[223] FA260.
[224] FA260.

attacked Máel Sechnaill's forces, and were eventually defeated, while Cerball and the Osraige decided to surrender and give up hostages. The *Fragmentary Annals* states that having defeated and killed Máel Guala and the Déisi king Máelchrón, Máel Sechnaill remained encamped at Emly and raided throughout Munster, taking hostages throughout the south.

According to the *Fragmentary Annals*, Cerball and his Norse allies continued to oppose Máel Sechnaill through the following year, despite having rendered hostages. In 859, Cerball met Máel Sechnaill at *Ráth Áeda*, where he and his Norse ally submitted to the king of Tara in front of several high-ranking ecclesiastical witnesses.[225] Clearly, Cerball was testing the limits of his authority. A slightly later entry in the *Fragmentary Annals* suggests that Máel Sechnaill had to keep Cerball as an ally, in order to hold out against the threat represented by the alliance between Áed Findliath of the Northern Uí Néill and his nephew, Flann mac Conaing, king of the Cianachta.[226]

During the conflict between Máel Sechnaill and Cerball mac Dúnlainge to the east of Déisi territory, another threat was developing to the west. Following the entry about the council at *Ráth Áeda*, the *Fragmentary Annals* record an altercation with a different band of Vikings, led by Hona and Tomrir Torra.[227] They reportedly went first to Limerick, and then started towards Waterford, at which point the Eóganachta and the Araid Cliach moved to oppose them. The Vikings retreated into a small enclosure of some kind, but eventually the Munster men drove them back out into the open and killed them. The arrival of a new band of Norsemen at Limerick and their apparent intention to occupy Waterford made Máel Sechnaill even more reliant on Cerball. Without Cerball as a strong ally in the southeast, Máel Sechnaill would soon have been surrounded.

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[225] FA859.
[226] FA862.
[227] FA278.

The unsteady alliances in the southeast seem to have broken down completely by about 864. The *Fragmentary Annals* record another raid by Cerball on the Laigin, who in turn called upon their Norse allies and attacked the Osraige. According to the annalist, the Osraige fled westwards into Eóganacht territory, under the assumption that their allies would protect them, but that the Eóganachta turned on them and killed as many of the Osraige as they could catch. After Cerball regrouped, the *Fragmentary Annals* state that he gathered his own Norse allies and attacked Mag Feimin and Fir Maige, both south of Cashel.[228] Another entry in the *Fragmentary Annals* reports that Cerball also attacked the Déisi, destroying Uí Óengusa.[229] These events signal the fragmentation of the short-lived alliances that united the Eóganachta, the Déisi, the Osraige and their Norse allies between the late 850s and the mid 860s.

Shortly after the breakdown of this alliance, the *Fragmentary Annals* reports another new Viking threat on the borders of Déisi territory. This time, a group of Vikings based in Cork came into conflict with the Déisi when both were raiding in Fir Maige, in modern day northeast Co. Cork. When the Déisi saw the Norsemen 'plundering and devastating the land', they formed an alliance with the Fir Maige to drive out the Vikings, who were led by a man named Gním Cinnsiolaigh.[230] This Irish nickname is used only in the *Fragmentary Annals*, whereas the *Annals of the Four Masters* refer to him by the name Gnímhbeolu.[231] That the leader of the Vikings of Cork should have an Irish name or nickname by the late 860s is worthy of note, although it is not possible to discern whether the name indicates mixed parentage or a degree of cultural integration.[232]

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[228] FA864.1.
[229] FA864.2.
[230] FA342.
[231] AFM865.16.
[232] A. Walsh, *Scandinavian Relations with Ireland During the Viking Period*, Dublin: Talbot Press, Ltd., 1922, 27. Walsh argues that the nickname *Cinnsiolaigh* or *Cenn Selach* was an Irish translation of a possible Old Norse nickname, *Selshofuth*.

While the mention of this set of events in the *Annals of the Four Masters* is very brief, the account in the *Fragmentary Annals* offers some insight into the background and significance of the altercation. For clarity, part of the account is quoted here:

> *Rá chúaidh imorro a t-táoisioch, .i. Gnim Cinnsiolaig a ainm, go rainig* ***caistial daingean*** *baoí a g-comfhocraibh dhóibh, & ro fuabhair a ghabhail, & as eadh bá diomháin dó, úair ní rá fhéd a fhulang ar iomad faga & cloch 'gá n-díubragadh dhó. Is eadh do rigni-siomh, Ceannfaoladh do ghairm chuige, uair bá dóigh leis bá cara é, & aisgeadha iomdha do gealladh dhó ara anacal; & as eadh bá diomháoin do-somh, úair ro tairrngead-somh amach tria impidhe na soichaidhe ro foghnaidsiot dhó reimhe, & ro marbadh go truagh é, & ro marbhaid a mhuinntear uile. Ba gairit imorro iar t-tain go t-tangas dochum an* ***chaistéol*** *in ro caith-siomh a bheathaidh go sártholach, & ro díosgáoilead uile e. Sic enim placuit Deo.*
>
> However, their leader, whose name was Gním Cinnsiolaigh, fled until he reached a **strong castle** that was near them, and he attempted to take it, but in vain, since he could not stand the number of javelins and stones that were being cast at him. What he did was to summon Cenn Fáelad to him, because he thought that he was an ally, and he promised him many presents in exchange for protecting him; but this availed him nothing, for he was dragged out, at the entreaty of the multitude who had served him before, and he was miserably killed, and all his followers were slain. Shortly after that, moreover, people came to the **castle** in which he had passed his life lustfully, and it was totally demolished. Thus it pleased God.[233]

Although this account must be regarded with some caution, it raises a number of suggestions. First of all, it seems that Gním was an active participant in local politics, and that he may have had control not only over his band of Vikings, but over some portion of the local population near Cork. This is perhaps implied by the vindictive attitude of those who ultimately cornered and killed him. He and his men may have been relatively firmly entrenched in Cork, with at least one or two 'strong castles' in the area. It is difficult to tell from this account whether the two mentions of castles refer to the same structure, or to two separate ones. Moreover, it would be useful to know who was holding the castle against Gním if indeed it was his own fortification. Again, this may be a hint that the local population was not altogether pleased with the presence of this man and his forces. The whole concept of a castle in this context raises even more questions. The word used in the

[233] FA342. Emphasis added.

annal entry is the Irish loanword, *caistél*, from the Latin *castellum*, which implies its military function, but does not necessarily indicate any specific physical form. The word *caistél* appears more regularly in the Irish annals starting in the 1120s, to describe the building projects of the O'Connor kings of Connacht, and its use in the *Fragmentary Annals*, most likely an eleventh century compilation, is difficult to interpret in any definitive way.[234]

Although it would seem that vigilance on the part of the Déisi and other kingdoms in Munster helped to contain or repel Viking raids, on some occasions they were not able to prevent attacks. The annals offer evidence for at least two assaults on Lismore in the second half of the ninth century, one in the 860s and one in the 880s. The account of the first of these raids, noted in the *Annals of Inisfallen* under the year 867, is brief and somewhat ambiguous.[235] The attacker, Amlaíb, is said to have 'committed treachery' against the community of Lismore, presumably by leading a raid, although one could speculate that he did so after agreeing to a truce, worsening his crime. The annalist concludes by stating that Martan, probably Martan ua Raichlech, then abbot of Lismore, was 'liberated' from Amlaíb. Overall, the entry can be interpreted in a number of ways, but it seems likely that Martan was captured in a raid in 867 but escaped or was freed shortly thereafter. As is so often the case with events described in the annals, history is left with more questions than answers about the background and ramifications of this episode.

The second raid, reported again in the *Annals of Inisfallen* under the year 883, is more straightforward.[236] In this year, Lismore is said to have been burned by the son of Ímair. If this Ímair is identified as the former ruler of Dublin who died in the 870s, then it would seem that this attack was a relatively long-distance one. Alternatively, it is possible that this son of Ímair, even if his primary association was with the Dublin Vikings,

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[234] T.E. McNeill, *Castles in Ireland: feudal power in a Gaelic world*, London: Routledge, 1997, 9.
[235] AI867.1.
[236] AI883.1.

coordinated the attack with one of the more local Viking groups, based at Cork, Waterford, or elsewhere in the south or southeast. Because it is not possible to distinguish between these two hypotheses on the basis of the available evidence, it is impossible to determine the motivation or outcome of this attack on Lismore.

At the close of the ninth century, the Déisi appear in the annals in connection with acts of violence against named individuals. The first, recorded in the *Annals of Inisfallen*, *Chronicum Scotorum* and the *Annals of Ulster*, is the killing of Flann mac Lónán, a famous poet associated with the kings of Connacht. The entry in *Chronicum Scotorum* attributes Flann's murder to the Uí Cuirrbuidh, glossed as the Uí Fothaid, and says that he was killed at *Loch dá Caoch*, Waterford, in Déisi territory.[237] The *Annals of Inisfallen* agrees that the culprits were the Uí Fothaid,[238] while the *Annals of Ulster* is less specific, stating that Flann was killed by the Déisi.[239] Unfortunately, little else can be said about the reasons for this murder, or its consequences, intended or unintended, so its political significance remains obscure.

Second, the *Annals of Inisfallen* in 897 reports the accession of Cormac mac Mothla to the kingship of the Déisi, and in the same entry, states that he killed a person named Máel Bennachta.[240] It is possible to hypothesize that Máel Bennachta was a figure who held the Déisi kingship in the period between the death of Niall mac Loegaire and Cormac's accession, and that his murder or execution played a key role in Cormac's rise to power. The identification of Máel Bennachta, unfortunately, remains uncertain, and it is not possible to place him within the Déisi genealogies.[241]

This apparently violent beginning seems to have set the tone for Cormac mac Mothla's reign, and the annals report that he spent much of his career raiding and fighting

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[237] CS896.
[238] AI896.3.
[239] AU896.10.
[240] AI897.2.
[241] David Thornton, 'The Déisi Muman in Munster and Dyfed', in D. Thornton, *Kings, Chronologies and Genealogies*, 2003, 171.

outside his kingdom. Alongside the king of Cashel, Cormac mac Cuilennáin, Cormac mac Mothla suffered defeat in the famous *Cath Belach Mugna*, or battle of Ballaghmoon, Co. Carlow, in 908.[242] The battle was the last episode in Cormac mac Cuilennáin's efforts to demonstrate the superiority of Munster over the encroaching Leinstermen and Uí Néill.[243] Cormac mac Cuilennáin led the Munster forces, in conjunction with one of his strongest allies and successor to the kingship of Cashel, Flaithbertach mac Inmainén, the abbot of Scattery Island in the Shannon estuary. Flaithbertach, whose power was likely directly related to the strategic location of his island monastery, had participated in the Clonmacnoise campaign, and seems to have been as ambitious to destroy the might of the king of Tara as was Cormac mac Cuilennáin himself. As mentioned above, the king of the Déisi, Cormac mac Mothla, was also a named participant. Cormac mac Cuilennáin's defeat at Ballaghmoon at the hands of Flann Sinna marked the beginning of the end for Eóganacht prestige, both in the island as a whole and within Munster. In the chaos following this battle, the weakened south coast became the focus of renewed Viking activity, which had a strong influence on the second half of Cormac mac Mothla's career.[244]

Having survived the *Cath Belach Mugna*, Cormac mac Mothla seems to have spent some time consolidating his power in his own kingdom, and in the southeast region. One of Cormac's brothers, Buadach, died around 910, potentially leaving Cormac open to a succession crisis.[245] Starting around 912, Cormac mac Mothla launched attacks on the traditional enemies of the Déisi, the Osraige. Presumably in a renewal of earlier dynastic violence, a new contender named Máel Ruanaid mac Néill, formed an alliance with the Osraige. Together, they managed to kill another of Cormac's brothers, a man named

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[242] FA908; AI908.2.
[243] AI908.2; AU908.3; FA908.
[244] Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 266.
[245] FA910.

Cuilennáin, in a raid on his stronghold.[246] While this episode appears only in the eleventh century *Fragmentary Annals*, it does seem to be of a piece with the early events of Cormac's reign, and it is apparent that an alliance between a political rival and the Osraige would be devastating to any Déisi king. Although there is no way to be certain, it is possible to hypothesize that the loss of these two brothers made the later years of Cormac's reign more difficult than they would otherwise have been.

As mentioned earlier, the second half of Cormac mac Mothla's reign was evidently dominated by the large influx of new 'foreigners' who arrived at Waterford around 914.[247] Perhaps due in part to the weakened state of the Eóganacht and Munster in general, Cormac and the Déisi were evidently unable to contain the newcomers, who began to raid into east Munster and Laigin. As the raids became more severe, others were forced to react, including the king of Tara, and another group of Norsemen, led by two of Ímair's grandsons.[248] It seems that the descendents of Ímair succeeded in taking over the leadership of the Norsemen based at Waterford, and the *Annals of Ulster* report that Ragnall, grandson of Ímair, led them in a season of raiding across the Irish Sea.[249] This campaign can be viewed as an effort on the part of Ragnall to consolidate his position of authority, both by proving his ability to lead, and by gaining wealth with which to reward his men.

Unfortunately, the annals do not offer any insight into Cormac's role as king of the Déisi during this period of conflict and during the consolidation of the Scandinavian presence at Waterford. Given the level of raiding into Déisi territory, we can hypothesize that Cormac was an enemy rather than an ally of the Waterford Vikings, although even that is not wholly provable. Even the timing and the cause of Cormac's death are difficult to determine with any certainty. When the *Annals of the Four Masters* and *Chronicum*

[246] FA912. Because of the nature of this source, the chronology should be regarded as loose, but these events seem to have taken place in the beginning of the 910s.
[247] FA914; CS914; AU914.5.
[248] CS915; AU915.7; AU916.3; AU916.6; CS917; AI917.1; AU917.2.
[249] AU918.4.

Scotorum mention Cormac mac Mothla's death in about 919, both use his correct name, describe him as king of the Déisi, and say merely that he died.[250] The *Annals of the Four Masters*, *Annals of Ulster* and *Annals of Inisfallen* have entries in the following year, around 920, which record the death, martyrdom or murder of one Cormac mac Cuilennáin, bishop of Lismore, abbot of Kilmolash and king of the Déisi.[251] While Hughes, Byrne and others have been content to ascribe this to an error on the part of the annalist, who mixed up this king of the Déisi with the more famous king of Cashel who died in 908, Thornton argues that the situation may be more complex.[252] Thornton hypothesizes that Cormac mac Mothla's brother, Cuilennáin, whose death in 912 is discussed in the *Fragmentary Annals*, may have had a son, Cormac, who became king after his uncle's death in 919.[253] This Cormac mac Cuilennáin may have already been established within the church, explaining why he is referred to in the mentions of his death as bishop of Lismore and abbot of Kilmolash. His death, according to the *Annals of Inisfallen*, was at the hands of a rival branch of the Déisi line, the Uí Fothaid Aiched, and could indicate a multi-generational feud or dynastic conflict.[254] It is potentially noteworthy that these Uí Fothaid are the same branch of the Déisi who were blamed for the killing of the poet Flann mac Lonáin near Waterford in 896, just before Cormac mac Mothla took power. Perhaps the Uí Fothaid were behind most of the Déisi dynastic conflict in this period; unfortunately, the surviving genealogical material is so narrow after the mid-eighth century that it prevents further inquiry into this rival lineage.[255]

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[250] CS918; AFM917.6.
[251] AU920.7, 'Cormac mac Mothla, king of the Déisi, was killed'; AFM918.3, 'Cormac mac Cuilennáin, Bishop of Lismore and lord of the Déisi of Mumu, died'; AI920.1, 'The martyrdom of Cormac son of Cuilennán, bishop and vice-abbot of Les Mór, abbot of Cell Mo-Laise, king of the Déisi, and chief counsellor of Mumu, at the hands of the Uí Fhothaid Aiched'.
[252] Hughes, *The Church in Early Irish Society*, 221-2; Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 214-5; Thornton, 'The Déisi Muman', 172-3.
[253] Thornton, 'The Déisi Muman', 172-3.
[254] AI920.1.
[255] Thornton, 'The Déisi Muman'.

While on one level, the uncertainty surrounding Cormac mac Mothla's death is academic, it does have a bearing on the interpretation of his career. Was he another 'ecclesiastical king' with the strong backing of Lismore and Kilmolash? Was he both the perpetrator and victim of dynastic violence? Or was he simply a violent, secular king who died naturally, and who was followed in his office by a nephew whose ecclesiastical backing was not sufficient protection against internecine strife? For simplicity, it is tempting to follow Byrne and Hughes, and to view this as an instance of genuine scribal error compounded by repetition, which was picked up by later chroniclers, who explained it away by means of fabrication or elaboration. One hint that this may be the case is the fact that only the late sources, the *Four Masters* and the *Fragmentary Annals*, supply the necessary information to make Thornton's hypothesis compelling. Examination of the earliest and, for this period, most reliable of our annalistic sources makes this appear to be nothing more than a slip of the pen.

Unfortunately, on the basis of present evidence it is impossible to solve this puzzle, making the scanty evidence about the career of Cormac mac Mothla even patchier. However, there are a number of statements that can be made about his legacy, whether or not it is his murder or his nephew's that appears in the annals at 920. First of all, Cormac's lineage seems to have successfully weathered the storm of dynastic conflict, and both of the later ruling Déisi lineages, the Uí Fhaeláin and Uí Bricc, were his direct descendents.[256] Second, it would seem likely that much of the upheaval among the Déisi during Cormac's career was related to the pressure of being on the front lines of the effort to repel or contain the new Viking threat at Waterford. The raiding inland seems to have been intense, and there were many powerful factions with an interest in the conflict, including the kings of Cashel, Tara, and various Scandinavian leaders. All of this may have led to strong differences of opinion and rivalry among the powerful members of the Déisi political and

[256] Thornton, 'The Déisi Muman', 132.

military elite, and it is perhaps a testament to Cormac's skills as a leader that his dynasty outlasted this period of strife.

As mentioned earlier, the second half of Cormac mac Mothla's reign coincided with the start of a period of intensified Viking activity in the southeast. This is worth discussing in a certain level of detail, because the events of the early tenth century are traditionally associated with establishment of 'true towns' at Waterford, Limerick and Dublin. While scholars disagree about the nature of Viking settlement in Ireland before the beginning of the tenth century, most are content to view the renewed Viking presence along the Irish coasts starting around 914 as evidence for an intention to establish permanent towns.

The first notices of this renewed activity do not seem to indicate ambitions of territorial conquest or of permanent settlement, but record a raid ostensibly similar to those of the previous century. Unnamed 'heathens', 'foreigners', or 'Norwegians' are said to have landed at Port Láirge or Loch dá Caech, Waterford harbour, in 914.[257] Downham has argued that this fleet may be the same as one mentioned in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* under the same year, which described the fleet's journey from Brittany to Ireland led by a jarl Óttar.[258] More Vikings seem to have arrived in the following year, and both the Déisi and the Eóganacht were evidently unable to contain the threat presented by these raiders, who spent the next two years plundering Osraige and parts of Laigin and Munster.[259] Several Irish kings, including Niall mac Áedo, attempted to defeat the Waterford Vikings, and it seems that their efforts met with limited success.[260]

The arrival, however, of the grandsons of Ímair in the following year seems to have changed the political and military balance of power. Two fleets, led by two of Ímair's

[257] FA914; CS914; AU914.5.
[258] Downham, *Viking Kings of Britain and Ireland*, 31.
[259] CS915; AU915.7; AU916.3; AU916.6.
[260] CS917; AI917.1.

grandsons, Sitric and Ragnall, appeared in Ireland in 917.[261] According to the notice in the *Annals of Ulster*, Sitric landed in Laigin, while Ragnall continued south to Waterford, where he attacked the Scandinavians who held control of the harbour.[262] None of the other annals record the arrival of the grandsons of Ímair, making it difficult to assess the events that may have precipitated their involvement in Munster. Downham hypothesizes that they may have been enemies of the jarl Óttar who appears to have led the first fleet of Vikings to Waterford in 914.[263] On the other hand, the same account in the *Annals of Ulster* suggests that Ragnall's campaign against the Vikings of *Loch dá Caech* may have been fought in association with the Eóganacht and the Ciarraige, raising the possibility that Ímair's grandsons had been invited to Ireland to help oust the aggressive, newer groups of Vikings who were proving difficult for the native Irish kings to subdue. It is possible to speculate further that Ímair's grandsons had been given permission to settle in the lands they protected, in a manner similar to the granting of benefices recorded in Frankish annals.[264] While the annals give no indication that any such arrangement took place, it would offer one explanation for the apparent differences between Viking settlements in Ireland the tenth and eleventh centuries as compared to those of the ninth century.

Waterford's history during the next two decades is inextricably linked with the ambitions of the grandsons of Ímair both within Ireland and in Britain. This period is marked by ongoing conflict between groups of Vikings based in Limerick and in Dublin. Throughout this conflict, both groups also had to contend with pressure from the kings of the Northern and Southern Uí Néill, as well as other Irish petty kings. There are several episodes involving the Waterford Vikings, whose leaders at this time remained linked by kinship to those of the Dublin Vikings. In addition, the people and churches of Munster suffered during these campaigns. The wider context of many of these events, which can

[261] AU917.2.
[262] AU917.2.
[263] Downham, *Viking Kings of Britain and Ireland*, 31.
[264] Simon Coupland, 'From Poachers to Gamekeepers: Scandinavian Warlords and Carolingian Kings', *Early Medieval Europe* 7:1 (1998), 85-114.

only be described briefly in this chapter, are discussed in greater detail by Downham and others.

After he and his brother Sitric secured their hold over both Waterford and Dublin,[265] Ragnall gathered his forces, and in 918, led an attack on Scotland.[266] In his absence, Sitric continued to defend Dublin against Niall mac Áeda, the Cenél Eógain king of Tara.[267] The conflict came to a head in 919, when a group of Irish kings, led by Niall mac Áeda, unsuccessfully attacked Dublin. In the course of the battle, Niall and several others were killed.[268] As Downham has pointed out, this victory over a powerful Irish force solidified the position of Ímair's grandsons in Dublin and Waterford.[269]

The following year, 920, the *Annals of Ulster* record renewed resistance from Donnchad Donn mac Flann Sinna, king of the Southern Uí Néill.[270] In a later entry in the same year, they also note Sitric's abandonment of Dublin, and credit his departure to the intervention of God.[271] It is possible that Donnchad Donn's victory over the Dublin Vikings forced Sitric to leave, but examination of the annal entries for the following year offer an alternative explanation. The *Annals of Ulster* contain two consecutive entries in 921 that record the death of Ragnall and the arrival in Dublin of Gothfrith, both of whom were grandsons of Ímair, Sitric's kinsmen.[272] Downham argues that Ímair's descendents were successfully and, at this point, cooperatively working to maintain their dynasty's power in Ireland and England. She believes that when Sitric departed from Dublin, he took up Ragnall's place in York, and was replaced in Dublin by Gothfrith.[273]

These changes in the leadership in Dublin had important consequences in Munster. While the alliance between the Dublin and Waterford Vikings remained secure, the

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[265] AU917.3; AU917.4.
[266] AU918.4.
[267] AU918.6.
[268] AU919.3; AI919.3.
[269] Downham, *Viking Kings of Britain and Ireland*, 32.
[270] AU920.2.
[271] AU920.5.
[272] AU921.4, AU921.5; AI921.3.
[273] Downham, *Viking Kings of Britain and Ireland*, 33-4.

Limerick Vikings were growing in strength, and seem to have been ready to make a bid for independence from Ímair's dynasty. Shortly after Gothfrith's arrival in Dublin, the Limerick Vikings attacked Clonmacnoise and settlements near Loch Ree.[274] According to the *Annals of the Four Masters*, they also captured the king of Cashel, Flaithbertach mac Inmainén, and imprisoned him in Limerick.[275] In an effort to check the growing power of the Limerick Vikings in Munster, Gothfrith launched a counter-attack from Dublin in 924, but was defeated at Limerick.[276] According to the *Annals of Inisfallen*, Gothfrith conducted this campaign by sea, sailing south and west from Dublin and taking hostages from Munster along the way.[277] Whether this was a pre-emptive effort on his way to battle with the Limerick Vikings, or part of his less than triumphant journey home is open to question. However, it is significant that Gothfrith was concerned enough about the increasing influence of the Limerick Vikings within Munster to want to reaffirm his dynasty's pre-eminence in this way.

Although the Waterford Vikings are not mentioned as participants in this set of events in 924, they appear as antagonists against the Limerick Vikings in 926. In that year, the *Annals of Inisfallen* state that the Waterford fleet travelled overland and established themselves on Loch Gur, but were soon defeated by an army of the Limerick Vikings and 'the men of Mumu' in a battle at Kilmallock, Co. Limerick.[278] Exactly which Munstermen the annalist is describing as allies of the Limerick Vikings is uncertain, but it seems most likely that these were essentially locals resisting aggression from outsiders. In the same year, *Chronicum Scotorum* states that Kildare was the victim of two raids, launched from Waterford and Dublin.[279] Downham views this as part of an attempt by Ímair's dynasty to secure control over the southeast in the face of the growing power of the Limerick Vikings

[274] AU922.3; AI922.2.
[275] AFM921.16.
[276] AU924.3.
[277] AI924.1.
[278] AI926.2, AI927.2.
[279] CS926

to the west.[280] Despite the losses experienced by the Waterford Vikings in 927 against the Limerick Vikings and their Munster allies, they once again raided Kildare in 928.[281] During this period of conflict and rivalry between Dublin and Limerick, Waterford remained in support of Dublin's cause, attempting to prevent the expansion of the Limerick Vikings, and assisting the Dubliners in maintaining their control over Leinster.

After the events of the 920s, the annals offer little information on the Déisi or the southeast for approximately a decade. Starting in the late 930s, a new phase of conflict, both between various Viking groups and Irish kings, and between *Leth Cuinn* and *Leth Moga*, begins to appear in the annals. The *Annals of Ulster* present these events from the points of view of the kings of the Northern and Southern Uí Néill, Muirchertach mac Néill and Donnchad Donn mac Flann Sinna. Amlaíb, another of Ímair's grandsons, took control of Dublin in 938, from which base he raided inland.[282] Acting in unison, Muirchertach and Donnchad Donn attacked Dublin and ravaged its surrounding area, but in 939, the Dublin Vikings seem to have continued their predations.[283] Although the Dublin Vikings are not specifically blamed, the annalist reports that Ailech was sacked and Muirchertach was 'brought off to the fleet' and held for ransom.[284] The Waterford Vikings and the Munstermen, led by Cellachán Cashel, also raided churches in Mide and Brega during this year.[285] Perhaps as a direct result, in the following year, Muirchertach and Donnchad Donn are said to have taken hostages from Laigin and Munster, but rebellions must have broken out once more shortly thereafter.[286] This required a further campaign by Muirchertach through Mide and Uí Fhailge, into Osraige and Déisi territory, in the course of which Muirchertach captured Cellachán mac Buadacháin, the Eóganacht king of

[280] Downham, *Viking Kings of Britain and Ireland*, 37.
[281] CS928.
[282] AU938.5; AU938.6.
[283] AU938.6; AU939.1.
[284] AU939.3; CS939. Downham, *Viking Kings of Britain and Ireland*, 44.
[285] CS939.
[286] AU940.1.

Cashel.[287] The alliance between Muirchertach and Donnchad Donn was evidently still in place. In the account of this campaign recorded in the *Annals of Ulster*, Muirchertach is said to have presented Cellachán to Donnchad, perhaps as a way of demonstrating that he did not intend his involvement in Munster affairs to be a sign of aggression towards Donnchad.

The *Annals of Ulster* indicate the ferocity of Muirchertach's attack on the Déisi, but do not offer reasons as to why they were targeted. The account of the events of these years given by the *Annals of Inisfallen* may help to explain Muirchertach's motivation. According to the *Annals of Inisfallen* and *Chronicum Scotorum*, in 941 Cellachán led a successful and bloody campaign against the Déisi, culminating, it is possible to assume, in their submission to him.[288] The *Annals of Inisfallen* also mention that the king of the Déisi, Célechair, son of Cormac mac Mothla, was among the fallen. Because the two attacks on the Déisi by Muirchertach and Cellachán are not recorded together in either the *Annals of Inisfallen* or in the *Annals of Ulster*, it is challenging to determine cause and effect. Some indication may be provided by the much fuller account that appears in the *Annals of the Four Masters*. Bearing in mind that the annalist may simply have been embroidering a good story on the bare facts that appear in the other compilations of annals, the evidence is worth considering. The *Annals of the Four Masters* present a sequence of events that begins with Muirchertach plundering and gaining the submission of the Déisi and the Osraige.[289] Viewing this as a hostile act, Cellachán likewise attacked the Déisi and Osraige, who lost the first battle, but won a second.[290] Finally, Muirchertach once more intervened, and in the course of a full circuit of Ireland, he pressured the Munstermen to

[287] AU941.3.
[288] AI941.1; CS941.
[289] AFM939.5.
[290] AFM939.7; AFM939.8.

deliver up Cellachán, who he then shackled and dragged away as a hostage to Donnchad.[291]

Although it is difficult to reconstruct the full political backdrop and ramifications of this sequence of events, it is safe to say that the Déisi and their Osraige neighbours were, in the mid-tenth century, pawns in a much larger power struggle. Questions remain about the nature of the relationships between the Déisi and Cellachán, and between the Déisi and the Osraige, during this period. Whether the Déisi were attempting to maintain their independence or were provoked into rebellion against the king of Cashel is impossible to say, but the events of 941 reported by the annals make it clear that they suffered at least twice: once when Cellachán forced their submission, and again during Muirchertach's campaign in Munster.

Annalistic material related to events involving the Déisi becomes relatively sparse between the early 940s and the 970s. During the late 940s and early 950s, the kingship of Cashel was held by the strong king Cellacháin mac Buadacháin. Those same decades saw the beginnings of the rise of the Dál Cais, under Cennétig mac Lorcán. The position of the Déisi in the conflicts between the Dál Cais and Cellachán Cháisil cannot be reconstructed on the basis of the annals.[292] The Dál Cais were able to further solidify their position after the 950s, at least in part due to instability among the Uí Néill and the Eóganacht. Cellachán died in 954,[293] and Congalach was killed in a battle against the Dublin Vikings and the Laigin in 956.[294] The Eóganacht kings of Munster hardly had time to recover from Cellachán's death when his successor, Máel Fothardaig mac Flainn, died in 957.[295] This pattern of very short-reigning kings of Cashel continued for the next several years; from the death of Cellachán in 954 to the death of his son, Domnall in 963, no king of Cashel

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[291] AFM939.9.
[292] For instance, there is no mention of the Déisi one way or the other at the battle of *Gort Rotacháin* in 944: AU944.7; CS944; AFM942.11;
[293] AI954.2; AU954.7; CS954; AFM952.8.
[294] AU956.3; AI956.1.
[295] AU957.2; AI957.3.

held that position for more than two or three years.[296] At least two of the entries in the *Annals of Ulster* referring to the deaths of these kings indicate deeper unrest in Munster, and among the Eóganacht, by suggesting that the leaders were killed by their own people.[297]

Due to the paucity of annalistic material for this period directly dealing with the Déisi, it is challenging to determine how this period of unrest impacted on their internal, local politics. One hint may be the similar instability of the abbacy of Lismore at this point. Because that monastic centre was of importance both within Déisi territory and within Munster, it may offer some indication of the state of that kingdom during the late 950s and 960s. While the turnover rate for abbots of Lismore was not quite as rapid as that of the Eóganacht kings of Cashel during this period, the abbots' reigns were still relatively short. Between the death of abbot Diarmait mac Torpaid in 954 to the death of abbot Cináed mac Máel Ciaráin in 965, two other abbots held office in Lismore: Maenach mac Cormac (d. 959), and Cathmug (d. 960).[298] Of these, only Cathmug is mentioned as having held multiple abbacies, in Lismore and Cork. Unlike the multiple abbacies common in the ninth century, this period in the mid-tenth century seems to be characterized by at least a mild contraction of Lismore's power.

Another clue as to the state of the Déisi kingdom during this period of time is, however, their genealogies. After the death of Cormac mac Mothla in 920, kingship of the Déisi passed to his son, Célechair, who was killed in a battle against Cellachán, king of Cashel, in 941. Célechair was succeeded by his brother, Fáelán, from whom the later ruling dynasties of the Déisi, the Uí Fháeláin and Uí Bricc, claim descent.[299] In contrast to the earlier Déisi genealogies, these later pedigrees are narrow and linear, consciously

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[296] Máel Fothardaig (d. 957) was succeeded by Dub-dá-Bairenn mac Domnaill (d. 959: AI959.1; AU959.3), who was succeeded by Fer Gráid mac Clérig (d. 961: AU961.4), who was succeeded by Domnall mac Cellacháin (d. 963: AI963.3; AU963.4)

[297] AU959.3; AU961.4.

[298] Torpaid: AI953.2; AI954.3; AU953.4; Cinaed: AI965.2; AU965.3; Maenach: AI959.2; AU959.4; Cathmug: AI961.1; AU960.5; CS960.

[299] Thornton, 'The Déisi Muman', 173.

constructed by the ruling dynasties to justify their monopoly of the kingship. The Uí Fháeláin pedigree begins with Domnall, son of Fáelán mac Cormaic, who died in 996. A later offshoot of this family, which appears in the eleventh century, are the Uí Bricc, who trace their lineage to a grandson of Fáelán mac Cormaic, Brecc son of Art Corp. As Thornton and others have noted, during the later medieval period, these two dynasties are the exclusive rulers of the Déisi, and other groups, like the Uí Fhothaid and Uí Óengusa, seem to disappear from the political stage.[300] Although lack of evidence for the events of the mid-tenth century frustrates efforts to fully explain how Cormac mac Mothla's dynasty came to dominate the kingship of the Déisi, their later monopoly on that position was likely based on their political manoeuvrings during this period.

Some indication of those manoeuvrings can be seen in the later narrative sources, *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh* (CGG) and *Caithréim Chellacháin Chaisil* (CCC). For instance, CCC, attempts to portray the Déisi as staunch supporters of Cellachán's revival of the glory of Cashel. The author of the saga depicts two later Déisi dynasts, Domnall mac Fáeláin and Áed mac Domnaill forming marriage alliances or fighting and dying alongside the hero of the tale, when in fact they lived decades after Cellacháin's death.[301] In addition to the obvious chronological problems, this saga's Eóganacht-centred purpose makes this reconstruction of events suspect. Another narrative source, CGG, states that Fáelán, the son of Cormac mac Mothla, was killed by Ímair of Limerick for having allied himself with Mathgamain mac Cennétig and the Dál Cais. He apparently refused to bring the Déisi to join into Ímair's hosting against Mathgamain, and effectively supported the Dál Cais in their efforts to take over the kingship of Cashel.[302] A certain degree of cooperation is also reported in the *Annals of the Four Masters*, which records at least one occasion on which the Déisi joined in with Mathgamain to prevent incursions into Osraige by Murchad mac

[300] Thornton, 'The Déisi Muman', 173-4.
[301] Ibid., 175.
[302] *The War of the Gaedhil with the Gaill* ed. and trans. James Henthorn Todd, 73.

Finn, king of Leinster.[303] However, relations between the Déisi and the Dál Cais were not uniformly positive. Mathgamain's army is blamed for the death of Cormac, son of Fáelán mac Cormaic meic Mothlai, and in the later part of the tenth century, the annals indicate situations in which the Déisi did not support, or even actively undermined, the Dál Cais.[304]

Part of the re-emergence of the Déisi as an important sub-kingdom in Munster may have been related to their alliance with the Vikings of Waterford. The Waterford Vikings were also present among Mathgamain's forces in the battle against Murchad mac Finn mentioned above, and Downham has argued that during the later tenth century, Waterford came increasingly under Dál Cais control.[305] Mathgamain, and especially Brian, worked to make Waterford a 'counterweight' to Dublin during that period, and ultimately, the forces based at Waterford were strong enough to make a bid for control over Dublin in the 990s.[306] However, there are also slight indications that during parts of Brian's reign, the Déisi were allied with the men of Waterford in opposition to the Dál Cais. The *Annals of Inisfallen* report the Déisi raid on Brian's forces in 985, an incident which is also described in some detail in CGG.[307] In both accounts, the Déisi are said to have been driven all the way to Waterford, perhaps indicating that this was their place of refuge. Perhaps amplifying this minor detail, the late *Leabhar Oiris* indicates that the men of Waterford joined the Déisi on their raid.[308] While this is slim evidence on which to base a theory, it is possible to speculate that the Déisi kings sometimes acted in cooperation with the forces based at the growing settlement at Waterford. As will be discussed later, such alliances would be mutually beneficial to both parties, and it is perhaps significant that during this period of time, the annals never credit the Waterford Vikings with violence against their Déisi neighbours.

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[303] AFM965.19; AFM967.12. These may relate to the same event.
[304] AI975.1. For instance, they raided Brian Boru's mercenaries in 985: AI985.2.
[305] Downham, 'The historical importance of Viking-Age Waterford', 86. AI984.2.
[306] AFM992.21; AFM994.6; AI993.6. Downham, 'The historical importance of Viking-Age Waterford', 86-7.
[307] AI985.2; *The War of the Gaedhil with the Gaill* ed. and trans. James Henthorn Todd, 106-7.
[308] R.I. Best, 'The Leabhar Oiris', *Ériu* 1 (1904), 78.

While alliances with the Vikings of Waterford may have been a feature of Déisi politics in the second half of the tenth century, much of their involvement in the events of this period can only be inferred from references to hostings of 'all of the men of Munster' and similar formulae. For instance, when Brian led a campaign against the Ulaid in 1002, the *Annals of Inisfallen* specifically name the presence of the Connachta, the men of Mide, the Laigin, and the forces of Dublin and Waterford, alongside the 'men of Mumu', among whom must have been the Déisi.[309] The Déisi are mentioned by name in accounts of the Battle of Clontarf, where Mothla, son of Domnall mac Fáeláin, king of the Déisi, is listed among the slain.[310] The narrative CGG says that, 'one very strong and great battalion was also formed of the chosen hosts of all Mumhain', including Mothla and his men.[311] While this compliment from the Dál Cais to the Déisi may be reflective of later politics more than the early eleventh century reality, it does indicate that the Déisi were considered a powerful sub-kingdom. By contrast, the Vikings of Waterford are not listed as having been present at the battle of Clontarf, and may not have chosen to support Brian on that particular occasion, for unknown reasons.[312]

During the ninth and tenth centuries, the Déisi became deeply embroiled in regional warfare between competing rulers, both Irish and Viking. Although they remained a small sub-kingdom throughout this period, the Déisi do not seem to have collapsed under the pressures of the politics and military campaigns of the Viking age, but were in fact able to leverage their geographical location to make beneficial alliances. During this period they also seem to have been undergoing the kind of dynastic consolidation characteristic of other strong Irish polities of the time, promoting certain lineages and suppressing others to limit the number of individuals eligible for the kingship. This had a stabilizing effect on their internal politics and is an indication of increasing political centralization and perhaps

[309] AI1002.4.
[310] AU1014.2; CS1014; *The War of the Gaedhil with the Gaill* ed. and trans. James Henthorn Todd, 209.
[311] *The War of the Gaedhil with the Gaill* ed. and trans. James Henthorn Todd, 167.
[312] Downham, 'The historical importance of Viking-Age Waterford', 87.

spatial integration in the Déisi kingdom. Whether the Vikings helped to catalyze these changes by changing the character and balance of Irish politics in this period is perhaps open to question, but it seems likely. Certainly the kingdom continued to thrive throughout the Viking age, and the churches of the Déisi seem to have carried on largely unharmed. In order to understand the impact of the Vikings on the Déisi churches, it is necessary first to look at the evidence for Viking influence on the Irish church as a whole.

4.5 The Irish Church in the Viking Age

Most of the contemporary documentary evidence related to the Viking Age in Ireland was written by clerics in ecclesiastical institutions, and the impression they provide is that Viking raiding had an incredibly destructive influence on the church. The annalists clearly depict the fear, sorrow and anger that churchmen felt in the face of Viking aggression. However, modern historians have tended to look beyond the emotion in these accounts to examine other indicators of the impact of Viking raiding on the development of the Irish church in the ninth and tenth centuries. In general, it seems that while this period of violence affected the structure and organization of the Irish church, it did not destroy or revolutionize it.

At the beginning of the Viking age, the church was well established and fully integrated into the fabric of Irish politics and society. As discussed in the chapter on the eighth century, the late eighth and early ninth centuries were a period of reform or religious revival in the church, best captured in the writings of the *Céle Dé* ascetic movement. Many of these texts portray the unreformed churches as morally lax, in contrast to the stricter, less worldly monastic life advocated by the followers of Máel-ruain of Tallaght and his circle. Hughes notes that the 'old churches' were not resistant to the reforming spirit of the *Céli Dé*, and that many abbots were sympathetic to the reformers' goals, adopting those aspects of their teachings that were compatible with life in their

communities.[313] This created a wide diversity of religious practices within and between ecclesiastical communities in the late eighth and early ninth centuries. Because of this diversity, and because there was no central authority governing the Irish church during this period, 'the reformers made little innovation in the underlying constitutional structure of Irish monasticism'.[314] For instance, although many monastic communities elected reform-driven abbots, other monasteries continued to be ruled by hereditary ecclesiastical dynasties.[315] Although many reforming texts, penitentials and monastic rules were composed during this period, no infrastructure was developed to ensure lasting adherence to the principles of the reform.[316] In many monasteries, life went on much as before, although religious writings in this period are coloured by this pervasive feeling of spiritual revival.[317]

In shunning the material world, the *céli Dé* advocated insulating oneself from everyday concerns to allow for undisturbed contemplation. This would seem to indicate that reformed churches and churchmen should avoid engagement with political and military events. As discussed in the previous chapter, the early medieval Irish church was far from helpless militarily, and monastic communities often fought against one another or against secular lords.[318] In the early ninth century, although aggression between monastic communities continued, churches that were attacked or insulted were tenacious in exacting compensation from the criminals.[319] Sometimes they obtained justice through legal means, or through other measures like boycotting royally-sponsored fairs.[320] There is some evidence to suggest that the church wanted to distance itself from physical violence during

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[313] Hughes, *The Church in Early Irish Society*,174-6.
[314] Hughes, *The Church in Early Irish Society*, 181.
[315] Ibid., 188-9.
[316] Ibid., 181-2.
[317] Ibid., 183-4.
[318] Ó Corráin, *Ireland Before the Normans*, 85-8.
[319] Hughes, *The Church in Early Irish Society*, 190-1. For instance, see the conflicts discussed in AU807.9; AU817.5; AI824.2; AI828.2.
[320] Clonmacnoise was legally awarded compensation, CS823; the community of Tallaght boycotted the óenach at Tailtiu, AU811.2.

this period. In 804, Áed Oirdnide reportedly freed the church from any obligation to join the king on military hostings or expeditions, a decree that was celebrated by the annalists as a victory for the church.[321] Hughes argues that the impetus for Áed's declaration seems to have come from Armagh, and that it was in effect, at least in the north, for some part of the early ninth century. When Viking raids intensified in the 830s and 840s, however, it seems to have become unenforceable.[322]

Despite the church's apparent desire to avoid violence, they apparently accepted the actions of Feidlimid mac Crimthainn. As mentioned above, Feidlimid appears among the members of the 'unity of Máel-ruain', but seems to have used his reforming zeal as an excuse to attack churches outside his borders, notably Clonmacnoise.[323] Leaving Feidlimid's actions aside, Hughes argues that campaigns by kings against churches were rare in the period before the 830s, and that, 'there was still a strong feeling that ecclesiastical property and lives were sacrosanct'.[324] This reverence for the church and its material goods may have prevented destructive attacks by Irish secular lords, but afforded the church no protection from Viking raiders in the ninth century.

As discussed earlier, the earliest period of Viking raids generally affected coastal regions, with few attacks reported more than a day's march inland. With the intensification of Viking activity in the 830s and 840s, churches further inland, particularly along rivers, also experienced violent raids. Although there are differing opinions as to the preferred plunder sought by Viking raiders during these early parts of the Viking Age, scholars agree that churches were targeted not because they represented the Christian faith, but because they were centres of population and concentrated wealth.[325]

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[321] AU804.8.
[322] Hughes, *The Church in Early Irish Society*, 192.
[323] Ibid., 192-3.
[324] Ibid., 191, 197.
[325] Colmán Etchingham, *Viking Raids on Irish Church Settlements in the Ninth Century: a reconsideration of the annals*, Maynooth: St Patrick's College Maynooth Department of Old and Middle Irish, 1996; Ó Corráin, *Ireland Before the Normans*, 88-9.

Hughes argues that initially, 'the effect of the Viking terror on the churches was physically and mentally devastating. Respect and veneration had been accorded to the church for so long that the Viking treatment left men bewildered'.[326] Because the first wave of attacks on churches was essentially random, it affected all types of ecclesiastical settlements, some of which were more readily able to recover from the losses of life and material wealth. Therefore, one consequence of Viking raiding was that many smaller houses became poorer, while larger and wealthier communities became more powerful.[327] Hughes hypothesizes that one visible indication of this trend is the enormous spike in reports of ecclesiastical pluralism in the annals for the ninth century.[328] Obits in the annals mention six individuals holding multiple ecclesiastical offices during the first three decades of the ninth century, eight between 833 and 849, ten between 863 and 869, and then 16 in the last three decades of the ninth century.[329] Unless it is simply the product of changes in record-keeping, this trend may be related to a shortage of acceptable candidates for ecclesiastical office, or it may indicate that in the face of falling revenues from church estates, powerful churchmen sought to control larger and larger areas.[330] Whether or not this trend was consistent throughout Ireland is open to questions, but in general, it is apparent that many rich monasteries in areas heavily raided by the Vikings continued to thrive throughout the ninth and tenth centuries.

The pressure of Viking raids on the church seems to have decreased during the tenth century, and there is evidence to suggest that many Vikings had become fully Christianized as early as the mid- to late ninth century. Nevertheless, the church faced significant challenges during this period. When Irish kings began to incorporate Viking allies into their inter-dynastic conflicts, the general intensification of violence seems to

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[326] Hughes, *The Church in Early Irish Society*, 199-200.
[327] Hughes, *The Church in Early Irish Society*, 207-8; Ó Corráin, *Ireland Before the Normans*, 85.
[328] Kathleen Hughes, 'The Irish Church, 800-1050', in Ó Cróinín, ed., *A New History of Ireland, Vol. 1: Prehistoric and Early Ireland*, 2005, 641-2.
[329] Hughes, *The Church in Early Irish Society*, 210.
[330] Ó Corráin, *Ireland Before the Normans*, 84-5.

have broken down whatever taboos remained against attacks on churches by secular lords.[331] At the same time, there are no reports of monastic communities attacking one another after the 830s.[332] In the later ninth and tenth centuries, monastic communities preferred to seek the patronage and physical protection of strong local secular lords. Some churches, Armagh foremost among them, were very successful at maintaining alliances with powerful kings and using them to their political and economic benefit.[333] Alliances with secular lords were a double-edged sword in certain circumstances, however, because they made churches viable targets for military campaigns.[334] During the later ninth and tenth centuries, the annals describe many expeditions on which secular lords burned or plundered the churches of their enemies as a matter of course.

So eager were many of the churches to gain the protection of a secular lord that in some cases they were prepared to offer him a leadership position in their community. Sometimes he was elected abbot, while at other times the annals refer to him as the *secnab*, or vice-abbot, a position that may have been honorary rather than practical.[335] The benefit to the lord may have been economic as well as spiritual; churches were still substantial landowners with many tenants, and some portion of the income of the monastery may have become available to its abbot-kings.[336] Particularly in Munster, it is also not uncommon during this period to see the opposite situation, in which clerics became kings.[337] While there were other instances of ecclesiastical kingship in Munster prior to the Viking age, the trend becomes more apparent in the later ninth and tenth centuries. Hughes notes that thanks to the conservative nature of the church, the linkages between the abbacy of a

[331] Hughes, *The Church in Early Irish Society*, 200, 203-6.
[332] Hughes, 'The Irish Church, 800-1050', 642-3.
[333] Hughes, *The Church in Early Irish Society*, 208-9.
[334] Ibid., 217, 219-20.
[335] Hughes, *The Church in Early Irish Society*, 212-4; Hughes, 'The Irish Church, 800-1050', 642.
[336] Hughes, *The Church in Early Irish Society*, 214; Ó Corráin, *Ireland Before the Normans*, 88-9.
[337] Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 213-5; Hughes, *The Church in Early Irish Society*, 221-2.

particular community and kingship were never formalized or passed from one king to his successor.[338]

It is possible to suggest, as Hughes does, that these factors contributed to the secularization of the church over the course of the later ninth and tenth centuries.[339] She notes that a shift in the words used by the annalists to refer to the heads of monastic communities during this period reflects his increasing concern with the material success of the monastery rather than its spiritual direction.[340] This same emphasis can be seen in the saints' lives of this period, which highlight the saints' roles as providers who successfully establish and manage the monastic estates.[341] In this context, it is interesting to note that the pluralism in the ninth century Irish church decreased in the mid-tenth century. This may indicate that the church had recovered, or that there was greater value to combining secular and religious authority than to amassing control over multiple ecclesiastical communities.

Overall, while the Irish church underwent a certain amount of change during the ninth and tenth centuries, 'the church as an institution remained much as it had been during the pre-viking age'.[342] For the purposes of this chapter, it is interesting to note the indications that as was true in the secular realm, power was becoming concentrated in the hands of the leaders of an increasingly restricted number of monastic communities during this period. Their alliances with secular lords were of mutual benefit, both economically and politically. As the next section will discuss, many of these themes are visible in the evidence for the churches of the Déisi kingdom in the ninth and tenth centuries.

4.6 Ecclesiastical Politics in the Déisi Kingdom during the Viking Age

In contrast to the eighth century, ninth-century ecclesiastical politics in Déisi territory, and in Munster as a whole, can be reconstructed in reasonable detail. The use of

[338] Hughes, *The Church in Early Irish Society*, 214.
[339] Hughes, *The Church in Early Irish Society*, 217-26.
[340] Ibid., 223.
[341] Ibid., 223-6.
[342] Hughes, 'The Irish Church, 800-1050', 645.

abbatial office to political effect becomes more apparent, if not more frequent in reality, and it is possible to say more about the affiliations of individual abbots of Lismore. Nevertheless, there are still challenges associated with the identification of these individuals and the lineages from which they descend.

The annals show that in the ninth century, one family supplied three abbots: Aedán mac Raichlich (abbot, c. 804-814), Suibne ua Raichlich (c. 825-856), and Martin ua Raichlich (c. 864-881).[343] These family members did not hold office one after another, but alternated with two comparatively well-known abbots, Flann mac Fairchellaich (c. 814-825) and Daniel ua Liathaite (c. 856-864). Memorial stone slabs dedicated to Suibne and Martin are still visible today in St. Carthage's Cathedral in Lismore. Despite the family's apparent prominence, little can be said about the Raichlech from whom they descended, or about these abbots' careers. Martin ua Raichlich is distinguished for having been captured by Vikings,[344] but after his death, the family disappears from the written record.[345]

Based on this evidence, it would seem that at Lismore, as at many Irish monasteries in this period, a single ecclesiastical family had a relatively stable claim over the office of abbot for a period of almost a century. As a monastery associated with the reforms of the Céli Dé movement, however, this kind of nepotism is perhaps somewhat unexpected. As Sanderlin has said, 'it is tempting to see the alternate abbots, both of whom were loosely associated with the Céli Dé movement, as marking the temporary triumph of reform over decadence, but the argument would be based on too little evidence'.[346] She rightly points out the need to examine the political atmosphere in which these abbots operated, particularly the two whose terms in office interrupted the control of the ua Raichlich family.

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[343] AI814.1; AU856.7; FA856; AFM878.7.
[344] AI867.1.
[345] S. Sanderlin, 'The monastery of Lismore A.D. 638-1111', in Nolan and Power, eds., *Waterford: History and Society*, 1992, 39.
[346] Ibid.

A series of unique entries in the *Annals of Inisfallen* describes the early career of Flann mac Fairchellach as abbot of Lismore. Flann was of the Ciarraige Luachra, as was the founder and patron of Lismore, St. Mochuda.[347] He became abbot around 814, following the death of his predecessor, Áedán mac Raichlich.[348] Two years later, he is said to have exhibited the shrine of Lismore's patron saint.[349] In 818, according to both the *Annals of Inisfallen* and the *Annals of Ulster*, Flann's monastery served as a refuge for Cuanu, abbot of Louth, and the shrine of Louth's patron, St. Mochta.[350] The differences between the two entries are interesting. The entry in the *Annals of Inisfallen* emphasizes the arrival of the shrine in Lismore, with no mention of Cuanu, while the entry in the *Annals of Ulster* records Cuanu's flight to Munster with the shrine, without mentioning Lismore. The two sets of annals agree that the threat of Áed Oirdnide, king of Uí Néill, was the motivation behind the event described.

This set of events makes sense in the wider context of early ninth-century politics. Like Lismore, Louth was associated with the Céli Dé *familia*, which explains why Cuanu would turn to Flann for assistance. Áed Oirdnide's role can also be understood in this light. Áed was responsible for the killing of the abbot of Raphoe in 817, in response to which the Columban *familia* went to Tara to curse him. Byrne argues that the Céli Dé churches were allies of the Columban *familia*, and became implicated by association, and that Cuanu fled in fear of retaliation.[351]

Unfortunately, nothing else is reported of Flann's activities, or of the fate of Mochta's shrine, but Flann's death is recorded in both the *Annals of Inisifallen* and in the

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[347] Donnchadh Ó Corráin, 'Ireland c. 800: some aspects of society', in D. Ó Cróinín, ed., *A New History of Ireland, Vol. 1: Prehistoric and Early Ireland*, 2005, 588.
[348] AI814.1; AI814.2.
[349] AI816.3. The word used to describe the action is *tócbáil*, which literally means the act of raising or lifting, but which, according to DIL, can also mean exposing and showing, exalting and upholding, or building.
[350] AI818.2; AU818.4.
[351] Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 162.

Annals of Ulster.[352] While the *Annals of Ulster* describes Flann as the abbot of Lismore, the *Annals of Inisfallen* says that he was abbot of Emly and Cork as well as Lismore. This pluralism is part of a wider trend towards the holding of multiple ecclesiastical offices in the last four decades of the ninth century. Hughes has argued that this may be attributable either to the decreasing wealth of the church during this period, or to the scarcity of suitable candidates to serve in positions of authority within the church.[353] On the other hand, Ó Corráin argues that pluralism in the ninth century Irish church, 'can be seen as a growing abuse to be attributed to the increase of wealth and power in the larger monasteries at the expense of the smaller, and to the expansion of professional ecclesiastical families'.[354] It is also possible to ask whether some records of pluralism reflect aspiration on the part of the individual or his commemorators, as opposed to any meaningful claim to control over multiple churches. In Flann's case, his supposed multiple abbacies combined with his efforts to increase Lismore's prestige seem indicative of his ambition.[355] A much later entry in the *Annals of Inisfallen* refers to an eleventh century abbot of Lismore as the *coarb* of Flann mac Fairchellaich, suggesting that Flann's achievements may have been recognized and remembered in subsequent generations.[356]

On the basis of the available evidence, it is difficult to determine Flann's ultimate goals, but the idea that he was able to gain control over the three most important monasteries in Munster is of great significance in understanding his career. Emly, in particular, was closely associated with the Eóganacht Chaisil, and Sanderlin argues that Flann intentionally took advantage of the dynasty's weakness in this period to pursue his almost expansionist policies.[357] Certainly, the concentration of this power in the hands of a

[352] AI825.1; AU825.13.
[353] Hughes, 'The Irish Church, 800-1050', 641-2.
[354] Ó Corráin, *Ireland Before the Normans*, 83-5.
[355] Sanderlin, 'The monastery of Lismore A.D. 638-1111', 39-41.
[356] AI1031.2
[357] Sanderlin, 'The monastery of Lismore A.D. 638-1111', 39.

single ecclesiastic must have constituted some level of a threat to secular rulers in the region.

Flann's patronymic is relatively unusual, and it is possible to speculate that his father, Fairchellach, was the abbot of Clonmacnoise of the same name, who died in 814, the same year that Flann came into office in Lismore.[358] While there is no concrete evidence to support this idea, it would offer a new lens through which to view Flann's policies. For instance, perhaps Flann's ambitions were supported by the Céli Dé king of Cashel, Feidlimid mac Crimthann, who came to power in 820. It is possible that the Munster churches and Clonmacnoise were allies during the period of Flann's abbacy. If this ended with Flann's death and the promotion of his successor, Suibne ua Raichlich, perhaps we have a further explanation for Feidlimid mac Crimthann's supposedly enigmatic aggression towards Clonmacnoise.[359]

Little is known about the life or reign of Flann's successor, but Suibne ua Raichlich's death is reported in both the *Annals of Ulster* and in the *Fragmentary Annals*, the former referring to him as a scribe, anchorite and abbot of Lismore.[360] Following his death, evidently from natural causes, another figure associated with the Céli Dé reform movement, Daniel ua Liathaite, came to power in Lismore. At his death in the mid-860s, the *Annals of Inisfallen*, *Chronicum Scotorum* and the *Annals of the Four Masters* all identify Daniel as the abbot of Cork as well as Lismore.[361] Moreover, although they do not assign the blame on any individual or group, all of the annals except the *Annals of Inisfallen* state that his death was a violent one. Because the entries offer so little detail, it is difficult to determine the significance of the murder, if indeed one occurred. However, it is possible to view Daniel's career as the end of the period of connection between Lismore

[358] AU814.7 describes Fairchellach as Fairchellach of Fore, as does CS and AFM, but CS and AFM809.3 also say that he was of the Gailenga Mora from Meath.
[359] Haggart argues that most of Feidlimid's actions are attributable to his role as a Céli Dé cleric and reformer, Craig Haggart, 'Feidlimid mac Crimthainn and the "Óentu Maíle Ruain"', *Studia Hibernica* 33 (2004/2005), 29-59.
[360] AU856.7, FA856.
[361] AI863.1; CS863; AFM863.4.

and the Céli Dé movement. The major piece of evidence linking Daniel to Céli Dé spirituality is an ascetic poem, written in the form of an admonition to a woman, which is commonly attributed to him.[362] As Sanderlin points out, however, the poem was written towards the end of the period in which Céli Dé ascetic spirituality was at its height, and may simply represent that literary and intellectual trend.[363]

What is perhaps more interesting is the degree of similarity between Daniel and Flann mac Fairchellaich. Both were preceded and followed in their office of abbot in Lismore by members of the ua Raichlich family, both are said to have been abbots of other important monasteries in the area in addition to Lismore, and both were linked in some way to the Céli Dé reform movement. In a sense, the connection of these abbots with the Céli Dé can be seen as an involvement on their part in the wider ecclesiastical politics of the day. Daniel and Flann may have risen to super-regional prominence because they were able to gain such a powerful hold over the major Munster churches. Conversely, it may be that their association with important ecclesiastics from outside Munster afforded them the degree of authority necessary to gain control over more than one monastery. Either way, we can view the tenures of these two abbots as periods when Lismore was highly significant on both a regional and super-regional level. Thus the political atmosphere of these two periods, 814-825 and 856-864, is worthy of special attention. Again, in this light, it is possible to view the ua Raichlich family as being one of local and regional importance, who held power during those times when Lismore was a less tantalizing prize for an ambitious ecclesiastic, presumably for a variety of political and economic reasons.

As mentioned in the previous section on secular politics in Déisi territory during the ninth and tenth centuries, one of the most powerful kings of the Déisi was Cormac mac Mothla who ruled between 897 and 920. At his death, the *Annals of Inisfallen* refer to him as a bishop, abbot of Kilmolash on the Blackwater river, and *secnab*, or vice-abbot of

[362] Kuno Meyer, 'Daniel Húa Liathaide's Advice to a Woman', *Ériu* 1 (1904), 67-71.
[363] Sanderlin, 'The monastery of Lismore A.D. 638-1111', 38.

Lismore. As Sanderlin notes, this is the only time a king of the Déisi was said to hold an office at Lismore, although the position of *secnab* was most likely honorary.[364] During Cormac's reign, the Déisi variously allied themselves with the Osraige, or the Eóganacht, or the Uí Néill, depending on which partnership coincided best with their own political goals. Cormac's relationship with Lismore and another Déisi church, Kilmolash, can be viewed as part of the strategy by which he established and maintained control over his core territory, enabling him to take risks outside of the kingdom. In this sense, the church became a vehicle for the increased spatial integration of the Déisi kingdom under Cormac mac Mothla.

There were two abbots of Lismore during Cormac's kingship. Martin ua Raichlich was succeeded by Flann mac Forbasaich upon his death, and Flann passed the abbacy to Máel Brigte mac Máele Domnaich when he died in 912.[365] There is little information in the annals about Flann's career, although only a few years after he became abbot of Lismore, the monastery was burned by 'the son of Imar'.[366] The next abbot of Lismore mentioned in the annals is Ciarán mac Ciarmacán, whose death is reported in 938.[367] Several sets of annals report Máel Brigte's death, while the passing of Flann and of Ciarán are only noted in the *Annals of Inisfallen*. This suggests that Máel Brigte may have been a better-known figure outside of Déisi territory than were his predecessor or successor. If this is the case, one possible explanation is that Máel Brigte, who became abbot of Lismore only a few years before Cormac mac Mothla took over the kingship of the Déisi, may have been one of the king's major allies or supporters. Although nothing further can be said about this hypothetical partnership on the basis of surviving evidence, it does seem to be a reasonable explanation for the known facts of their careers.

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[364] AI920.1; Sanderlin, 'The monastery of Lismore A.D. 638-1111', 42.
[365] AI894.2; AI912.1; AU912.2; FA912.
[366] AI883.1.
[367] AI938.1.

Máel Brigte's successor, Ciarán, may have faced more difficult circumstances, particularly at the beginning of his career. He took power in 912, and only three years later, Lismore faced heavy raiding from the new influx of Vikings arriving in Waterford Harbour.[368] It is probably significant that sacking Munster churches, including Lismore, was a top priority for the new group of Waterford-based Vikings; in addition to the incentive of collecting spoils, the Viking leaders ordering such raids must have been cognizant of the political significance of attacking such ecclesiastical communities. As is typical of the annals, no details about the aftermath of this attack on Lismore are available, or its impact on Ciarán's career, but it is possible to assume that like Cormac, he struggled to preserve his authority during this period of renewed Viking presence in the southeast.

Under the year 917, the *Annals of Ulster* report a 'slaughter of the foreigners at *Neimlid* in Muma', a location that has not been identified.[369] The *Onomasticon Goedelicum* notes that *Neim* was the name given to the lower portion of the river Blackwater, and that in at least one source, it is referred to as *Emlidh*; it seems plausible then that this battle against the new Vikings of Waterford was fought in the Blackwater estuary, perhaps in an effort to prevent them from establishing an encampment in western Déisi territory. They may have been trying to rebuild the base at Youghal that the Déisi burned in the mid-860s,[370] or they may have hoped to found a new site; either way, according to the *Annals of Ulster*, they were defeated in 917.

Control over the Blackwater river would have been a substantial strategic advantage in Munster, and a Viking encampment in the estuary would have encroached on the use of the river by laypeople, and by the many churches along the Blackwater valley. For instance, Dairinis, an island monastery, is only a few miles upriver from Youghal, and would therefore have been extremely vulnerable. Interestingly, after this episode of

[368] AU915.7; CS915; AFM913.4.
[369] AU917.2.
[370] AFM864.7.

conflict in 917, the annals do not report any more Viking attacks on Déisi churches until 962, and it is possible to speculate that the Déisi won this reprieve through their victory in 917. On the other hand, most churches within the sphere of influence of Viking settlements in Ireland did not routinely suffer raids, and it is possible that an encampment or settlement of some kind was established near the mouth of the Blackwater in the early tenth century. This possibility will be examined more fully later in this chapter.

After Ciarán mac Ciarmacán's death in 938, little can be said about the Déisi churches until the 950s, when Lismore seems to have suffered a period of some instability. As mentioned above, the abbots of Lismore in this period held power for relatively short periods of time, and none are said to have held additional offices in any other monasteries. Under the year 958, the death notice in the *Annals of Inisfallen* for Cináed ua Con Minn refers to him as bishop of Lismore and Scattery Island, which does suggest that during the 950s, Lismore retained its connections to other important churches in Munster.[371] During the early 960s, the *Annals of the Four Masters* report an attack on Lismore by Amlaíb Cuarán during the course of a larger campaign in the east and southeast.[372] This is the only reported Viking attack on a Déisi church after the events of 914-17, and it may be significant that it was not the work of locally-based Viking groups, but of outsiders from Dublin and elsewhere.

Despite this attack, there are indications that in the early 960s, Lismore started to regain some of its strength. After the death of abbot Cathmug in 960, Lismore was controlled by two members of the same family: Cináed mac Máel Ciaráin, who died in 965, and Cormac mac Máel Ciaráin, who died in 983.[373] The annals only mention these two individuals at their deaths, and their familial ties cannot be ascertained with any security on the basis of extant evidence. Nevertheless, their long periods in office, and the

[371] AI958.3. Like the founder of Lismore, Cináed ua Con Minn was a member of the Ciarraige Luachra. Ó Corráin, 'Ireland c. 800: aspects of society', 588.
[372] AFM960.14.
[373] AI965.2; AU965.3; AU983.1.

possibility that two members of a single family controlled Lismore for a period of almost twenty-five years seems to indicate that the instability of the 950s had ended. Incidentally, these two abbots' terms in office coincided with the periods in which Mathgamain and Brian were working to establish Dál Cais control over Munster; one wonders what type of relationship existed between the Dál Cais and Lismore during this period, particularly during the years in which the Déisi supported Mathgamain.

It is not entirely clear who succeeded Cormac mac Máel Ciaráin as abbot of Lismore after his death in 983. During the mid-980s, when the Déisi attacked Brian's mercenaries, he responded by campaigning heavily throughout the kingdom, but two years later he also took hostages from Lismore, Cork and Emly as a way of ensuring their loyalty. As mentioned earlier, during his career, Brian frequently manipulated ecclesiastical politics in such a way as to consolidate his own authority and the strength of the Dál Cais. It is unfortunate that the annals do not record who was in power in Lismore during this critical period. The annals record only secular events in Déisi territory from this point up until the 1020s, and the eleventh century church will be discussed in the next chapter.

4.7 Conclusions: The Impact of the Viking Age on Irish Society

Many scholars have tried to estimate the impact on Irish society of this first century of interaction between the Vikings and the Irish. Both Ó Corráin and Ó Cróinín have argued that the early Viking raids had little or no effect on the fabric of Irish secular politics, nor were they responsible for the 'decay' of the Irish church, as had previous been thought.[374] They suggest that the most significant and lasting impacts of interactions between the Irish and the Vikings in this period were the introduction of new technologies for ship-building, the intermixing of Scandinavian motifs and techniques in Irish metalworking and decorative art, and in particular, greater access to commercial networks

[374] Ó Corráin, *Ireland Before the Normans*, 82-8; Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, *Early Medieval Ireland 400-1200*, 260-5.

and coinage-based economic practices.[375] In other words, the scholarly consensus is that while the arrival of the Vikings and the first century of their interactions with the Irish had an impact on the social, economic, political and military fabric of society, they were not an unstoppable destructive force in the face of which Irish institutions crumbled.

Similarly, while the Vikings have been credited with the introduction of towns and town-based economic practices to Ireland, they cannot be said to have destroyed the pre-existing rural settlement pattern into which they interposed themselves. As discussed earlier, urbanization in Ireland was the result of a variety of economic, social, political and topographical factors, and had an impact not only on developing towns, but on rural areas. The continuing difficulties with characterizing changes in settlement patterns and economic organization in Ireland in the ninth and tenth centuries largely stem from the nature of the available archaeological evidence. The next section will consider the archaeological evidence for settlement and the economy in Ireland and more specifically in the kingdom of the Déisi during the Viking Age.

4.8 *Longphuirt* and Hoards: The Archaeology of the Early Viking Age in Ireland

The annals provide a concrete date for the start of Viking raids in Ireland, but this kind of precision is not to be found in the archaeological evidence. The arrival of the Vikings did not cause any instantaneous break with past patterns of settlement or economic organization, and the changes that they did help to catalyze occurred over a period of generations, not overnight. In general, it appears that secular and ecclesiastical settlement remained much the same in the ninth century as it had been in the eighth century, retaining its dispersed and agrarian character.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, the heyday of ringfort building continued into the ninth century, and it has been demonstrated that the occupation of ringforts by secular elites continued into the tenth century and beyond. However, there are also indications that there

[375] Ó Corráin, *Ireland Before the Normans*, 105-7; Ó Cróinín, *Early Medieval Ireland*, 263-5.

was a gradual shift to unenclosed settlement forms from the ninth century onward. The evidence for this is currently sparse, but it is to be hoped that future analysis will help to provide a better understanding of this change in rural settlement patterns.[376] Edwards offers a concise summary of the arguments that link the shift toward unenclosed settlement with the centralization of secular authority in Ireland from the tenth century onward. [377] Starting in the tenth century, the concentration of authority and wealth in the hands of a limited secular elite meant that there was a trend toward downward social mobility. As individuals and families lost status, they may also have lost the right or the ability to live in and maintain enclosed settlements, which would end the period of ringfort building, and result in a shift toward unenclosed settlement. This model for changing settlement patterns and forms makes logical sense, but it remains to be conclusively supported with archaeological evidence, and until that time, it is not possible to say more about the form and function of such enclosed settlements.

Because the outlines of changes in the overall settlement pattern during this time can only be dimly perceived, there is a tendency to imagine that the 'classic' Irish pattern of settlement was actually unchanging, and to look only for innovations in settlement forms and functions introduced by the Vikings. From the early 840s, the annals start to refer to *longphuirt* (sg. *longphort*) as bases from which inland raids could be conducted.[378] Their construction seems to coincide and relate to the overall increase in Viking activity in Ireland from the late 830s onward, and the term is typically translated as a 'ship-camp'. Most archaeologists and historians use the word *longphort* to refer to a type of temporary

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[376] Nancy Edwards, 'The archaeology of early medieval Ireland, c. 400-1169', in D. Ó Cróinín, ed., *A New History of Ireland, Vol. 1: Prehistoric and Early Ireland*, 2005, 299.
[377] Ibid., 300.
[378] AU841.4: '*Longport oc Linn Duachaill asar orta tuatha & cealla Tethbai. Longport oc Duiblinn as-rorta Laigin & Oi Neill etir tuatha & cealla co rice Sliabh Bledhma*'; 'There was a naval camp at Linn Duachaill from which the peoples and churches of Tethba were plundered. There was a naval camp at Duiblinn from which the Laigin and the Uí Néill were plundered, both states and churches, as far as Sliab Bladma'.

encampment built and occupied by the Vikings during their raiding phase.[379] These are frequently only named in annalistic notices of their destruction, although a few annals mention the construction of a *longphort* or a raiding party setting out from one; unfortunately, the annalists never offer a physical description of such a site.

The major question about the term *longphort*, and one that has been hotly debated, is how the annalists intended the word to be understood.[380] They may have been describing a specific type of settlement with a relatively uniform physical appearance that would be recognizable archaeologically as a single monument type, or they may have used the term to denote a particular site function, that could be carried out at a wide variety of morphological site types. Doherty suggests that the word *longphort* was used alongside the word *dúnad* to refer to different types of temporary military encampments, with similar functions but different morphology or locations.[381] This uncertainty creates a mismatch between the documentary sources and the potential of archaeology to provide useful evidence.

In addition to confusion about the relationship between the annalistic term and a unique monument type, there remain questions about the function of this possible class of sites. Although the *longphort* as described in the annals is typically mentioned in the context of military events, Valante and others have argued that over time, the term *longphort* was used to refer not only to temporary military encampments, but also to a variety of other site types. She argues that 'as the nature of Scandinavian settlement evolved in Ireland, the term was used flexibly by the Irish annalists, referring to anything from temporary raiding bases, to Scandinavian rural settlements, to way stations between

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[379] Charles Doherty, 'The Vikings in Ireland: a Review', in Clarke, Ó Floinn and Ní Mhaonaigh, eds., *Ireland and Scandinavia in the Early Viking Age*, Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1998, 324-5.
[380] For a summary of the debate, see Mary Valante, *The Vikings in Ireland: Settlement, Trade and Urbanization* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2008), 38-9, 41-2, including footnotes; Michael Gibbons, 'The longphort phenomenon in Early Christian and Viking Ireland', *History Ireland* 12:3 (Autumn 2004): 19-23; and John Sheehan, 'The *Longphort* in Viking Age Ireland', *Acta Archaeologica* 79 (2008), 282-95.
[381] Charles Doherty, 'The Vikings in Ireland: a Review', in Clarke, O Floinn and Ní Mhaonaigh, eds., *Ireland and Scandinavia in the Early Viking Age*, Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1998, 324-5.

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'.[382] In other words, if the term *longphort* was ever used by annalists to refer to a single archaeological monument type, by the later ninth and tenth century this was no longer the case.

In a recent article, Sheehan has argued for the use of the term *longphort* to describe only, 'Scandinavian or Hiberno-Scandinavian bases located in coastal, lacustrine or riverine contexts from the period encompassing the mid-ninth to the mid-tenth centuries; these were initially established for offensive or raiding purposes, though some developed trading and other economic functions'.[383] Following Kelly and Maas, he identifies a number of key features shared by *longphuirt*, including a riverside location, a D-shaped enclosure, and a position at a pre-existing Irish political or territorial boundary.[384] Although Sheehan notes that pre-existing enclosures or natural features like islands could also have been used by Vikings as temporary military encampments, he argues that 'the location and morphology of several potential *longphuirt* do, in fact, conform in a rather striking manner to one another, and it is not, consequently, unreasonable to describe the *longphort* as a monument-type'.[385] Sheehan's carefully limited definition of a *longphort* and the combination of morphological and documentary evidence he provides to support his argument are compelling, and it is possible that there is a genuine early Viking Age monument type that can be equated with the early mentions of *longphuirt* in the annals. Indeed, as Harrison has pointed out, the concept has taken root very strongly among archaeologists and historians: 'In little more than a decade, Irish archaeology has moved from a situation where no *longphuirt* had ever been identified archaeologically to one

[382] Valante, *The Vikings in Ireland*', 38.
[383] John Sheehan, The *Longphort* in Viking Age Ireland', *Acta Archaeologica* 79 (2008), 283.
[384] E.P. Kelly and J. Maas, 'The Vikings and the kingdom of Laois', in P.G. Lane and W. Nolan, eds., *Laois History and Society: interdisciplinary essays on the history of an Irish county*, Dublin, 1999, 123-60.
[385] Sheehan, The *Longphort* in Viking Age Ireland', 285-6.

where it is widely believed that a 'typical' *longphort* is a D-shaped enclosure adjacent to water and often close to the confluence of two rivers'.[386]

This emerging orthodoxy is not without problems, however, particularly as regards the perceived non-military functions of *longphort* sites. To date, only one *longphort* site has been excavated, analyzed and published, and unlike the other potential *longphuirt* identified by Kelly, Sheehan and others, it was located by accident rather than on the basis of surviving surface remains.[387] This is Woodstown, Co. Waterford, located a few kilometres upriver from Waterford city on the southern bank of the river Suir (see below, Fig. 4.1). As will be discussed further below, in the absence of other excavated examples, Woodstown has begun to be used as a 'model' *longphort* site, which creates new problems of definition.

A fuller interpretation of the *longphort* phenomenon must await further excavations at possible *longphort* sites, and it is to be hoped that new evidence will help to resolve the problems outlined above. However, there is a significant amount of other archaeological material related to the early Viking Age in Ireland upon which to draw. Information from early Viking Age pagan burials, silver hoards, and various single finds of artefacts all add to the picture of interactions between the Vikings and the Irish in the ninth and tenth centuries.[388] Bradley has argued that there was probably a substantial rural and agrarian element to early Viking settlement in Ireland, and he identifies a number of possible rural Scandinavian or Hiberno-Scandinavian settlements on the basis of architectural styles,

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[386] Stephen Harrison, 'Academic review of Woodstown 6- the identification, contextualization and interpretation of an early Viking Age site in Co. Waterford', in ACS Limited, *Woodstown 6 SRP*, 2007, 28. Some remain convinced, following for example: Eamonn Kelly, 'Vikings on the Barrow: Dunrally fort, a possible Viking longphort in County Laois', *Archaeology Ireland* 9:3 (Autumn 1995): 30-2; Eamonn Kelly and Edmond O'Donovan, 'A Viking *longphort* near Athlunkard, Co. Clare', *Archaeology Ireland* 12:4 (Winter 1998): 13-6.

[387] At the time of writing, excavations at Annagassan, Co. Louth have begun, under the direction of Dr. Mark Clinton, but no publications or reports of the findings have been forthcoming.

[388] For an overview, see, Raghnall Ó Floinn, 'The Archaeology of the Early Viking Age in Ireland', in Clarke, Ó Floinn and Ní Mhaonaigh, *Ireland and Scandinavia in the Early Viking Age*, Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1998, 131-65.

Viking-style graves and a variety of diagnostic artefacts.[389] Beginish, Co. Kerry, for instance, has been interpreted as the home of a peaceful group of Scandinavians or Hiberno-Scandinavians whose settlement served as a way-station for boats travelling along the west coast.[390] The identification of Viking rural settlements in Ireland is challenging, and sites at which only one or two diagnostic artefacts are found remain hard to interpret as definitely Scandinavian or definitely Irish. However, the possibility of fairly widespread Viking rural settlement in Ireland must be considered in any interpretation of their impact on pre-existing Irish settlement patterns and their developing role in Irish society.

One area of Viking activity in Ireland that has already produced some important insights is the study of Viking silver hoards. Over the past several years, Sheehan has gathered data and analysed the contents of the Irish Viking Age silver hoards, of which there are over 130 known examples.[391] These can be categorized as coin hoards, hoards composed of non-numismatic silver, and hoards comprised of both coins and non-numismatic silver objects. Most of these hoards have deposition dates in the ninth and tenth centuries, roughly between 850 and 950, and the majority of these early Viking Age hoards are coinless or contain a mixture of coins and non-numismatic silver. Coin hoards typically date to the late tenth century or later, when coin hoarding, and then coin production at Dublin's mint, established c. 997, became the norm. This broad trend parallels the emergence of coin-based economies in other parts of the Viking trade network, but Sheehan argues that the Irish case is unique, in the sense that there was no

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[389] John Bradley, 'The interpretation of Scandinavian settlement in Ireland', in John Bradley, ed., *Settlement and Society*, 1988, 49-78.

[390] John Sheehan, Steffen Stummann Hansen and Donnchadh Ó Corráin, 'A Viking Age maritime haven: a reassessment of the island settlement at Beginish, Co. Kerry', *Journal of Irish Archaeology* 10 (2001), 93-119.

[391] John Sheehan, 'Silver and Gold Hoards: Status, Wealth and Trade in the Viking Age', *Archaeology Ireland* Vol. 9, No. 3 (1995), 19-22; John Sheehan, 'Viking Age Hoards from Munster: A Regional Tradition?', in M. Monk and J. Sheehan, eds., *Early Medieval Munster: archaeology, history and society*, Cork: Cork University Press, 1998, 147-63; John Sheehan, 'Early Viking Age Silver Hoards from Ireland and their Scandinavian Elements', in Clarke, Ó Floinn and Ní Mhaonaigh, *Ireland and Scandinavia in the Early Viking Age*, Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1998, 166-202; John Sheehan, 'Ireland's Early Viking-Age Silver Hoards: Components, Structure and Classification', *Acta Archaeologica* 71 (2000), 49-63; John Sheehan, 'Social and Economic Integration in Viking-age Ireland: the Evidence of the Hoards', in Hines, Lane and Redknap, *Land, Sea and Home*, SMA Monograph Series, 2004, 177-88.

developed weight-based silver economy in place before the introduction of minting. Rather, he argues that it was the collection, circulation and hoarding of foreign coins that most directly contributed to the establishment of a mint at Dublin.[392]

However, this is not to say that there was no exchange based around silver bullion in the early Viking Age. In order to better understand how that early silver economy function, Sheehan proposes the reclassification of the coinless and mixed hoards into 5 categories based on the composition of their non-coin components: Class 1 hoards contain complete ornaments only; Class 2 complete ingots only; Class 3 a combination of complete ornaments and complete ingots; Class 4 complete ornaments and ingots along with hacksilver; Class 5 hacksilver only.[393] He argues that this non-numismatic component of mixed or coinless hoards is the key to understanding their economic and social role. Broadly speaking, hacksilver is viewed as evidence for the hoard's role in a weight-based silver economy, while intact ornaments are seen as having social value as status objects rather than direct monetary value. These are the extremes, and hoards of Classes 2 and 3, which contain complete ingots or both ingots and ornaments, are interpreted as 'potentially active', in the sense that the ingots represent the melting down of other silver objects in recognition of their value as bullion rather than as finished ornaments.[394] Sheehan's proposed reclassification scheme allows for a more nuanced understanding of the social and economic functions of individual hoards, making the most of the insights to be gained from such finds.

The locations from which hoards have been recovered can also provide information about trade and exchange, and about the nature of interactions between the Norse and the native Irish in this period. Hoards are usually assumed to have been buried for safe keeping, particularly in times of uncertainty or warfare; peak years for coin-hoard

[392] Sheehan, 'Ireland's Early Viking-Age Silver Hoards', 62.
[393] Sheehan, 'Ireland's Early Viking-Age Silver Hoards', 57-62; Sheehan, 'Social and Economic Integration in Viking-Age Ireland', 181-7.
[394] Sheehan, 'Social and Economic Integration in Viking-Age Ireland', 187.

deposition, for instance, seem to cluster around 980, when Máel Sechlainn, king of Tara, inflicted a heavy defeat on the Vikings.[395] Most hoards are not, however, recovered from Scandinavian or Hiberno-Scandinavian contexts, but from settlement sites in Irish-controlled territory. Hoard find spots include ringforts, as well as ecclesiastical sites and crannogs.[396] The presumed native Irish context in which these hoards were deposited is key to their interpretation, but as Sheehan explains, 'the means and processes by which the Irish acquired a large proportion of the Viking-age silver on record from Ireland are unclear'.[397] While the hoards could represent booty stolen on raids into Scandinavian settlements, it seems that most must represent more peaceful interactions. One suggestion is that this wealth accumulated as a result of cooperative slave trading between Irish kings and Viking leaders.[398] Trade in other commodities may also have been an important factor in the accumulation of this wealth, and Sheehan notes that the tenth century hoards found in ecclesiastical contexts are typically comprised of economically 'active' coins and ingots, rather than the 'passive' silver ornaments found elsewhere.[399] Coinless and mixed hoards, especially those made up of intact ornaments and ingots, may represent the tribute or gifts exchanged between Scandinavians and Irish leaders as part of the process of securing political or military alliances. As Sheehan argues, 'the fact that a large proportion of the Viking-age silver from Ireland occurs in the form of armrings may serve to reinforce this hypothesis, for, as is suggested below, these objects may have primarily served as status objects in native Irish milieux'.[400]

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[395] Sheehan, 'Silver and Gold Hoards', 22.
[396] Sheehan, 'Early Viking Age Silver Hoards from Ireland', 175; Sheehan, 'Ireland's Early Viking-Age Silver Hoards', 54.
[397] Sheehan, 'Ireland's Early Viking-Age Silver Hoards', 54-5.
[398] M. Kenny, 'The geographical distribution of Irish Viking-age coin hoards', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 87C (1987), 518; Sheehan, 'Early Viking Age Silver Hoards from Ireland', 175-6.
[399] Sheehan, 'Early Viking Age Silver Hoards from Ireland', 55. Raghnall Ó Floinn has suggested that this is an indication of trade between some monastic communities and Viking settlements in the tenth century: 'The Archaeology of the Early Viking Age in Ireland', in Clarke, Ó Floinn and Ní Mhaonaigh, eds., *Ireland and Scandinavia in the Early Viking Age*, Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1998, 161.
[400] Sheehan, 'Ireland's Early Viking-Age Silver Hoards', 55.

In addition to these site-specific locations, the overall distribution of hoards across Ireland is telling. Few hoards have been recovered west of the Shannon, and there is a pronounced concentration of hoards in Leinster. The distribution of ninth and tenth century coinless hoards differs from that of coin-only or mixed hoards from the same period. Coinless hoards are fairly evenly distributed through east Ulster and Munster, with a slight concentration in the east midlands, but almost three-quarters of the provenanced coin-only or mixed hoards were found in northern Leinster, with only a few in Ulster or Munster.[401] As will be discussed further below, the hoards from Déisi territory are few, but generally conform to this Munster trend.[402]

Overall, the evidence derived from hoards provides unique insights into interactions between the Vikings and the Irish in this period, as well as into the developing structure of the Irish economy. In some ways, Sheehan's nuanced appraisal of the silver hoard data presents a challenge to historians and archaeologists, who must re-examine their evidence in order to better understand the types of exchanges, relationships and interactions that led to the accumulation of so much silver in Irish hands. Moreover, the sheer weight of this silver, as Sheehan has pointed out, indicates that at least certain segments of the Irish economy were functioning far above a subsistence level in the Viking Age, or the surpluses needed to amass such wealth would not have been obtainable. This should provoke a greater appreciation of the sophistication and intensity of the agrarian economic base upon which Irish society depended in the ninth and tenth centuries. With these general considerations in mind, the next section will explore the archaeology of the early Viking Age in the Déisi kingdom, in an effort to assess the local impact of Viking incursions and settlement in this case study area.

4.9 The Archaeology of the Early Viking Age in the Déisi Kingdom

[401] Sheehan, 'Early Viking Age Silver Hoards from Ireland', 173 and Fig. 6.4.
[402] Sheehan, 'Viking Age Hoards from Munster: A Regional Tradition?', 148-9.

As discussed above, the documentary evidence for Viking activity in the Déisi kingdom in the ninth and tenth centuries is considerable. Although the excavations in Waterford City have not revealed any evidence for settlement there before the eleventh century, the recent discovery of the settlement at Woodstown, further inland on the Suir, has shed new light on the early Viking period in southeastern Ireland (see Fig. 4.1). A number of archaeologists and historians have endeavoured to place this site in context, but Woodstown is not without its challenges, and the problems of interpretation it has provoked will be discussed in the next section. In particular, there is a need for Woodstown to be reconsidered against the backdrop of pre-existing settlement patterns in the region.

Woodstown and the *Longphort* Debate

In 2003, archaeological testing along the proposed route of the N25 resulted in the discovery of a large concentration of features. ACS Ltd. undertook a fuller investigation of the extent and character of the site, including a program of geophysical survey and excavation which revealed a large, d-shaped riverside enclosure, over 400m in length, defined by a series of enclosing ditches. The interior of the enclosure, and the space immediately outside the ditch were evidently used for a variety of domestic and industrial activities, and radiocarbon dates and artefacts suggested that the site was in use in the early medieval or early Hiberno-Norse period. In 2004, further investigation, including metal

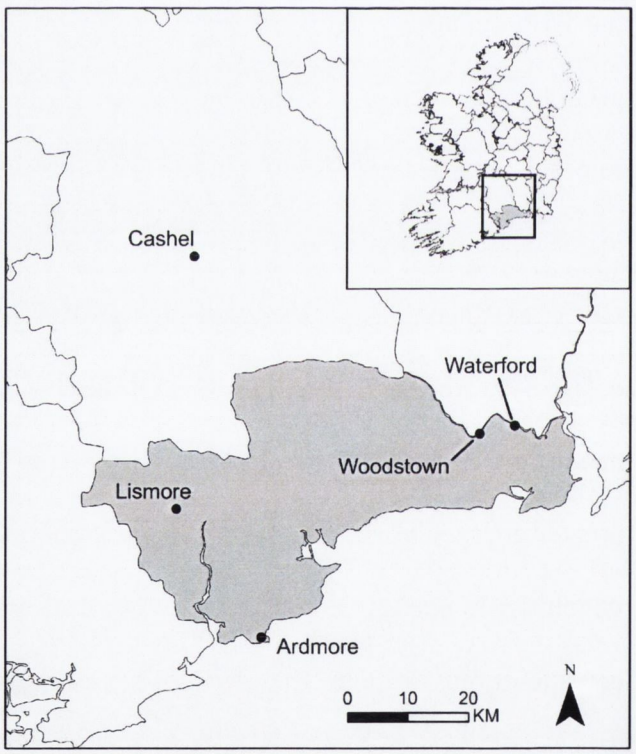

Fig. 4.1: Woodstown, in the Déisi Kingdom

detecting and sieving of topsoil, excavation, and geophysical and underwater surveys, recovered a substantial assemblage of artefacts and produced a clearer overall picture of the site's form and function.[403]

At this stage, the excavators characterized the site as a multi-period, multi-functional site, and on the basis of a number of radiocarbon dates, determined that it might have been in use from as early as the fifth century until the middle of the eleventh century. Given the rich artefact assemblage and the presence of some typically ecclesiastical metal objects, the excavators postulated that the site could even have had an ecclesiastical character during an early medieval, pre-Viking phase.[404] The excavators found no evidence to indicate that the site had been abandoned prior to the arrival of the Vikings and the beginning of their phase of occupation in the mid-ninth century.[405]

The Viking phase was clearly represented by an array of metal finds, including hack-silver and ingots, an enormous collection of lead trade weights, and some possible ship-rivets, as well as by a furnished warrior burial located outside the enclosing ditch.[406] Although the grave lacked a skeleton due to the acidity of the soil, it contained an unusually full complement of grave-goods, including a sword, spearhead, axe, shield, honestone, and a copper-alloy pin.[407] During this phase of occupation, the inhabitants re-cut the enclosing ditch, and may have fortified the enclosure with a palisade, but were apparently not overly concerned with defence, allowing the ditch to silt up, and even using it for industrial work. The excavators envisioned the site as having been used during this phase for habitation, metalworking, and trade, and the evidence seemed to indicate the abandonment of the site in the mid-eleventh century.[408]

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[403] Richard O'Brien and Ian Russell, 'The Hiberno-Scandinavian site of Woodstown 6, County Waterford', in Jerry O'Sullivan and Michael Stanley, eds., *Recent Archaeological Discoveries on National Road Schemes 2004*. NRA Monograph Series 2 (2005), 111-24.
[404] Ibid., 118-20.
[405] O'Brien and Russell, 'The Hiberno-Scandinavian site of Woodstown 6', 124.
[406] Siobhán McNamara, 'Woodstown 6: the finds', in O'Sullivan and Stanley, 2005, 125-30.
[407] O'Brien and Russell, 'The Hiberno-Scandinavian site of Woodstown 6', 121-2.
[408] Ibid., 122-3.

In 2007, as a follow-on and summary of post-excavation work, the archaeological team that had excavated Woodstown undertook a supplementary research project (SRP).[409] The project was intended to survey all of the relevant historical and archaeological material pertaining to Woodstown, and to offer a final assessment of the site in its regional and historical context. While the project generally confirmed the excavators' original interpretation of the site, it re-evaluated some of their initial chronological conclusions. On the basis of radiocarbon dates, the excavators had postulated both pre-Viking and Viking phases of occupation. However, on further analysis, many of the early dates were found to have come from pieces of oak located in ditch fills. Many of these did not fit either with the stratigraphic sequence or with dates obtained from other samples and from datable artefacts in the same contexts. In the SRP, Harrison argues that the early dates were attributable to the 'old wood' effect, which occurs when radiocarbon dates are taken from the inner, older rings of a very long-lived tree. This can throw the date range off by hundreds of years in certain cases. Thus, while there were certainly multiple, layered occupation phases at Woodstown, the report states that the site should be interpreted as essentially a ninth-tenth century, early Viking Age site, rather than one with a significant, long-term pre-Viking phase.[410]

A considerable number of archaeologists and historians have followed up the many questions raised by the excavations at Woodstown, and in doing so, have drawn Woodstown into a series of ongoing academic debates. Prior to the discovery of Woodstown, documentary sources were the only evidence for the early Viking Age in southeastern Ireland, because excavations in Waterford town to date have only uncovered occupation layers from the eleventh century and later. In light of the new archaeological

[409] ACS Limited, *Woodstown 6 Supplementary Research Project*, <www.environ.ie/en/Heritage/Archaeology-NationalMonumentsService/>, July 2007.
[410] Harrison, 'Academic review of Woodstown 6', 19-21.

evidence, several scholars have offered reassessments of the documentary evidence for Viking activity in the southeast in the ninth and tenth centuries.

Some have endeavoured to find direct geographical and chronological links between Woodstown and the documentary record. In his review of the evidence, Etchingham highlights annalistic references to Viking raiding and fighting in southeastern Ireland throughout the 820s, 830s and 840s. He discusses the earliest references in the Irish annals to Vikings based in Waterford harbour, starting in the 860s. Many other annalistic entries from the mid-ninth century onward mention Viking activity within easy distance of Waterford or Woodstown, and both Valante and Etchingham argue that the raiders involved may well have come from bases at either or both of those locations. [411]

On a more specific level, Etchingham raises the possibility that Woodstown might represent the *Camas Ua Fothaid Tíre* mentioned in the twelfth century epic *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gaillaibh* (*CGG*). The text mentions the landing of a large fleet of ships at this location, some time in the early ninth century. Etchingham more tentatively hypothesizes that the name of this lineage of the Déisi, the Uí Fhothaid, might have given Woodstown its name. He envisions that the original name might have been *Baile Ua Fothaid*, which was subsequently Anglicized to Woodstown.[412] Etchingham's suggestion that the *Camas* may be related to Woodstown is pursued further by Ó Cíobháin, who argues that the natural feature of the *Camas*, or river bend, described in the *CGG* was probably to be found at Mount Congreve, slightly further upriver. He suggests that the more permanent settlement at Woodstown was a later development in Norse activity in the area, established once they had a firmer foothold in the region. [413]

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[411] Colmán Etchingham, 'Woodstown and Viking Waterford: the historical context', *Save Viking Waterford Action Group*, <www.vikingwaterford.com>, 7 October 2004. Mary Valante, *The Vikings in Ireland: Settlement, Trade and Urbanization*, Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2008, 43-4.
[412] Etchingham, 'Woodstown and Viking Waterford'.
[413] Breandán Ó Cíobháin, '*Camas Ó bhFathaid Tíre*: A note on its location and significance', *Save Viking Waterford Action Group*, <www.vikingwaterford.com>, 25 January 2005.

Chronologically, Etchingham points out that many of the early stories about Waterford Vikings appear to be intertwined with the career of Cerball mac Dúngaile, king of Osraige between about 848 and 888. [414] Swift discusses the fact that the date range on most of the silver artefacts from Woodstown places them in the mid to late ninth century, further corroboration that the rise of the settlement was at least chronologically linked to Cerball mac Dúngaile's career. [415]

All of this work by Downham, Etchingham, Swift, Valante and others appears to demonstrate that the existence and location of Woodstown fit in well with the image of the early Viking Age in the southeast presented in the available documentary sources. However, debate is ongoing about Woodstown's function, and whether or not the site should be considered a *longphort*, one of the temporary military encampments from which the Vikings conducted raids. As noted in the SRP, the bulk of the excavated evidence does not seem to indicate that Woodstown's function was primarily military. [416] Although weapons and a furnished burial were found on the site, their presence is arguably indicative of the occupants' high status rather than their day-to-day activities. The enclosing ditch itself is not massive, and was not maintained in a way that would indicate that effective defences were vital to the survival of the settlement.

In addition, many of the metal finds are indicative of economic, perhaps trading activity. Much of the silver found on the site is hack-silver, which Sheehan has argued is indicative of its use in commercial transactions in the absence of or alongside coinage.[417] Along with the hack-silver, the other strong indicator of trade is the large assemblage of over 200 lead weights recovered from Woodstown, which were used to measure small

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[414] Etchingham, 'Woodstown and Viking Waterford'.
[415] Catherine Swift, 'Woodstown: Viking Chiefs, Irish Kings and Exported Princesses', *Save Viking Waterford Action Group* <vikingwaterford.com> 12 June 2008, 5-14.
[416] Harrison, 'Academic review of Woodstown 6', 31-9.
[417] John Sheehan, 'Social and economic integration in Viking-age Ireland: the evidence of the hoards', in J. Hines, A. Lane and M. Redknap, eds., *Land, Sea and Home*, Society for Medieval Archaeology Monograph Series 20 (Leeds: Maney, 2004), 187.

quantities of metals, particularly silver.[418] Harrison has pointed out the similarities and differences between Woodstown and sites like Torksey or Llanbedrgoch. Among other functions, both of these sites have been characterized as possible sites of trading activity, and while both had both hack-silver and trade weights in their artefact assemblages, neither came close to rivalling the concentration of those finds at Woodstown. On this basis, Harrison argues that Woodstown 'must be considered the most important Viking Age trading centre yet discovered on the south coast of Ireland'.[419]

Manufacture and industrial work also seem to have been important activities at Woodstown. The most visible, and perhaps most prevalent, was metalworking, as demonstrated by a number of finds, including furnace and mould fragments, hearths and slag. Most of this activity was ironworking, although some work in silver and other metals appears to have taken place as well. A number of rivets may indicate that clinker-built ships were dismantled or repaired at the site, and various other tools associated with woodworking and textile production provide evidence for those types of activities.[420] By contrast, the only evidence for food production and processing comes in the form of a few fishhooks and a sickle, and little can be said about the diet of Woodstown's inhabitants.[421]

On balance, the excavated evidence does not appear to support the idea that Woodstown was a primarily military site, and although questions remain about the daily lives of its inhabitants, many activities seem to have been regarded as more important than defence. In the SRP, Harrison summarizes his analysis by emphasizing the rich, Hiberno-Norse material culture of the site, and its apparently close connection with the insular Scandinavian weight-based economy of the time.[422] He argues that the economic

[418] McNamara, 'Woodstown 6- the finds', 127-8.
[419] Harrison, 'Academic review of Woodstown 6', 35-6.
[420] McNamara, 'Woodstown 6- the finds', 126.
[421] Harrison, 'Academic review of Woodstown 6', 37.
[422] Ibid., 25-6.

complexity and overall wealth of Woodstown should be regarded as paramount in its interpretation, and he declines to characterize the site as a *longphort*.[423]

Other scholars, however, have tended to use the term *longphort* to describe Woodstown, perhaps as a form of shorthand. This is true of articles published in the immediate aftermath of the excavations, but the characterization has persisted in more recent survey publications when they mention Woodstown. In their 2004 articles, Swift and Downham both refer to Woodstown as a *longphort*, and highlight both the military or defensive aspects of the site and its apparent role in some level of manufacturing and long-distance trade.[424] In his largely documents-based discussion on the location of *Camas Ó bhFathaid Tíre*, Ó Cíobháin has proposed a teleological or evolutionary progression of Norse settlement in this area. He argues that Woodstown might be the third *longphort* in a succession of sites along the Suir of increasing size, permanence and proximity to the Three Sisters estuary. The earliest of these, he argues, was at Mount Congreve, or *Camas Ó bhFathaid Tíre*, the second at Rocketscastle, then Woodstown, and finally Waterford.[425] While there may have been other Norse settlements in this region, of various morphological types and serving a variety of purposes, there is no evidence to suggest that such a neat progression in both time and space occurred in this case.

The image of Woodstown as a possible model *longphort* site has begun to appear in more general discussions on the early Viking Age in Ireland. In a survey article on the archaeological evidence for Scandinavian settlement in Ireland, Wallace cites Woodstown as a potential archaeological example of a *longphort*, or at least of a ninth century 'fortified base', highlighting its military significance and parallels with other sites in Ireland and Britain.[426] Sheehan uses evidence from Dublin and Woodstown to support his argument

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[423] Ibid., 46-7.
[424] Clare Downham, 'The Historical Importance of Viking Age Waterford', 71-96; Swift, 'Woodstown: Viking Chiefs, Irish Kings and Exported Princesses'.
[425] Ó Cíobháin, '*Camas Ó bhFathaid Tíre*'.
[426] Patrick F. Wallace, 'Archaeological Evidence for the Different Expressions of Scandinavian Settlement in Ireland, 840-1100', in Stefan Brink and Neil Price, eds., *The Viking World*, London: Routledge, 2008, 434-8.

that *longphuirt* may have been intentionally established for the purposes of trade, rather than simply for military reasons.[427]

In other words, although the excavators never characterized Woodstown as a *longphort*, it has come to be labelled as one by the majority of scholars who mention it in their work. In many of the articles mentioned, the authors' use of evidence highlights the problematic nature of the *longphort* concept: when they discuss the military and defensive aspects of the site, they draw largely on written sources, and attempt to determine Woodstown's role in early Viking Age activity by grouping it together with other *longphuirt* described in the documentary sources. As the only excavated example of a *longphort*, Woodstown takes on the role of an exemplar or model site, and comes to redefine its own classification. Because the excavated evidence from Woodstown indicates that metalworking and trade were its most significant functions, the term *longphort* has begun to take on these characteristics, ones that it never had when its definition was derived from documentary sources. Although it is undoubtedly useful not to underestimate the capacity of such sites to change or develop additional functions over time, it is important to remain cautious about attributing complex multi-functionality to unexcavated sites that are believed to fall into the same site type.

This blurring of definitions is not dissimilar to the overall debate on Irish urbanization and town development, and indeed, Woodstown and the concept of the *longphort* have come to occupy an intermediate position between the essentially rural settlement pattern in pre-Viking Ireland and the establishment of towns at a few coastal locations during the Viking Age. Based on the assumption that the *longphort* represents the earliest Viking settlement form, there has been an attempt to interpret the preliminary phases of Irish urbanization based on the evidence from Woodstown. The presumed continuity of some *longphuirt*, like Dublin, right down to the present day, has led some

[427] Sheehan, 'The *longphort* in Viking Age Ireland', 282-95.

scholars to ask why Woodstown 'failed'. This brings up questions about the possible chronological, political and economic relationship between Woodstown and Waterford. However, underlying all of the discussions about Woodstown and urbanization is a largely unspoken notion of what constitutes a town. As discussed in Chapter 1, long-distance trade, as facilitated and stimulated by the Vikings, is often seen as the major catalyst for urbanization in early medieval Ireland. When interpreting evidence for trade at Woodstown in the form of lead weights and hack silver, many scholars argued that the site must have been important in a network of long-distance trade. Direct evidence for long-distance trade on the site included a fragment of a Middle Eastern *dirham*, a few glass and amber beads, and a single ivory bead, possibly walrus ivory from the north.[428] Despite the modesty of this assemblage of imported goods, almost every scholar who has written about Woodstown has characterized one of its functions as long-distance trade.

While the overall impression from the excavations at Woodstown indicates a considerable level of trade resulting in wealth, it also seems as though the bulk of the goods involved are missing. Swift and Harrison have put forward the suggestion that Woodstown was a settlement whose inhabitants were engaged in the collection, sale and export of slaves.[429] Valante has also strongly argued that one of the major aims of raids launched from sites like Woodstown was to gather captives to be sold as slaves.[430] Although the idea is compelling, there is no archaeological or direct historical evidence to indicate that Woodstown was a collection centre or market for slaves. Nevertheless, the possibility remains that the wealth of the site's inhabitants derived in some way from slave raiding and trading.

Although slave raiding might be expected to make Woodstown's inhabitants unpopular with their neighbours, there has also been some attempt to view Woodstown as a

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[428] McNamara, 'Woodstown 6- the finds', 127-8.
[429] Swift, 'Woodstown: Viking Chiefs, Irish Kings and Exported Princesses', 5-14; Harrison, 'Academic review of Woodstown 6', 37-8.
[430] Valante, *The Vikings in Ireland*, 86-90.

link between long-distance trade routes and the local Irish economy. As pointed out earlier, and as discussed by Harrison, very little, if anything is known about the relationship between Woodstown and its local economy.[431] In her analysis of the links between Woodstown and the Osraige king Cerball mac Dúngaile, Swift notes that according to the annals, Cerball held at least one fair, or *óenach*, during his reign. Swift suggests that Woodstown's inhabitants would have been important participants in the market held on such occasions, selling their imported or manufactured goods to wealthy locals.[432] This could include Munster-style metalwork, which Valante has suggested may have been produced at Woodstown.[433] Although these preliminary thoughts are probably on the right track, there is still a good deal of work to be done on Woodstown's position within the pre-existing, local networks of exchange.

In other words, discussions of Woodstown's function have tended to revolve around activities that are viewed as key features of towns or indicators of urbanization. Despite this, there have been no articles that specifically propose classifying Woodstown as a town. One problem may be that the relationship between the settlement and its hinterland is unclear. Another may be that historians and archaeologists alike have an additional set of criteria in mind. For instance, it is possible that if definite evidence for house plots had been found, Woodstown would be referred to as a town. As it stands, in the conclusion of his portion of the SRP, Harrison states that, 'It is even tempting to consider it [Woodstown] as a 'proto-urban' site'.[434] Having observed features of 'proto-' or 'incipient' urbanism at Woodstown, a few scholars have raised questions about the site's 'failure' to develop into a town.[435]

This leads naturally to an investigation of the relationship between the 'failed' settlement at Woodstown and the 'successful' one at Waterford. Excavations at Waterford

[431] Harrison, 'Academic review of Woodstown 6', 38.
[432] Swift, 'Woodstown: Viking Chiefs, Irish Kings and Exported Princesses', 14.
[433] Valante, *The Vikings in Ireland*, 45.
[434] Harrison, 'Academic review of Woodstown 6', 46.
[435] Etchingham, 'Woodstown and Viking Waterford', 13; Valante, *The Vikings in Ireland*, 107-8.

town to date have not provided data to suggest a chronological overlap between the two sites, and excavations at Woodstown did not indicate a specific, datable abandonment event. Therefore, in the absence of conclusive evidence, few scholars have ventured to commit to a theory on the chronological relationship between the two sites. In the SRP, Harrison summarizes the possibilities: 1) Woodstown was abandoned prior to settlement at Waterford; 2) the founders of Waterford suppressed and forcibly moved the inhabitants of Woodstown; or 3) Waterford and Woodstown were inhabited simultaneously for some period of time, and Woodstown went out of use gradually.[436] Generally speaking, the resolution of this line of questioning must wait for further excavations in Waterford to provide insights into the date, form and character of the earliest settlement at the mouth of the Suir.

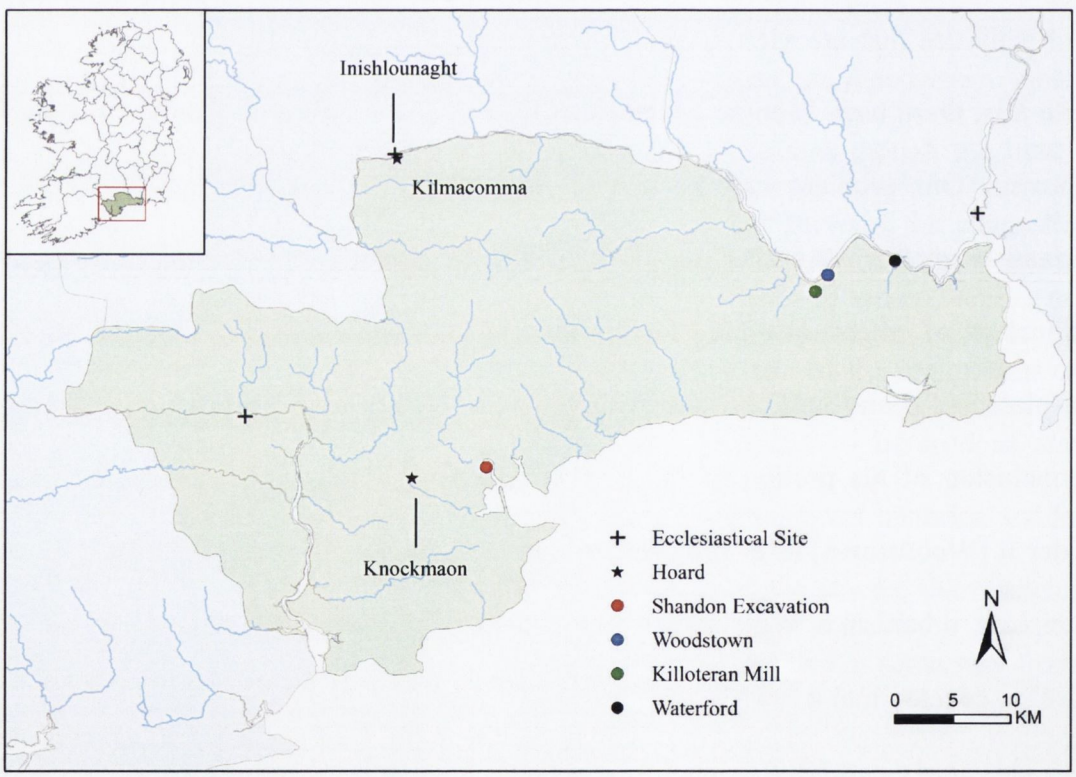

Fig. 4.2: Early Viking age silver hoards near Woodstown, Co. Waterford

[436] Harrison, 'Academic review of Woodstown 6', 44-5.

4.10 Woodstown, Munster and the Déisi Kingdom: Further Possibilities

The possible relationship between Woodstown and Waterford is only one facet of Woodstown's role in its local and regional patterns of settlement and networks of communication and exchange. In order to better understand Woodstown, it is important to look at it in relation to other evidence for economic activity and settlement, both Viking and Irish, in its vicinity. Sheehan's work on Munster silver hoards of the ninth and tenth centuries provides one avenue of inquiry, while analysis of the pre-existing settlement pattern around Woodstown provides another.

Two Viking age silver hoards have been discovered in Co. Waterford, one from a ringfort in the townland of Kilmacomma, on the banks of the Suir in northern Waterford, and one from the townland of Knockmaon, inland from Dungarvan, in the southeastern part of the county (see Fig. 4.2). The Kilmacomma hoard is a coinless hoard consisting entirely of hack-silver, mostly derived from ingots and arm-rings, as well as a fragment of a circular-sectioned silver rod, and a piece of silver wire.[437] On the basis of the hoard's contents, Sheehan proposes that it was deposited between approximately 880 and 940, and he notes that this collection of hacksilver, in the absence of coins, complete ingots or complete ornaments, is paralleled by only three other Irish hoards found to date.[438] Sheehan argues that the best point of comparison for the contents of the Kilmacomma hoard is, in fact, the assemblage of hacksilver from Woodstown, some kilometres downstream on the Suir. The hoard was deposited in an Irish-controlled area, in the bank of one of several ringforts in the townland, and across the river from the ecclesiastical site at Inishlounaght, Co. Tipperary, where another single find of ornament-derived hacksilver has also been discovered. Although he acknowledges the difficulty of reconstructing the interactions behind the hoard's collection and deposition, Sheehan argues that the silver in

[437] John Sheehan, 'The Viking-Age Silver Hoard from Kilmacomma, Co Waterford: A Woodstown Connection?', *Peritia* 20 (2008), 277-8.
[438] Sheehan, 'The Viking-Age Silver Hoard from Kilmacomma', 286-7, 291.

the Kilmacomma hoard originated at Woodstown.[439] As discussed above, hacksilver is considered economically 'active', meaning that the accumulation of the hoard was related to trade or monetary payment, rather than gift-exchange or tribute. However, questions remain as to when and by whom the fragmentation of this silver occurred, and why the hacksilver was gathered together to be deposited as a hoard. While the possibility of trade between Woodstown and the Déisi people living in Kilmacomma remains intriguing, the nature of these exchanges remains challenging to determine.

The second hoard, from Knockmaon, is somewhat later in date than the Kilmacomma assemblage. The Knockmaon hoard dates to around 1000, and is a mixed hoard comprised of a combination of coins and hacksilver derived from silver ornaments, specifically Scotto-Scandinavian 'ring-money'.[440] In this sense, it is both temporally and culturally distinct from the Kilmacomma hoard, despite the presence of hacksilver in both cases. However, the Knockmaon hoard is also unusual among Munster hoards more generally because mixed or coin hoards from the later tenth and eleventh centuries are comparatively rare outside of north Leinster and the midlands.[441] The implications of the presence and contents of this hoard will be discussed further in the next chapter, in its eleventh century context. However, it is worth noting that Knockmaon is only about ten kilometres west of the townland of Shandon, near Dungarvan, where a ninth or tenth century bone trial piece of a Hiberno-Norse type was found in 1917.[442]

The Kilmacomma hoard in particular emphasizes the possibility that concentrations of Scandinavian-derived wealth were accumulating in the Déisi kingdom and passing into Irish hands to be deposited as hoards. This raises questions about the nature of the interactions between the Vikings based at Woodstown, and perhaps at other sites thus far

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[439] Sheehan, 'The Viking-Age Silver Hoard from Kilmacomma', 291-2.
[440] Sheehan, 'Viking Age Hoards from Munster', 157.
[441] Ibid.
[442] NMI reg. 1947:237. U. O'Meadhra, *Early Christian, Viking and Romanesque art. Motif pieces from Ireland, volume 2*, Stockholm, 1987, 55-6.

unknown, and the Déisi population. The documentary sources cannot provide insights into the political relations between the Déisi kings and the inhabitants of Woodstown. However, it may be that the most important relationships on a day-to-day level were between Woodstown's inhabitants and the local population, who controlled agricultural and natural resources in the immediate vicinity.

As mentioned earlier, there is little excavated evidence to indicate how the inhabitants of Woodstown supplied themselves with food. Given the overall paucity of tools, it is likely that they relied upon interactions with their neighbours to obtain agricultural produce. Whether this was in the form of mutual exchange, or something more power-structured like tribute or taxation is not possible to determine at the moment. What is certain, however, is that the produce had to be transported from the source to Woodstown. A similar situation would apply to metalworking, whether the goods produced were mostly used by the inhabitants, sold to locals or intended for sale abroad. Metalworking requires both metal, and a huge amount of fuel, which would have had to be obtained and transported, once again, from the local area surrounding Woodstown. If such exchanges were occurring over a series of generations, it might be logical to expect a certain level of specialization in the regional agrarian economy to serve the needs of Woodstown's population.[443]

The idea that the inhabitants of Woodstown were involved in the slave trade suggests the possibility that they were linked to longer distance networks within Ireland. Given their reliance on their neighbours for food and fuel, among other raw materials, it would seem unlikely that they also extracted captives for the slave trade from among their local area. This may indicate, as many scholars have argued, that they participated in the various raids recorded in the annals from this period. It may also have been one of the reasons for or the results of an alliance with warring native kings like Cerball mac

[443] Landers, *The Field and the Forge*, 112; Christopher Dyer, 'The Archaeology of Medieval Small Towns', *Medieval Archaeology* Vol. 47, Issue 1 (2003), 101.

Dúngaile. Either way, if slaves passed through Woodstown, they too had to be led or transported there from their homes or points of capture.

In other words, just in these very limited examples, it is possible to re-imagine Woodstown as a hub, with spokes radiating out along all of the various routes of travel to the places and groups of people with which it exchanged goods, services, raw materials, and information. One question, then, is whether or not this network grew outwards from Woodstown after it was established, or whether Woodstown was established where it was in order to take advantage of pre-existing routes of travel and communication.

Woodstown's location in the easternmost part of the Déisi kingdom, near its contested borders with the Osraige and Uí Chennselaig must have been known and valued by those who established the settlement. As mentioned earlier, several scholars have noted the possibility that Woodstown's inhabitants formed a strategic alliance with at least one king of Osraige. More obviously, the topography of the area in which Woodstown was established would seem to indicate that the area was well connected long before the Viking Age. The Suir estuary joins the estuaries of the Nore and the Barrow at Waterford Harbour, giving waterborne access to much of eastern Ireland. The Suir also connects the area around Woodstown to the important Blackwater valley, which linked the coast to the ecclesiastical centre at Lismore and the Eóganacht royal site at Cashel.

On a smaller scale, the local area around Woodstown also appears to have been intensively settled over a long period before the Viking age. Prehistory in the immediate area is well represented in the form of Bronze Age houses, *fulachta fiadh*, standing stones, and cist burials (see Fig. 4.3). While early medieval activity in this area is limited, what evidence there is indicates both wealth and a relative density of occupation. This is made particularly evident by the remarkably well-preserved, and very early tidal watermill that was excavated in Killoteran, just east of the houses in Adamstown (see Fig. 4.4 and 4.5). The complex, vertical-wheeled watermill has been radiocarbon dated to around the 6th

century.[444] The structure represents a large investment of skill and time on the part of its patrons and builders, and would have been able to process substantial amounts of grain during its period of use.[445] Again, to place this in perspective, the use of such a mill would mean the movement of people and their grain to and from this central location on a regular basis over a considerable period of time.

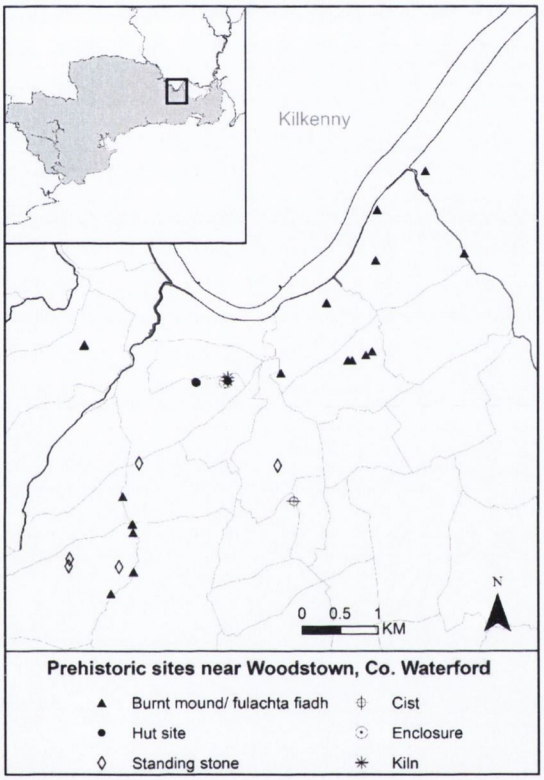

Fig. 4.3

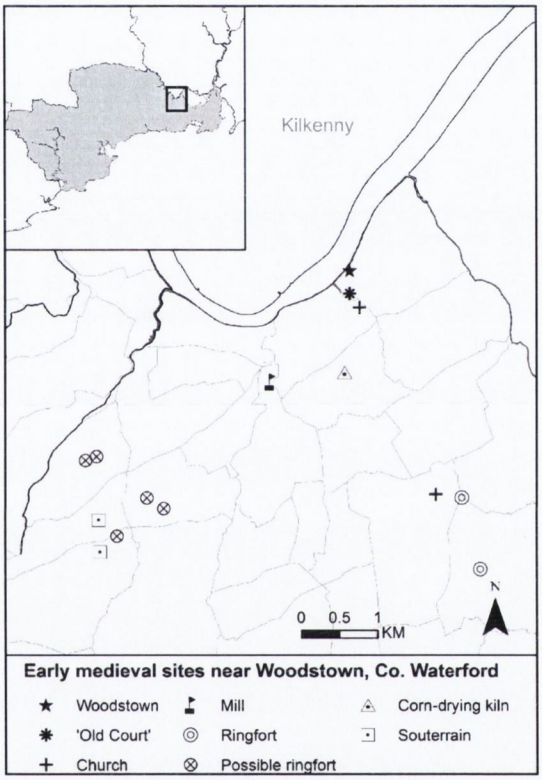

Fig. 4.4

[444] Bennett, *Excavations 2004*, 426-7.
[445] Niall Brady, 'Mills in Medieval Ireland: Looking Beyond Design', in Steve Walton, ed., *Wind and Water in the Middle Ages* (2006), 39-68.

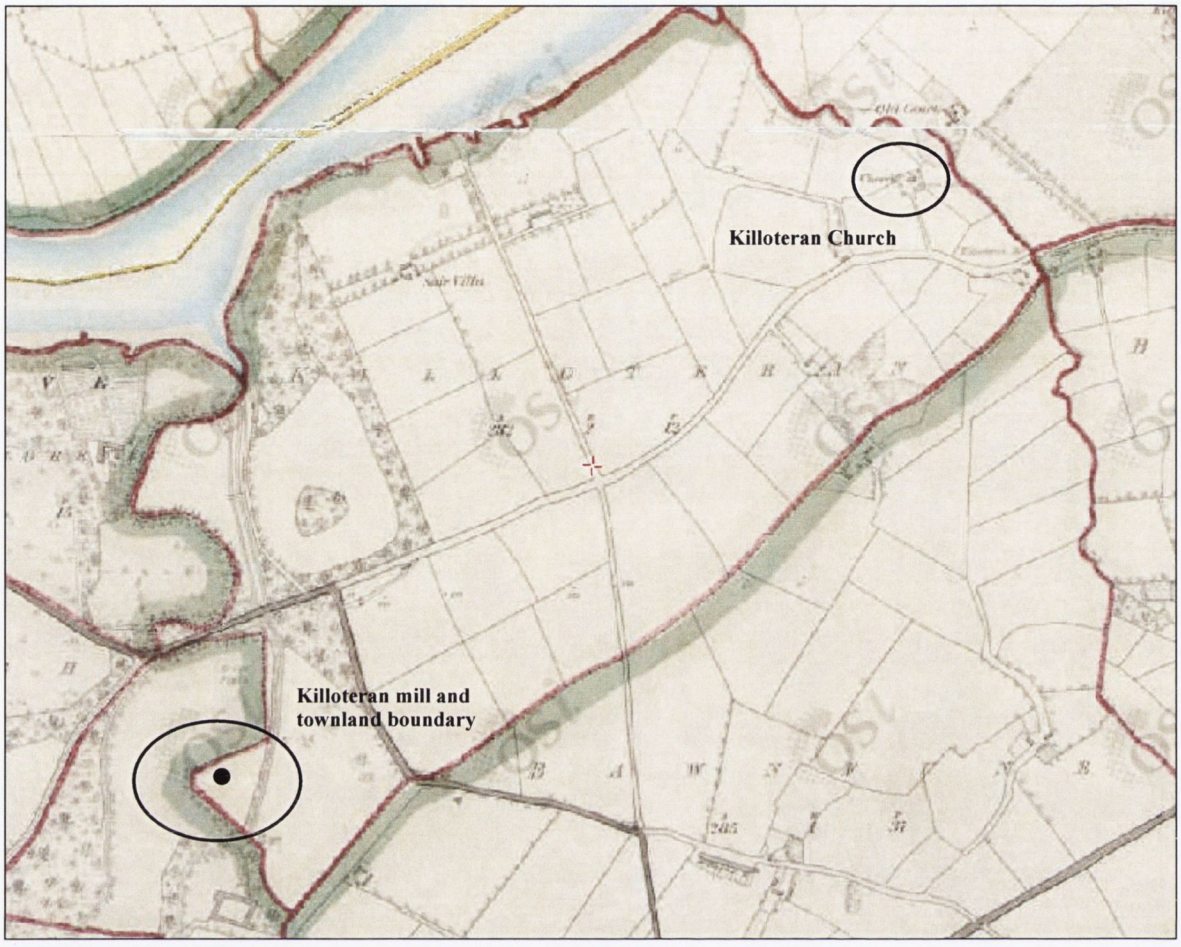

Fig. 4.5: Killoteran townland, 1st edition Ordnance Survey 6-inch map

The Killoteran townland boundary juts out into the marshy ground to include the site of the mill, and the excavators hypothesize that the mill may have been associated with Killoteran church,[446] located on drier ground to the west (see Fig. 4.5). Although the only extant church is an early modern structure with no evidence for older features, Harrison has argued that it may stand on the site of an older foundation. Considering the proximity of a holy well, and the townland's *cill-* placename, Harrison speculates that there must have been a church in Killoteran during the early medieval period. He believes that the church probably survived, and may have prospered during the Viking Age and perhaps up to the

[446] Bennett, *Excavations 2004*, 427.

Reformation.[447] While this theory cannot be tested conclusively at present, the idea of an early medieval church on this site remains a possibility. Such a church may have served as a living site for a certain number of clerics, and may also have represented the centre of a wider community, at which people would regularly gather for a variety of religious, social, economic and political activities. The church may have owned lands and supervised tenants, and would have maintained links with other neighbouring ecclesiastical communities. The flow of people, goods, raw material and information to and from this site may have been substantial.

Southwest and southeast of Woodstown and Killoteran, there are a number of other sites that indicate early medieval activity and settlement in the area. These include two souterrains, a corn-drying kiln, two definite ringforts, and a number of possible ringforts identified through analysis of the first edition Ordnance Survey maps and aerial photographs. There is also another possible early medieval church a few kilometres south of Killoteran in Kilronan. While none of these sites are directly associated with the early medieval mill or with Woodstown, their presence helps to fill in the gaps in our understanding of the wider settlement pattern of which Woodstown was a part.

In other words, from evidence currently available, it would seem that Woodstown was established in an area that had both regional political and military importance, and probably local importance within the agrarian economy. It seems very likely that Woodstown's founders intentionally selected this site in order to take advantage of its pre-existing level of spatial integration. If the Kilmacomma hoard is indeed related to trade between the Déisi further west and the inhabitants of Woodstown, this site can be said to have further increased spatial integration in the Déisi kingdom during its period of use. However, questions remain about the nature of the relationship between Woodstown's inhabitants and the Irish population among whom they settled. Did they settle there under

[447] Harrison, 'Academic review of Woodstown 6', 8-11.

the protection or at the behest of a particular individual or group? Did they have political or familial ties to their neighbours, lay or religious? Did they dominate the region, as some have envisioned, or was their position negotiated over time?

4.11 Conclusions

These questions cannot, at present, be answered, but some preliminary statements on the conclusions to be drawn from Woodstown can be made. First of all, urbanization seems to have been a joint initiative, whereby the local Irish agrarian economy provided the surplus necessary to allow for economic specializations like manufacturing and trade. The local economy provided the raw materials, and some level of demand for products, while longer-distance trade generated the bulk of wealth accumulated and redistributed through the trading sites. Traded commodities probably included slaves, but it would seem that in most cases, these could not have been captured from the local area, and must have been transported from further away. Whether we want to view Woodstown as a town or not is almost irrelevant, and whether or not it should be referred to as a *longphort* is even more so. The important questions for the history of Irish urbanization are all related to the ways in which pre-existing networks of communication and exchange allowed for the development of specialized economic activities, and how both the region and the newly-established settlements changed in response to one another over a period of time. As will be discussed in the next chapter, increasing specialization in both the agrarian and non-agrarian economies continued in the eleventh century, and the links between the populations and central places engaged in these activities are the key to understanding urbanization in pre-Norman Ireland.

Chapter 5

Ireland and the Déisi Kingdom in the Eleventh Century

5.1 Irish Kingship after the Battle of Clontarf, 1014-1100

One of the most famous events in Irish history, the battle of Clontarf was enshrined in Irish and Norse literature as a confrontation between the Irish and the foreigners in which the great Brian sacrificed his life to expel the Vikings once and for all from Ireland's shores.[1] In point of fact, the battle was the culmination of the long-running conflict between the Dál Cais and Limerick versus Leinster and Dublin, and Irish and Norse men fought on both sides.[2] By this point in the eleventh century, the idea of entirely uprooting the descendents of the Norse settlers was as impractical as it was undesirable; the Irish and Norse political, economic and social spheres had become far too intertwined. This is physically manifest in Irish sculpture and metalwork of the eleventh century, which was heavily influenced by Scandinavian styles.[3] At Killaloe, near Limerick, an eleventh century stone commemorates an individual by the Scandinavian name of Thorgrim with inscriptions in both ogam and runes.[4]

Despite these evocative indications of cultural intermingling, the annals still portray the Scandinavians as a distinct minority in the eleventh century, and it would be going too far to suggest that the two groups were indistinguishable. In the minds of many modern historians, the persistence of a Scandinavian identity is linked to the rise of the so-called 'Viking towns', whose urban character and connections to networks of long-distance trade made them distinctly different from the rest of the rural Irish culture and economy. To some extent this is true; the Irish towns in the eleventh century share a consistent material

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[1] Due in large part to the text *Cogadh Gaedhil re Gallaibh*. The battle also remained important in the Norse tradition. It is described with some awe in *Njal's Saga*, ed. and trans. Magnus Magnusson and Hermann Pálsson, 1960, ch. 154-7.
[2] Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, *Early Medieval Ireland, 400-1000*, 1995, 266-7.
[3] Ibid., 264-5.
[4] Damian McManus, *A Guide to Ogam*, Maynooth Monograph Series 4, 1991, 130.

culture that bears remarkable similarities to that of other contemporary towns in northwestern Europe. In this sense, perhaps it is more accurate to speak of the eleventh-century towns as participating in a broader northwest European urban culture, rather than a Scandinavian or even Hiberno-Norse culture.

While the coastal towns were linked both economically and culturally to a network of other towns, they were also fundamentally reliant on their rural surroundings. This has been explored by a number of scholars in recent years, including John Bradley and Mary Valante, and has been a major step in advancing the state of knowledge about the roles and functions of the Irish towns. This has come in the wake of excavations in Dublin, Waterford, and to a lesser extent in Wexford, Limerick and Cork, and each new piece of evidence makes the picture even clearer. Towns have been redefined in the minds of most archaeologists and historians to include, as a matter of necessity, the rural hinterland from which the towns' inhabitants drew food and raw materials.

There is still a lack of consensus, however, on the cultural composition of that rural hinterland, or its extent, or the mechanics of the relationship between town-dwellers and agriculturalists. There has also been little discussion on how the agriculturalists working to feed and supply the town interacted with other segments of the rural population economically, socially or politically. These are questions that can only be answered on a region by region basis, and it seems likely that there would be major variations from one place to another.

As will be discussed further below, archaeological evidence can help to provide preliminary answers to some of these questions. The historical evidence, however, makes one thing very clear. By the eleventh century, and for a variety of reasons, the towns were integral to Irish politics. Although their role, and their economic significance, had developed over a longer period of time, the relationship between control over the towns and successful regional kingship can be seen vividly from the early eleventh century

onwards. Brian Bóruma demonstrated a keen awareness of the value of controlling the coastal towns throughout his career. Hudson has argued that the battle of Clontarf was essentially related to Brian's need to establish his overlordship of Dublin, and that he had no desire to 'kill the goose that would continue to lay golden eggs'.[5]

Brian's interest in and ability to control the coastal towns may have been a major reason for his military and political successes, but the lasting popularity of his legacy as 'high king of Ireland' is attributable to his alliance with Armagh. In the entry on the battle of Clontarf in the *Annals of Ulster*, Brian is referred to as 'high king (*ard-rí*) of the Irish of Ireland and of the Foreigners and the Welsh, the Augustus of the whole of north-west Europe'.[6] In 1005, he held a council at Armagh and laid a quantity of gold on the altar before he departed. An inscription in the *Book of Armagh* states that on that occasion, the assembled secular lords and clergy declared or recognized him as the *imperator Scotorum*. After he was killed at Clontarf, Brian's body was taken to Armagh for burial, and both his legendary achievements and the position of 'high king of Ireland' that he supposedly held were subsequently strongly promoted by Armagh.

Byrne has argued that the concept of the high kingship of Ireland originated in Armagh and Iona before the ninth century, and that its reality at any given point in time was directly related to the strength of the Uí Neill kings of Tara.[7] He further argues that despite the efforts of Armagh in particular, the position of high king of Ireland never became a formalized, or even necessary, part of the political hierarchy. It was rather a 'prize to be won'.[8] However, prior to Brian's reign, the prize had always remained firmly in the hands of the Uí Néill lineages of Clann Cholmáin or Cenél Eógain, and firmly associated with the ancient royal seat at Tara.[9] Therefore, it is possible to argue that one of

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[5] Benjamin Hudson, *Irish Sea Studies 900-1200*, 2006, 26.
[6] AU1014.2
[7] F. J. Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001, 260.
[8] Ibid., 261.
[9] Ibid., 48-69.

the major results of Brian's career was the separation of the concept of high kingship of Ireland from the Uí Néill and from Tara.

Jaski, on the other hand, argues that the concept of high-kingship as it developed in the eleventh and twelfth centuries was genuinely a novelty. The rulers of Tara, according to Jaski, never came close to being high-kings of Ireland in any practical sense. Brian's successful challenge to Máel Sechnaill did help to bring about the end of the Uí Néill as a political force, and the final phase of Máel Sechnaill's reign, from the Battle of Clontarf to his death in 1022, must be seen as the 'last convulsions' of the Uí Néill.[10] The fall of the Uí Néill after 1022 opened the way for the military and political manoeuvring of various regional kings during the eleventh and early twelfth centuries.

The 'prize' of high kingship had to be won by force of arms, and this increasing militarism is an important feature of eleventh century Irish politics. Gathering and equipping men for ever more frequent and ever larger campaigns required a great deal of wealth, but precisely where this came from remains challenging to assess. According to Ó Cróinín, by this point in the eleventh century, regional kings 'were in a position to draw on economic and military resources that were unknown to their predecessors. This in turn meant that Irish kings could acquire powers and prerogatives which were new and different; they now exercised a degree of control and authority in their own provinces which none of their predecessors had enjoyed'.[11] This begins to look like a chicken-and-egg problem, and there is little documentary evidence to assist in finding a solution. By analogy with contemporary developments in England, it is possible to imagine that kings were becoming sufficiently organized and sufficiently powerful to extract taxes and military levies from the territories under their control. *Lebor na Cert*, which dates to the late eleventh century or twelfth century, deals with the rights and dues of the king of Cashel with respect to his tributary kings. Although the text stresses the rights of the sub-

[10] Bart Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession*, Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000, 227.
[11] Ó Cróinín, *Early Medieval Ireland*, 274.

kings rather than the dues they paid to the king of Cashel, it does contain some valuable information.[12] The king of Cashel is largely entitled to livestock and military service from his sub-kings, who in turn are given a combination of luxury goods and military materiel, including horses, hounds, swords, shields and ships.[13] There is, unfortunately, no way of knowing how often these rights and dues were enforced, and therefore no way of knowing how efficiently the system was organized.

However, some tentative conclusions can be drawn. For instance, as Swift has argued in the case of ship-gifts, the granting of military equipment was likely designed to strengthen the fighting force the over-king could command.[14] Swift also argues that the evidence from *Lebor na Cert* demonstrates the increasing importance that the kings of Cashel, and presumably other Irish regional kings, placed on controlling shipping in the Irish Sea during this time period. This leads to the second point, which is that by the eleventh century regional kings had clearly realized the potential benefits of gaining control over the increasingly wealthy coastal towns and their formidable fleets. This can be seen vividly by examining the annalistic evidence for the careers of the kings who followed in Brian Bóruma's footsteps to bid for the high kingship of Ireland in the eleventh century.

After Brian's death at Clontarf, the balance of power shifted away from the Dál Cais and Munster and back towards Mide and the Uí Néill. Máel Sechlainn retained control over the kingship of Tara until his death in 1022,[15] but was never truly a contender for high kingship. The next ruler to make a viable bid for the high kingship, Diarmait mac Mael na mBó, came to power in the 1030s. Diarmait was king of the Uí Chennselaig, based in Ferns in southern Laigin, and during his forty-year reign, he successfully neutralized his Uí Dúnlainge rivals from north Laigin. Just as the strategic position of the

[12] Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 197-8.
[13] *Lebor na Cert: The Book of Rights*, ed. Myles Dillon, Irish Texts Society 46, Dublin, 1962.
[14] Catherine Swift, 'Royal Fleets in Viking Ireland: the Evidence of *Lebor na Cert*, AD 1050-1150' in Hines, Lane and Redknap, eds., *Land, Sea and Home*, SMA Monograph Series 20, Leeds: Maney, 2004, 202.
[15] AU1022.3.

Dál Cais in the Shannon estuary near Limerick enabled their rise to power, the Uí Chennselaig benefited from control over the territory around Wexford. Diarmait spent the early part of his career gaining control of the kingship of Leinster, an achievement that became possible while the north Leinster dynasties were under attack by the Dubliners and the southern Uí Néill. By the late 1040s, Diarmait's exploits attracted the attention of Brian Bóruma's son Donnchad, who vainly attempted to repress him in 1048. Diarmait nevertheless continued to push out of Leinster into Mide, and also managed to remove the Norse king of Dublin, taking over the leadership of the city more completely than had any of his predecessors.[16] By the mid 1050s, Diarmait had no serious rivals within his province, and exercised direct control over both Dublin and Wexford.[17]

Diarmait's Norse connections extended outside of Ireland; more so than any Irish king before him, Diarmait attempted to exercise authority in the Isle of Man and the Hebrides.[18] Although his grip over the Hebrides was tenuous, Diarmait controlled Man from 1061 onward. In that year, his son Murchad successfully extracted tribute from the Manx, and expelled their leader, Echmarcach mac Ragnaill.[19] Thus, Diarmait's takeover of Dublin was not only an attempt to control the resources coming into the port town, but also to fully exploit the Norse political, social, military and economic network of the Irish Sea.

Despite his widespread Norse alliances and his control over the eastern seaboard of Ireland, Diarmait's high kingship was never entirely secure. His reign was characterized by "wars of the circuits", ongoing campaigns to obtain tribute and hostages from neighbouring dynasties whose simmering discontent posed a continuous threat.[20] At his death, one annalist designed a brand new category of kingship to describe Diarmait's

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[16] AU1052.8
[17] Donnchadh Ó Corráin, 'The Career of Diarmait mac Máel na mBó, King of Leinster', *Journal of the Old Wexford Society* 3, 1970-1, 27-35 and 4, 1972-3, 17-24.
[18] Sean Duffy, 'Irishmen and Islesmen in the Kingdoms of Dublin and Man, 1052-1171', *Ériu* 43, 1992.
[19] AFM1060.6; AT1061.3.
[20] Seán Duffy, *Ireland in the Middle Ages*, Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1997, 37-40.

important, but precarious, political life: he was a *rí hÉrend co fressabra*, king of Ireland with opposition.[21] The coining of this title is important in that it indicates a sense, at least on the part of the monastic recorders of events, that there should be a high king of Ireland, and that in the best case scenario, he should be unopposed in the land.

In an effort to maintain control over his restless kingdom, Diarmait had entrusted his son Murchad with great military and political responsibilities, particularly the leadership of Dublin.[22] If he had intended to pass the high kingship onto his son, Diarmait, like Brian before him, was unsuccessful; Murchad was killed in 1070 and buried in Dublin.[23] Rather it was the king's former ally, Toirrdelbach Ua Briain, Brian Bóruma's grandson, who came to the forefront after Diarmait's death.[24] That very same year, Toirrdelbach took hostages from Osraige and Laigin, burned Uí Chennselaig and earned the submission of Dublin from the Norsemen.[25] A few years later, in 1075, he followed in Diarmait's footsteps by expelling the Norse king of Dublin and regranting the position to his son.[26] This allowed him to ensure control over the town without having to leave his power base in Munster unattended. Toirrdelbach also attempted to emulate Diarmait's expansive Norse network, although his efforts to control Man seem to have been less successful.[27] Nevertheless, he died in 1086 as the most powerful king in Ireland. The

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[21] *Book of Leinster*, 1072, gives him that particular title. The other annalists offer him a variety of other titles: ALC1072.1; AI1072.2; AFM1072.3; AU1072.4.

[22] AI1057.5, records Murchad leading a raiding party of Norsemen to Scattery Island in the Shannon estuary. He also participated in many raids with Toirrdelbach Ua Briain in the late 1050s and 1060s. At his death in 1070, he is called 'lord of the foreigners and of Leinster, under his father', AFM1070.7.

[23] The annalists, if not the kings themselves, thought that father-son succession was possible and desirable at this stage. The *Annals of Inisfallen* refer to Murchad Ua Briain, Brian Bóruma's son, as the "royal heir of Ireland and the king of Ireland's son" at his death in 1068, although he was in no way a powerful contender for the high kingship: AI1068.2.

[24] There is evidence to suggest that the alliance between Diarmait and Toirrdelbach did not last throughout Diarmait's life. At the very least, they were on opposite sides of the battle that claimed Diarmait's life. AI1072.2; AFM1072.3.

[25] AI1072.4; AI1072.6.

[26] AI1075.2, AI1075.4. Diarmait had placed his son Murchad in charge of many of his campaigns, as well as appointing him king of Dublin. Toirrdelbach followed suit by appointing his son Muirchertach to the position.

[27] AU1073.5. This entry records the death of two of Toirrdelbach's kinsmen and a Norse ally in the Isle of Man.

Annals of Ulster refers to Toirrdelbach as high king in his death-entry in 1086.[28] His reign restored the strength of the Uí Briain dynasty, and also continued the pattern of control over the towns as the major stepping-stone to high kingship.[29]

Toirrdelbach passed the high kingship on to his son Muirchertach Ua Briain, one of the most innovative and powerful Irish kings of the pre-Norman period.[30] After a decade of ruling Dublin for his father, Muirchertach was placed in charge of an expedition into Connacht and Mide. He was extremely successful, if barbaric, in subduing his father's rivals: he delivered the head of the king of Connacht to Toirrdelbach in Limerick.[31] These early accomplishments demonstrate Muirchertach's ambition and his father's trust, but Muirchertach was not his father's only son. At his death in 1086, Toirrdelbach divided Munster among his three sons. While his brother Tadc died shortly thereafter, Muirchertach created a bitter enemy when he banished his other brother, Diarmait, from Munster.[32] Just two years later, Diarmait and a group of Norsemen from Dublin and Waterford planned an expedition to sack Cork, but were thwarted by Muirchertach's men, and Diarmait's rebellions continued to trouble Muirchertach throughout his reign.[33]

Having secured his kingdom at his brother's expense, Muirchertach set about expanding his authority outside of Munster. In 1087 he gained the submission of the Laigin,[34] and in 1088 he launched an ambitious campaign into Connacht, sending a fleet up the Shannon into the heart of the region. The attempt to subdue Connacht was disastrous,[35] and marked the start of a difficult period in Muirchertach's reign. That same year, the northern Uí Néill produced a powerful young king, Domnall mac Lochlainn, who made a

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[28] AU1086.4.
[29] Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 271. He sees Toirrdelbach as an innovator in his ability to control the ambitions of his various family members, using them to hold the strategic Norse towns of Cork, Dublin etc.
[30] Seán Duffy, ' 'The western world's tower of honour and dignity': The Career of Muirchertach Ua Briain in Context', *Ireland and Europe in the Twelfth Century*, D. Bracken and D. O'Riain-Raedel, eds., Dublin, 2006.
[31] AU1084.6; AFM1084.8; AFM1084.9.
[32] AI1086.7.
[33] AU1088.4.
[34] AI1087.5; AFM1087.8.
[35] AFM1088.7.

devastating raid into Munster in 1088 with the support of Connacht. They made a point of retrieving the head that Muirchertach had made off with years before, and burned Limerick as they left.[36] Domnall mac Lochlainn was to be Muirchertach's most stubborn and powerful enemy for the next twenty years.

A continued streak of losses and failed campaigns in 1089 meant that by 1090 Muirchertach's power outside of Munster was at its lowest ebb. A peace conference held that year brought together Muirchertach, Domnall mac Lochlainn, Ruaidrí Ua Conchobair, king of Connacht, and Domnall Ua Maelsechlainn, king of Mide. Perhaps in recognition of Domnall mac Lochlainn's status, the other three are reported to have handed over hostages to the king of the northern Uí Néill and departed in peace.[37] Neither the peace nor mac Lochlainn's supremacy lasted long, largely due to the self-destruction of Connacht after Ruaidrí was blinded by a competitor in 1092.[38] With the force to the immediate north neutralized for the time being, Muirchertach started to recover.

By 1093, he had started the eastward expansion required of every candidate for high kingship, and gained the submission of Mide.[39] When the kingdom rebelled, Muirchertach responded with an unprecedented manoeuvre: he divided Mide into two halves and gave a portion each to a pair of bitter rivals.[40] In doing so, he prevented the area from mounting any effective resistance to his hegemony, but he also introduced a new set of ideas about kingship into the Irish political scene. Irish kings were traditionally kings of people, and even a high king reckoned his power in terms of the men who had submitted to him, rather than on territory. The partition of Mide was a direct intervention

[36] AFM1088.10.
[37] AU1090.4; AFM1090.5.
[38] AFM1092.7.
[39] AI1093.3.
[40] AI1094.8.

on the part of a high king on the land of his people, and therefore a radical departure from earlier notions of kingship in Ireland.[41]

With the threat from Mide subdued, Muirchertach marched on Dublin, and expelled the king, Gofraid Méranach in 1094.[42] Like his predecessors, he placed his son, Domnall in charge of the town. In less than ten years, Muirchertach had come back from the verge of ruin. By the end of 1094, even Domnall mac Lochlainn was no match for Muirchertach; Domnall controlled only his home territory of Cenél Eóghan, the neighboring Cenél Conaill, and occasionally Ulaid in the north east. Muirchertach, by contrast, had the support of Osraige, Leinster, Mide, and Connacht in addition to his own kingdom of Munster. He also held Limerick, Cork, Waterford, Wexford and Dublin, either directly or indirectly.[43]

The combination of developments in the concept of high kingship and the reshaping of Irish political geography in this period directly contributed to the onset of the next phase of Irish history. Over this period, the centres of power shifted: Tara to Dublin, Caisel to Limerick. The Uí Néill, while still a force at times, became a peripheral rather than central feature of Irish political life. The significance of the title of high king and the powers it entailed changed drastically during this period. Kings sought to rule land as well as people; they ousted dynasties, changed borders, annexed the ancestral lands of other groups. In part, this new concept of kingship can be attributed to Irish dynasts' efforts to control and benefit from the growing coastal towns.

Some scholars have tried to characterize this period as the development of Irish society toward a form of government more similar to the other European monarchies. Even with the benefit of hindsight, it is impossible to say whether or not Irish high

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[41] The *tecosc rig* genre of texts also offer insight into the limited nature of kingship in the earlier medieval period; for instance, *Tecosca Cormaic* and *Audacht Morainn*.
[42] AU1094.2. The Irish sources call him Gofraid Méranach, but he is also known as Godred Crovan in the Manx Chronicle. George Broderick, 'Irish and Welsh Strands in the Genealogy of Godred Crovan', *Journal of the Manx Museum* 8 (1980), 32-8, provides a more extended analysis.
[43] Duffy, 'The career of Murichertach ua Briain', 68.

kingship would have evolved into true monarchy, had the Norman invasion not intervened. It is perhaps valuable simply to view this period as one of intense upheaval and experimentation, in which powerful men attempted to change or replace many of the older ways of ordering and maintaining balance in the Irish political sphere.

5.2 Waterford in the Annals 1014-1100

Although Dublin and Limerick feature most prominently in the foregoing narrative of the developing relationship between the Irish kings and the coastal towns in the eleventh century, Waterford and its region also had an important role to play. The men of Waterford are not mentioned in any of the annalistic accounts of the confrontation at Clontarf. During Brian's career, Waterford was sometimes with him and sometimes against him, as was true of Dublin. The ruler of Waterford, Imar, died in 1000, and his son Ragnall took power.[44] In 1002, the men of Waterford joined Brian on a campaign to take hostages from the Ulaid, perhaps as a punishment for harbouring the king of Dublin after he was ousted by Brian and the Munstermen two years earlier.[45] Although a number of similar campaigns are recorded over the next several years, little else is reported about Waterford or its ruler until over a decade later, after the battle of Clontarf, when Ragnall son of Imar was killed by the Uí Liatháin.[46] He seems to have been succeeded by his brother, Sitric, who was reportedly killed a few years later by the Osraige.[47] These two killings likely represent continued conflict between Waterford and its closest neighbours. The Osraige, in particular, were probably determined to try to prevent a military alliance between Dublin and Waterford that would leave them cornered.

The early 1030s were a period of conflict for Waterford, although the events are somewhat challenging to fully reconstruct. The *Annals of Inisfallen* record the burning of Waterford in 1031, although they do not indicate whether the fires were accidental or were

[44] CS1000; AU1000.3
[45] AI1000.2; AI1002.4
[46] CS1015; AI1018.5
[47] CS1022; AU1022.1

part of an attack on the town.[48] If the burning of the town was intentional, it may have been related to conflict between Donnchad mac Briain and the Osraige in that same year. Donnchad's campaign into Osraige was evidently motivated by revenge for the death of his steward, and although his forces suffered casualties, the annals report that he took 'great booty and cattle therefrom'.[49] Only the *Annals of Inisfallen* record both of these events, and they place the battle before the burning of Waterford, and there is no evident link between the two events. The *Annals of Inisfallen* also record that in the following year, Donnchad married the daughter of Ragnall, king of Waterford.[50] If he had been responsible for the burning of the town, this may represent a peace settlement, but either way, this marriage indicates an alliance between the king of Munster and the rulers of Waterford in this period.

The alliance may have been part of Donnchad's strategy for controlling the Osraige. Donnchad mac Gilla Pátraic, king of Osraige was making a bid to take over the leadership of Laigin during the 1030s, and an alliance with Waterford would have helped Donnchad to ensure that the Osraige were unable to expand westwards.[51] This may have been particularly important because, as will be discussed below, the Déisi kingdom was experiencing a crisis during this part of the 1030s, and would not necessarily have been in a position to resist the Osraige militarily. The Osraige remained a problem for Donnchad, and in 1034, he apparently undertook another punitive campaign.[52]

Coincidently, the king of Dublin, Amlaíb son of Sitric, was killed by the Saxons on his way to Rome in the same year.[53] After his death, his son, Sitric, took over control of Dublin, and the annals state that he led a raid on Ardbreccan in 1035.[54] In the same year,

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[48] AI1031.9.
[49] AI1031.6; AI1031.7; AU1031.6.
[50] AI1032.6.
[51] AU1033.4; AU1036.3; AU1039.2; AT1033.3; AT1036.1; AT1039.6; AT1039.7; CS1036; CS1039; AI1039.7.
[52] AU1034.5.
[53] AU1034.2; CS1034; AT1034.2.
[54] AU1035.6;

the annals report the 'treacherous' murder of Ragnall, king of Waterford, by Sitric.[55] The murder evidently took place in Dublin, and unfortunately, the annalists do not analyze the motivation or circumstances of the killing. From the way the event is recorded, it would seem that Ragnall was in Dublin as a guest, and that he was killed while supposedly under Sitric's protection, but it is impossible to determine why the two Norse leaders were meeting. Perhaps they were considering the possibility of an alliance, or perhaps they were securing a peace agreement, but Sitric's decision to kill Ragnall is probably best understood in the context of his efforts to maintain his hold over Dublin, and Dublin's position as the pre-eminent town in Ireland.

Downham and others consider Ragnall's death to be a major turning point in Waterford's history.[56] She argues that Ragnall's murder was one of the final episodes in the generations-long conflict between the Uí Ímair rulers of Waterford and the rulers of Dublin.[57] After this point, it appears that Waterford's kings were Irish rather than Norse, although their identities remain challenging to determine. The next recorded king of Waterford is an individual named Cú Inmain ua Robann, who was evidently 'killed by his own people' in 1037. Unfortunately, his identity, and that of his people, remains uncertain. His name does not appear in the Déisi genealogies, for example, and this mention of his death is the only time he is mentioned in the annals.[58] On the basis of his name, he is assumed to have been Irish, but the possibility remains that he was of Norse or part-Norse extraction.

Between the murder of the king of Waterford in 1037 and the late 1080s, the annals provide no information on the internal politics of the town or its external relations with

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[55] AU1035.5; AFM1035.3. This event is also reported under the year 1031, in AFM1031.14 and AT1031.4. The Four Masters probably record the event in both years because their sources differed, but Downham and others accept the AU date of 1035 for Ragnall's death.

[56] Clare Downham, 'The Historical Importance of Viking Age Waterford', *The Journal of Celtic Studies* 4 (2004) 71-96.

[57] Downham, 'The Historical Importance of Viking Age Waterford', 87.

[58] The death of another person named Cú Inmain, son of Ruaidrí ua Cétfada, is mentioned in AU1033.5, but with no indication of where he was from or who he was.

other kingdoms. As will be discussed below, the archaeological evidence indicates that this was a period of growth in the town, and Waterford's absence from the annals may simply represent a peaceful phase in the town's development. The events of the late 1080s do, however, indicate that the town maintained its military capabilities. In 1088, the *Annals of Inisfallen* report that Waterford was attacked by the Laigin, led by the son of Domnall Remar, brother of the late Diarmait mac Mael na mBó.[59] The town was occupied by the 'nobles of Desmumu' and Énna, the son of Diarmait mac Máel na mBó. Énna was the current king of Laigin, and this ultimately unsuccessful attack by his first cousin was an attempted coup. The account in the *Annals of Inisfallen* indicates that after the Laigin failed to defeat the forces defending the 'fortress' of Waterford, they were pursued to Inis Teimle, or Great Island, Co. Wexford, where they were defeated.

While it is unclear precisely how Waterford figured in this conflict, other than as the setting for the battle, their role as aggressors is highlighted in an account of another event in the same year. The *Annals of Ulster* report that the Uí Echach of Mumu, or the Eóganacht Raithlinn, defeated a joint hosting of the men of Dublin, Waterford and Wexford against Cork.[60] This bare account does not offer any indication of the wider political motivations or consequences of the attempted raid or its defeat by the Eóganacht Raithlinn. However, these two events taken together offer a glimpse of Waterford's various alliances and loyalties in this period. The threatened king of Laigin was given refuge in Waterford and support from the Munstermen against his cousin, and Waterford participated in an attempted campaign alongside the men of Dublin and Wexford. Their target, and their opponent were both to the west, and it would appear that by this point in the late eleventh century, Waterford was looking firmly to the east for their alliances. This marks a departure from the earlier eleventh century, when Waterford tended to be allied

[59] AI1088.3.
[60] AU1088.4.

with Limerick and the Uí Briain against the Dubliners. Unfortunately, the scarcity of annalistic information relating to this transition makes it challenging to reconstruct.

After this set of events in the late 1080s, the annals provide no more information about eleventh century Waterford, but as will be discussed below, some additional insights can be gained by considering the available archaeological evidence.

5.3 The Kingdom of the Déisi in the Eleventh Century

In the events of the early eleventh century, the Déisi feature only rarely. The death of Áed, king of the Déisi is reported in the *Annals of Inisfallen* in 1009, and although no patronymic is provided by the annalist, Thornton has argued that this may be the Áed, son of Domnall mac Fháeláin who features in the *Cathréim Chellachain Chaisil*.[61] They fought on Brian's side against the Dubliners and the Laigin, and their king, Mothla mac Domnaill maic Fáeláin was killed during the battle. His head is said to have been taken for burial alongside Brian Bóruma's body at Armagh.[62] This privilege may indicate the importance of the Déisi in securing the victory over the Dubliners and Laigin at Clontarf. Interestingly, the *Annals of Inisfallen* does not preserve this story, nor do they indicate the involvement of the Déisi at Clontarf. This seems to be an example of the unfortunately abbreviated state of this set of annals.

Déisi political life is impossible to reconstruct during the next decade and a half, but in 1031, the *Annals of Inisfallen* reports 'a battle between the Déisi, and great slaughter was inflicted on both sides'.[63] From the mid-eleventh century onwards, the kingship of the Déisi became restricted to two lineages, the Uí Fháeláin and the Uí Bricc. Although the genealogies of these two groups highlight their kinship, Thornton has demonstrated that 'the inter-relationship of the two dynasties was by no means peaceful and the periodic

[61] AI1009.2; David Thornton, 'The Déisi Muman in Munster and Dyfed', in D. Thornton, *Kings, Chronologies and Genealogies*, 2003, 176.
[62] CS1014; AU1014.2
[63] AI1031.5.

alternation of the kingship between them was probably not voluntary'.[64] Thornton, following Pender, points out two other entries under the year 1031 in the *Annals of Tigernach* and the *Annals of the Four Masters*, which read as follows:

> **AT1031.10**: Diarmaid son of Domhnall son of Faelán, king of the Deise, died.
> **AT1031.11**: Donnslébhe and his brother were killed by Murchadh son of Brec in the battle of Sliabh Cua.
> **AFM1031.13**: Diarmaid, son of Domhnall, son of Faelan, lord of the Deisi, was slain by Muircheartach, son of Brian, in the battle of Sliabh Cua.

By taking these three entries together, Pender and Thornton argue that both Diarmaid and Donn Sléibe were sons of Domnall mac Fháeláin, and that both were killed by Muirchertach mac Bricc, who appears in the correct place in the Uí Bricc genealogies.[65] The association between these killings and the larger battle among the Déisi suggests that the events of 1031 represent the first real challenge to the Uí Fháeláin kings of the Déisi by their rivals the Uí Bricc.

Placename evidence identified by Power suggests that the Uí Bricc were based in the southern, coastal area of Waterford, and he suggests that their stronghold might have been at *Oileán Uí Bhric*, now Dane's Island, Ballynarrid Townland, Ballylaneen Parish.[66] As will be discussed further below, it is possible to speculate that the emergence of the Uí Bricc as serious contenders for the kingship of the Déisi was related to their geographical location between Waterford and Dungarvan. Muirchertach mac Bricc's coup against the Uí Fháeláin brothers was evidently successful, because his death is recorded in 1051, at which time he is referred to as the king of the Déisi. His death, like his assumption of power, was evidently violent: the *Annals of Ulster* says that he was burned by the Uí Fháeláin.[67] In that same year, a number of sets of annals record further violence among the

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[64] Thornton, 'The Déisi Muman', 174
[65] Thornton, 'The Déisi Muman', 176-7. Seamus Pender, 'Uí Bruicc, Ríg na nDéssi', in *Féil-Sgríbhinn Éoin Mhic Néill*, ed. John Ryan, Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1940 [Reprint 1995], 475-6.
[66] Rev. Patrick Power, *Place-names of Decies*, Cork, 1952, 116-9. This is shown on the OS 1st ed. maps, and a promontory fort is listed on this headland, WA032-016, Moore, *Archaeological Inventory of County Waterford*, 64-5.
[67] AU1051.1; AI1051.2.

Uí Bricc. Máel Sechnaill ua Bricc is said to have killed his cousin, Fáelán mac Búatán meic Bricc in the church at Lismore. Fáelán is referred to as the *rígdamna*, or royal heir of the Déisi in some sets of annals, while his slayer, Máel Sechnaill was apparently the late Muirchertach mac Bricc's son. [68] Pender argues that this succession dispute among the Uí Bricc is indicative of their power within the Déisi at this time. They were able to fight amongst themselves and still prevent the Uí Fháeláin from securing the kingship in the wake of Muirchertach mac Bricc's murder.[69]

Máel Sechnaill ua Bricc evidently succeeded in securing the kingship, and although Pender argues that he was a strong ruler, the annals record little about his reign.[70] He may have remained an important, if dangerous, figure in Munster politics into the later 1050s. He killed Finnguine ua Finnguine, the *rígdamna* of Munster in 1057, but was ultimately suffocated in a cave by a member of the Uí Fháeláin lineage, Máel Sechnaill mac Gilla Brigte ua Fháeláin.[71] This killer's father was the brother of the Diarmait and Donn Sléibe who had been killed by the Uí Bricc in the 1030s. Pender points out that those members of the Uí Fháeláin royal line were killed during the conflict that had signalled the rise of the Uí Bricc in the first place.[72] The killing of Máel Sechnaill ua Bricc and the subsequent kingship of Máel Sechnaill mac Gilla Brigte ua Fháeláin was the first real check to their newfound dominance of Déisi politics.

However, the evident persistence of this feud is a feature of Déisi politics for the rest of the eleventh century and into the twelfth. Máel Sechnaill mac Gilla Brigte ua Fháeláin held onto the kingship into the 1080s, but not without resistance. According to the *Annals of the Four Masters,* he was captured in the late 1060s by Toirrdelbach ua

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[68] AU1051.2; AI1051.6; AT1051.3; AFM1051.7. There are inconsistencies in the names given by the different sets of annals, as pointed out by Thornton, 'The Déisi Muman', 177-8.
[69] Pender, 'Uí Bruicc', 476.
[70] Ibid.
[71] AU1057.3; AI1059.2
[72] Pender, 'Uí Bruicc', 476.

Briain who handed him over to the Uí Bricc to be blinded.[73] Indeed, at his death in 1085, he is referred to as 'the blind' by those annalists.[74] His capture may have been related to Toirrdelbach's efforts to assert his authority within Munster during this period. Entries in several annals in that same year report a major hosting by Toirrdelbach ua Briain and Diarmait mac Máel na mBó into Connacht, where Toirrdelbach was supposedly at the head of 'the men of all Mumu'.[75] Appealing to regional kings was evidently one tactic used in the ongoing feud between the two rival Déisi royal lines. If the Uí Bricc were associated in some way with the coastal settlements at Dungarvan and Waterford, then their support may have been worth a good deal to Toirrdelbach during a time when he was attempting to secure and expand his authority.

The last king of the Déisi that is recorded in the annals in the eleventh century is another Uí Bricc ruler, Muirchertach ua Bricc, who is said to have been killed, although no murderer is named.[76] Little can be said about Déisi politics in the last decade of the eleventh century, although the feud between the Uí Fháeláin and the Uí Bricc continued to divide the kingdom into the twelfth century.[77]

5.4 Ecclesiastical Politics in the Déisi Kingdom, 1000-1100

Ecclesiastical politics in the Déisi kingdom are more difficult to reconstruct during this period than secular politics, but some conclusions can be drawn from the extant evidence. Sanderlin has argued that 'in the mid-eleventh century Lismore was still a Déisi monastery', and that some secular political happenings took place in this ecclesiastical setting.[78] The murder of Fáelán mac Búatán maic Bricc by his cousin Máel Sechlainn ua Bricc in 1051 was apparently committed in the stone church at Lismore. The *Annals of*

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[73] AFM1067.9.
[74] AFM1085.14.
[75] CS1067.
[76] CS1090; AFM1090.9.
[77] Pender, 'Uí Bruicc', 477-8.
[78] S. Sanderlin, 'The Monastery of Lismore, AD 638-1111', in Nolan and Power, eds., *Waterford History and Society*, 1992, 42.

Inisfallen also states that the killer 'surrendered himself to Mochutu in retribution for it'.[79] Nevertheless, the saint apparently did not forgive or forget the desecration of his church, because the *Annals of Inisfallen* give Mochuda credit for killing Máel Sechlainn ua Bricc several years later.[80] As discussed above, Máel Sechlainn was actually killed by a member of the Uí Fháeláin. One wonders whether the annalist simply means that this killer's death should be taken as the saint's retribution, or whether he is suggesting that Lismore had a specific link with the Uí Fháeláin in this period. Hughes has interpreted this incident as evidence for the growing involvement of monastic leaders in secular politics.[81] She argues that during the eleventh century, 'secular princes are once more able and willing to act as ecclesiastical champions', and that although this sometimes meant that churches became embroiled in regional conflicts, they seem to have actively sought to establish and maintain links to secular leaders.[82]

Aside from this intersection between secular Déisi politics and Lismore, information relating to the leading church in the kingdom is sparse. The *Annals of Inisfallen* states under the year 1015 that 'most of the churches of Mumu were vacated in the above year on account of scarcity and dissension'.[83] The annalist reports this at the end of a long litany of violence in or towards churches, and it may therefore represent an exaggeration. However, it does suggest that there was some degree of upheaval in Munster following the Battle of Clontarf, perhaps especially in comparison with the stability the church experienced during Brian's reign.

Unfortunately, little other information is provided about how Lismore or other Déisi churches fared in the aftermath of Clontarf, and the next entry in the annals related to ecclesiastical events in the kingdom is a death entry for Ua Maíl Shluaig, abbot of Lismore. As is true of many of Lismore's abbots, this individual cannot be identified. The next

[79] AI1051.6.
[80] AI1059.2.
[81] Kathleen Hughes, *The Church in Early Irish Society*, 1966, 239.
[82] Ibid., 240-1.
[83] AI1015.11. The preceding entry says that Emly was 'vacated' in this year.

ecclesiastical obit presents slightly more information. The *Annals of Inisfallen* uniquely reports the killing of Ua Taidc, described as 'coarb of Flann, son of Fairchellach'. No party is named as the killer, and the description of Ua Taidc as the coarb of Flann makes it challenging to determine which monastic community he led. Flann was the ninth century abbot of Lismore, Emly and Cork, and being referred to as his coarb might mean that Ua Taidc made a similar claim to multiple abbatial offices. On the other hand, it could simply mean he was abbot of one of those locations. Because no first name is provided with the patronymic, Ua Taidc becomes harder to trace. The most famous Ua Taidc is Tadc ua Taidc, member of the ecclesiastical dynasty of Killaloe who died in the 1080s, but it is impossible now to determine whether these two ecclesiastics were related. If they were, it is possible to postulate an ongoing connection between one or all of these Munster churches and the Uí Briain, despite their defeat at the Battle of Clontarf.[84] Again, it is challenging to assess what impact this may have had on politics in Munster or in Déisi territory during this period.

Starting in the 1040s, the abbacy of Lismore was dominated by an ecclesiastical family, the Uí Rebacháin, who provided abbots for the monastery into the twelfth century.[85] The two Uí Rebacháin whose deaths are reported in the annals in the second half of the eleventh century did not hold office consecutively, but alternated with an outsider, Cináed son of Aicher.[86] As Sanderlin points out, 'the presence of a family apparently enjoying the hereditary abbacy of Lismore did nothing to injure its reputation', and indeed, Armagh was generally ruled by members of an ecclesiastical dynasty during this period.[87] The Uí Rebacháin may perhaps trace their ancestry back to Rebachán mac

[84] Donnchadh Ó Corráin, 'Dál Cais- Church and Dynasty', *Ériu* 24 (1973), 52-63. Starting with Scandlán mac Tadc, this ecclesiastical family, known as the Uí Ailgíle, alternated with members of Brian's own family as abbots of Killaloe.
[85] Sanderlin, 'The Monastery of Lismore', 43. AI1041.2; AI1090.2; AU1090.1.
[86] AI1063.5; AU1063.7. AI also reports the death of Donnchadh son of Aicher, king of Uí Chormaic and Uí Chonaill, who was buried in Scattery Island in 1070. Uí Chormaic and Uí Chonaill are the areas of Limerick and Clare near the Shannon estuary.
[87] Sanderlin, 'The Monastery of Lismore', 43.

Mothlai, the tenth century abbot of Tuaim Gréine and king of the Dál Cais whose death is reported in 934.[88] Although this is speculative, it would again support the idea of a continued close connection between the Uí Briain and the Déisi churches during this period.

In the late eleventh century, Lismore was linked, not only to secular and ecclesiastical politics within Munster, but to a wider network of ecclesiastical intellectual endeavour. The Armagh scholar Mael Ísu ua Brolcháin evidently spent time at Lismore, and ultimately died and was buried there.[89] A *dairtech* or oak house may have been dedicated to him within the compound at Lismore.[90] Sanderlin also notes that the Life composed during this period for the Welsh saint Cadoc portrays him journeying to Lismore for his education.[91] These links outside of Munster and indeed outside of Ireland demonstrate the extent to which Lismore was operating in the highest ecclesiastical circles in its region. One component of this, as will be discussed below, probably involved participation in the discussions surrounding Gregorian reform in this period.

During the final decade of the eleventh century, Lismore again played an important role in regional secular politics. Diarmait and Muirchertach ua Briain, Toirrdelbach's warring sons, 'made a peace and a covenant' which was announced publicly at Cashel and Lismore and was sworn on 'the relics of Ireland, including the Staff of Jesus'.[92] The witnesses included 'the nobles of Mumu' and Domnall ua hÉnna, who was a Dál Cais bishop and abbot of Killaloe. Ua hÉnna was one of the earliest leaders of the Gregorian reform movement in Ireland, and a correspondent of Anselm and Lanfranc.[93] His presence at this peace-making council was probably crucial, although it is interesting to note that the church chosen for this political event was Lismore, rather than Emly, Killaloe, or any other

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[88] AI934.1.
[89] AI1086.2; AU1086.1.
[90] AU1116.3. The wording is ambiguous; the burning of the *dairtech* and of part of Lismore may refer to two distinct locations.
[91] Sanderlin, 'The Monastery of Lismore', 43.
[92] AI1093.11
[93] Ó Corráin, 'Dál Cais- Church and Dynasty', 57.

ecclesiastical centre commonly associated with the Uí Briain. Lismore may have been selected for its proximity to Cashel, the secular ceremonial centre of Munster, but it may genuinely have been viewed as the premier church in Munster during this part of the eleventh century.

Lismore was not the only Déisi church that witnessed important secular political events during the late eleventh century. As discussed earlier, the final battle in the conflict between the son of Domnall Remar and Énna, son of Diarmait mac Máel na mBó, over the Laigin succession, was played out at Inis Teimle. Ní Dhonnchadha has demonstrated that Inis Teimle is Great Island in the estuary of the Suir, Nore and Barrow rivers.[94] She argues that although the documentary evidence for the history of the site is limited, the archaeological remains and the records or Viking raids on the monastery are indicators of its importance in the early medieval period. The retreat of Domnall Remar's son to the island suggests that there was still a viable settlement there, and that he may even have been hoping for a degree of protection from his cousin.

As discussed in the previous chapters, the history of the Déisi churches other than Lismore is impossible to reconstruct in any detail. For instance, there are no references in the annals to Ardmore during this period, and the only extended text that deals with the monastery in the pre-Norman period is the twelfth century *Life of St. Declan.*[95] The *Life* claims that Ardmore was the chief church of the Déisi, and does not discuss the position of Lismore in the kingdom or in the wider region. The narrator describes the bonds of friendship between Declan and the other 'pre-Patrician' saints, particularly Ailbe of Emly, as well as his relationship with St. Patrick. Declan is referred to as the 'Patrick of the Déisi', in acknowledgement of his supposed efforts to convert the nobility and common people of the kingdom. Ardmore as a physical location is also discussed in some detail, and two mentions are made to a settlement or village called *Ait-Breasail* located near

[94] Máirín Ní Dhonnchadha, 'Inis Teimle, between Uí Chennselaig and the Déissi', *Peritia* 16 (2002), 451-8.
[95] Rev. Patrick Power, *Life of St. Declan of Ardmore*, Irish Texts Society 20 (1914).

Ardmore at the time of its foundation. According to the story, Ardmore was an island at that time, and although Declan could see the 'shipping and boats of the island plying thither and backwards', when he approached, the people of the settlement hid their boats so he could not get out to the island. Declan, with divine assistance, pushed back the sea, so that Ardmore was connected to the mainland. Later in the narrative, this story is repeated, and the narrator adds that Declan was also refused a fire or any other hospitality by the villagers. In punishment, God destroyed the village with fire, and it was abandoned.

Declan's *Life* probably reflects the political conditions of the mid to late twelfth century rather than any earlier period, and the information it contains about Ardmore's claims to status or primacy does not apply to the eleventh century. The stories about the village that pre-dated Ardmore may be simple fabrications on the part of the hagiographer, or they may preserve memories of a real settlement that had since been abandoned. Naturally, there is no way to know whether this settlement might have existed in the eleventh century or in an earlier period. Declan and Ardmore are not mentioned at all in the earlier *Life of St. Mochuda*, and truly nothing can be said about Ardmore during the eleventh century. The same is true of the rest of the churches in Déisi territory, which are rarely mentioned in the annals after the end of Viking raiding. While it is assumed that monastic life continued at many if not all of the known early medieval church sites, little can be said about the specific history of any of these communities in the eleventh century.

5.5 Church Reform and the Coastal Towns

As mentioned above, the late eleventh century saw the beginnings of the Gregorian reform movement in Ireland, a cultural development that would have an impact on both the Irish church structure and hierarchy, and on the growing coastal towns. Over the course of the late eleventh and twelfth centuries, reform swept through western Christendom. The papacy and individual church leaders embarked on a campaign to standardize church practices, and in particular to eradicate clerical marriage and simony, or the sale of

ecclesiastical offices.[96] In addition, the church sought to disentangle itself from secular interference in the appointment of bishops and other church officials.

The medieval Irish church was something of an anomaly within the Christian world. Abbots, the leaders of monastic communities, rather than bishops, were the most powerful members of the ecclesiastical hierarchy.[97] Many monasteries, including Lismore, were ruled by successive generations of a particular family, and many abbots were married laymen.[98] In such practices, the Irish church was out of step with current canonical standards, and appeared particularly lax about several points of marriage law.[99] At the end of the eleventh, and particularly during the twelfth century, the Irish church underwent a reform movement parallel to that of the rest of Europe, but with perhaps even more dramatic effects on the nature of its ecclesiastical structure and character.

Irish church reform is a well studied, but highly contentious topic. Because much of the reforming influence on Ireland came from the English church, some scholars view the reform movement as an inherently imperialist and hegemonic project intended to extend England's right to control Irish society.[100] Carrying this notion to the extreme, others portray the Norman invasion towards the end of the twelfth century as the logical outgrowth of the relationship between England and Ireland established during the reform era.[101] Still others, in contrast, portray the early stages of reform as a productive period of intellectual exchange between the English and Irish churches, and cast the whole

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[96] Pope Gregory VII established this in the second year of his pontificate, in the Roman council of 1074. The text of the decrees can be found in Oliver J. Thatcher and Edgar Holmes McNeal, eds., *A Source Book for Medieval History*, 1905, 134-5.

[97] J.A. Watt, *The Church and the Two Nations in Medieval Ireland*, Cambridge, 1970, 3.

[98] This also includes Armagh; laymen from the Uí Sinaich family provided about two centuries of abbots for this monastic community, up until the consecration of Cellach in 1105. Watt, *The Church and the Two Nations*, 3-4.

[99] Hughes, *The Church in Early Irish Society*, 253.

[100] For instance, Martin Holland, 'Dublin and the Reform of the Irish Church in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries', *Peritia* 14 (2000), 111-60.

[101] For example, Duffy, *Ireland in the Middle Ages*, 25-7.

movement as a beneficial development in Irish ecclesiastical and intellectual life.[102] There is also disagreement as to the extent to which indigenous political and social development, contact with Canterbury, or contacts with churches elsewhere in Europe impacted the pattern of reform in Ireland.[103]

Although it is difficult to determine the exact intentions of all the parties involved, the church reform movement had undeniable, observable consequences for the political geography of Ireland. During this period, the Viking towns of Dublin, Waterford and Limerick were all supplied with bishops consecrated at Canterbury. The English and Continental ecclesiastical structure seems to have been better suited to the growing towns than was the pre-existing Irish church hierarchy.[104] Hughes argues that for this reason, the coastal towns were major entry points for reforming ideas, which came into Ireland alongside other material and cultural imports from Britain and the Continent.[105] In this sense, the close relationship between the coastal towns and Toirrdelbach and Muirchertach ua Briain may have predisposed those kings to embrace the potential for church reform. Under Muirchertach's leadership, synods in the early twelfth century attempted to reorganize the church hierarchy and administrative units by dividing the island into northern and southern provinces led by Armagh and Cashel. Various factors within the church and in the realm of broader Irish politics led to a later four-way division that received papal recognition in 1152. The recognition of Ireland's own church hierarchy in 1152 also put an end to Canterbury's claims to primacy over the Irish church. As with the development of high kingship, the church reform movement led to the increased integration of the Viking settlements into the political geography of Ireland.

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[102] For example, Watt, *The Church and the Two Nations*, ch. 1; Martin Brett, 'Canterbury's Perspective on Church Reform and Ireland, 1070-1115', in D. Bracken and D. Ó Riain-Raedel, eds., *Ireland and Europe in the Twelfth Century: Reform and Renewal*, 2006, 13-35.

[103] Aubrey Gwynn, *The Irish Church in the 11th and 12th Centuries*, Dublin, 1992, and Hughes, *The Church in Early Irish Society*, 253-6, stress the impact of Irish contacts on the continent. Watt, *The Church and the Two Nations*, 4, emphasizes that lasting reform required native Irish participation. Brett, 'Canterbury's Perspective', 16-7, attributes much of the credit for Irish reform to Canterbury.

[104] Hughes, *The Church in Early Irish Society*, 258-9.

[105] Ibid., 257-9.

When Dublin's bishop, Dunan or Donatus, passed away in 1074, the king of Dublin, the Norseman Gofraid Meránach, sent his successor-elect, Patrick, to Canterbury for consecration.[106] Archbishop Lanfranc, a reformer in his fourth year at Canterbury, consecrated Patrick to the bishopric of Dublin, and received from him a profession of obedience. Interestingly, the formal documents drawn up to request the consecration were written in Canterbury, rather than Dublin.[107] In addition, the documents refer to Dublin as the metropolitan church of Ireland, or the foremost church on the island.[108] Such a high estimation of Dublin's status within the Irish church in 1074 is out of line with the political reality. As Gwynn points out, "even the author of the Old Irish poem in the Book of Rights, who sang so loudly the praise of the young men and women of Dublin, would have been startled had he heard the title *metropolis Hiberniae* applied to a city which was for him, as for all other Irishmen of the day, the city of the Foreigners of Dublin".[109] While Dublin was certainly developing a place within the Irish political imagination at this point, it can hardly have been seen as the leading religious centre.

The use of such inflated titles for Dublin in the consecration documents can be interpreted as the expression of a set of aspirations on the part of Canterbury.[110] At the time of Patrick's consecration, a debate was in full force within the English church as to whether or not Canterbury could claim primacy over York. Lanfranc, archbishop of Canterbury, was determined to obtain the submission and obedience of York, and looked to

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[106] Gwynn has put forward the theory that Dunan was chosen as Dublin's first bishop by Sitric Silkbeard after his pilgrimage to Rome in 1028, and that he too was consecrated at Canterbury. There is little doubt that he came to power under Sitric's protection, but it is unclear where or how he was consecrated. For one view, see Gwynn, *The Irish Church*, ch. 4.

[107] Holland, 'Dublin and the Reform of the Irish Church', 112-5. This would be counter to the standard method for obtaining consecration. Ordinarily, the bishop-elect would bring a document to his archbishop from his diocese and lord requesting confirmation.

[108] The profession: *"Propterea ego Patricius, ad regendum Dublinam metropolem Hiberniae electus antistes..."* M. Richter, ed., *Canterbury Professions*, Canterbury and York Soc. 67 (1973), 29. The *decretum*: *"Vestrae paternitati est cognitum, quod Ecclesia Dublinensis, quae Hiberniae insulae metropolis est, suo sit viduata pastore, ac destitute rectore."* Holland, 'Dublin and the Reform of the Irish Church', 112-3.

[109] Gwynn, *The Irish Church*, 69.

[110] Holland, 'Dublin and the Reform of the Irish Church', views this as the first piece of evidence for a plan on the part of Lanfranc and his successors to make Dublin the metropolitan see of Ireland, under their direct supervision.

Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of England* for justification. The case Lanfranc built to support his claims to York also had repercussions for Ireland: "...from the time of St. Augustine, the first archbishop of Canterbury, down to Bede's own time, that is to say for a period of about 140 years, my predecessors have exercised a primacy over the church of York and the whole island of Britain, and also over Ireland".[111] The ability to claim authority even outside England would bolster Canterbury's claims over York, and there is evidence to suggest that the notion was given some credence by the pope.[112]

While it seems clear that Canterbury was testing its ability to extend its authority into Ireland, it is uncertain to what extent that was intended to be, or was perceived as a genuine threat to native Irish autonomy. When Patrick returned to Ireland after his consecration, Lanfranc sent with him two letters, one for Gofraid Meránach and one for Toirrdelbach Ua Briain. The one for Ua Briain is particularly interesting because it offers good wishes to the dynast in his struggles for high kingship:

> May the King of kings and the Lord of rulers, when He sees that your royal majesty is in all things subject to His precepts, that as you fear and love Him you are merciful to His servants and followers, hostile to those who oppose His worship and jealous for His rights, may he lend a propitious ear to you and your followers who cry to Him, may He beat down your enemies and grant you lasting peace in this world and eternal life in the next.[113]

The bulk of correspondence between Lanfranc and the Irish secular and ecclesiastic leaders is written with a tone of authority, but not command, and on the whole appears to be politely paternal. This is not to say that Lanfranc could not have aspired to primacy, but

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[111] H. Clover and M. Gibson, ed. and trans., *The Letters of Lanfranc, archbishop of Canterbury*, Oxford, 1979, 50-51.

[112] In the 1080s, Pope Gregory VII wrote to Lanfranc urging him to promote reform within Ireland, as well as writing to Muirchertach Ua Briain. Ireland's unique administrative situation forced popes to control their ecclesiastic structure by whatever means was available until the establishment of the Irish archbishoprics in 1152. See Holland, 'Dublin and the Reform of the Irish Church'. 114-5, no. 16.

[113] Clover and Gibson, *Letters of Lanfranc*, 73, no. 10. Quoted in Brett, 'Canterbury's Perspective', 24.

only to indicate that at this stage in the reform movement, the relationship between the churches of England and Ireland might have been cooperative and mutually beneficial.[114]

Although Bishop Patrick had been elected by Gofraid and consecrated at Canterbury, Toirrdelbach and Muirchertach Ua Briain did not interfere with his position or power when they took Dublin after Gofraid's expulsion and death in 1075.[115] Indeed, after Patrick died in 1084, Toirrdelbach requested that Lanfranc consecrate his successor-elect, Donngus.[116] The *Acta Lanfranci* indicates that Donngus had been a monk at Canterbury earlier in his career[117] and during his tenure at Holy Trinity Cathedral in Dublin, a group of Canterbury monks was established as the cathedral chapter.[118] Considering that Dublin was one of the major foci of Toirrdelbach's bid for high kingship, it is interesting to note that he did not hesitate to foster connections with Canterbury. He may even have felt that such ties abroad helped to increase his, and Dublin's, prestige within Ireland and the Irish Sea region.

After Toirrdelbach died in 1085, Muirchertach Ua Briain did little to change his father's policies with regard to the Irish church or its connections to Canterbury. This may be attributable to the fact that at the start of Muirchertach's reign, Canterbury was not a particularly imposing force. After Lanfranc's death in 1089, William Rufus kept the see of Canterbury vacant a full four and a half years before Bishop Anselm was consecrated as his successor. During the interregnum period, the balance of power within the Irish church shifted somewhat. When Archbishop Anselm wrote his first letter to the clergy and people of Ireland, he gave precedence of place in the greeting to the reforming bishop Domnall Ua hÉnna of Munster, rather than to Bishop Donngus in Dublin.[119]

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[114] Brett, 'Canterbury's Perspective', 20-6, and Watt, *The Church and the Two Nations*, 7-8.
[115] AU1075.1; AFM1075.11; AI1075.2; AI1075.4.
[116] Holland, 'Dublin and the Reform of the Irish Church', 119-20. He explains that the actual *decretum* and submission documents are no longer extant.
[117] C. Plummer, *Two of the Saxon Chronicles Parallel*, Oxford, 1892-9, vol. 1, 290.
[118] Holland, 'Dublin and the Reform of the Irish Church', 120.
[119] Holland, 'Dublin and the Reform of the Irish Church', 122-3. The letter is reprinted in F.S. Schmitt, ed., *S. Anselmi Cantauriensis archiepiscopi Opera omnia*, Edinburgh, 1949, vol. 4, letter 198. Holland argues

Despite this recognition of the growing power of the Munster churches, Muirchertach still allowed Canterbury to consecrate a third bishop for Dublin, Bishop Samuel, and the first bishop of Waterford, Mael Ísu, in 1095 and 1096.[120] Only after this point does a distinct change in Muirchertach's policies become apparent.[121] Beyond his interest in the church, Muirchertach was looking abroad in this period, particularly extending himself into the kingdom of Man and the Isles. He was confident enough even to risk offending Henry I by forming a marriage alliance with the Arnulf de Montgomery, a rebellious south Welsh marcher baron. He was also working to counter the resumption of direct Norwegian crown influence in the Irish Sea region, beginning in 1098 when Magnus Barelegs launched a reconquest mission in area, and continuing in 1102 when they reached an accord sealed by the marriage of their children.[122]

Muirchertach's approach to church politics in this period can be seen as an extension of this simultaneously aggressive and self-protective policy. He established himself as the secular leader of church reform in Ireland, and then systematically blocked Canterbury's ability to influence the movement. At the synod of Cashel in 1101, Muirchertach made progress toward both of these goals by launching an indigenous program of reform outside the Dublin-Canterbury orbit. During the council, Muirchertach 'made a grant such as no king had ever made before,' giving Cashel, the ancient secular centre of Munster to 'all the religious, without any claim of layman or clergyman upon it, but the religious of Ireland in general'.[123]

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that Anselm is simply waiting for an opportunity to unveil his plan to rule the Irish church through Dublin. It seems equally likely that Anselm's interests differed from his predecessors', if indeed they ever intended to try to exercise their primacy directly.

[120] M. Rule, ed., *Eadmeri Historia novorum in Anglia*, RS 81, London, 1884, 73, 77.

[121] Brett, 'Canterbury's Perspective', 25. He argues that the policy change was on both sides, and that for a number of practical reasons, Canterbury was not all that interested in Ireland after 1096. Nevertheless, Irish sinfulness was a trope used by English reforming writers throughout the 12th century, and their writings had an impact on the Crown's policies in Ireland.

[122] Seán Duffy, 'The Career of Muirchertach Ua Briain in Context', 69.

[123] AFM1101.5.

The grant served several purposes. First, it deprived the Eóganacht of their traditional royal seat.[124] Secondly, Flanagan has argued that the grant was part of a deal with Armagh, in return for which Armagh officially recognized Muirchertach's high-kingship.[125] Muirchertach was also subsequently free to make Limerick, the Dál Cais heartland, the capital of the province, in line with his father's policy during his reign.[126] Dublin had no place of prominence in Muirchertach's program of reform; in fact, the Dublin clergy were not even in attendance.[127] In this sense, the synod provided Muirchertach with an opportunity to solidify his control over the island without bolstering the power of its foremost town. Finally, under his leadership, the synod of Cashel sought to bring the Irish church in line with contemporary canonical practices, and adopted many of the decrees characteristic of synods in England and on the Continent at the time.[128]

The synod of Cashel was the first in a series of reforming councils in the early twelfth century, which lie outside the scope of the current project. In general, the impact of this second wave of reform was to draw Armagh further into the reform movement, and renew its position of supremacy within the Irish church. This allowed Irish kings and clergymen to gain some distance from Canterbury and the English church. For instance, the first bishop of Limerick was not consecrated at Canterbury, and was probably confirmed in his appointment by Cellach, the bishop of Armagh.[129] However, as demonstrated by the appointing of bishops over Limerick, Waterford and Dublin in this period, church reform also drew the coastal towns more firmly into the Irish ecclesiastical hierarchy.

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[124] Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 191-2.
[125] Marie Therese Flanagan, 'High-kings with opposition, 1072-1166', in D. Ó Cróinín, ed., *A New History of Ireland, Vol. 1: Prehistoric and Early Ireland*, Oxford University Press, 2005, 913-4.
[126] Flanagan, 'High-kings with opposition', 902.
[127] Holland, 'Dublin and the Reform of the Irish Church', 132; Watt, *The Church and the Two Nations*, 10-11; Gwynn, *The Irish Church*, 155-172. The synod is referred to in the *Annals of the Four Masters*, AFM1101.5.
[128] Donnchadh Ó Corráin, 'The Synod of Cashel, 1101: Conservative or Innovative?', in Edwards, David, ed. *Regions and Rulers in Ireland 1100-1650*, Dublin: Four Courts Press (2004), 13-19.
[129] Flanagan, 'High-kings with opposition', 914-5.

In the case of Waterford, it is challenging to assess how the town's churches related to or competed with the pre-existing ecclesiastical centres in the region. Relations between Lismore and Waterford appear to have been good. Malchus, the first bishop of Waterford, moved to Lismore from Waterford in 1110, where Harbison suggests he may have commissioned the construction of a church 'which reflected the architectural developments which he would have seen during his stay in England at the end of the eleventh century'.[130] Gwynn and Hadcock suggest that the unification of the diocese of Waterford and Lismore probably also occurred during Malchus' lifetime.[131] Whether or not such a cooperative relationship between Waterford and Lismore was extended back into the earlier eleventh century is uncertain. In general, however, it would appear that both the town-based church and the older ecclesiastical network cantered on Lismore were thoroughly connected to developments in the Irish church and in the European church as a whole by the end of the eleventh century.

5.6 The Archaeology of Late Viking Age Waterford

From these documentary sources, it is clear that the town at Waterford had come to occupy an important position in ecclesiastical and secular politics in its region by the eleventh century. The settlement's role in its local and regional economy is less apparent from examining written sources alone, and the next section will investigate the archaeological evidence from Waterford town. Although this was the major locus of urbanism in the Déisi kingdom during the eleventh century, it is not necessarily the only place at which a Hiberno-Scandinavian material culture could be found. The results of recent excavations at Shandon will be discussed, along with a few comments about Déisi politics and the development of Waterford's late Viking age hinterland. The purpose of this section is not to re-evaluate the findings of Waterford's excavators, which are very

[130] Peter Harbison, 'From prehistory to 1600', in Harbison, Potterton and Sheehy, eds., *Irish art and architecture*, London, 1978, 81.
[131] A. Gwynn and R.N. Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses: Ireland*, London, 1970, 100.

thoroughly published in the 1997 excavation monograph,[132] but to attempt to place this single town within its wider regional context.

Both documentary and archaeological evidence confirm that Waterford was a town in the mid-eleventh century. As discussed in the previous chapter, the origins and early development of Waterford have yet to be fully understood, but the pre-Norman town is generally believed to have occupied a triangular area bounded by the River Suir to the north and John's River to the southeast (see Fig. 5.1).[133] Excavations between 1987 and 1990 investigated approximately 6000 square meters of the centre of this triangular area, and revealed evidence for town living in Waterford from the eleventh century into the late medieval period.[134]

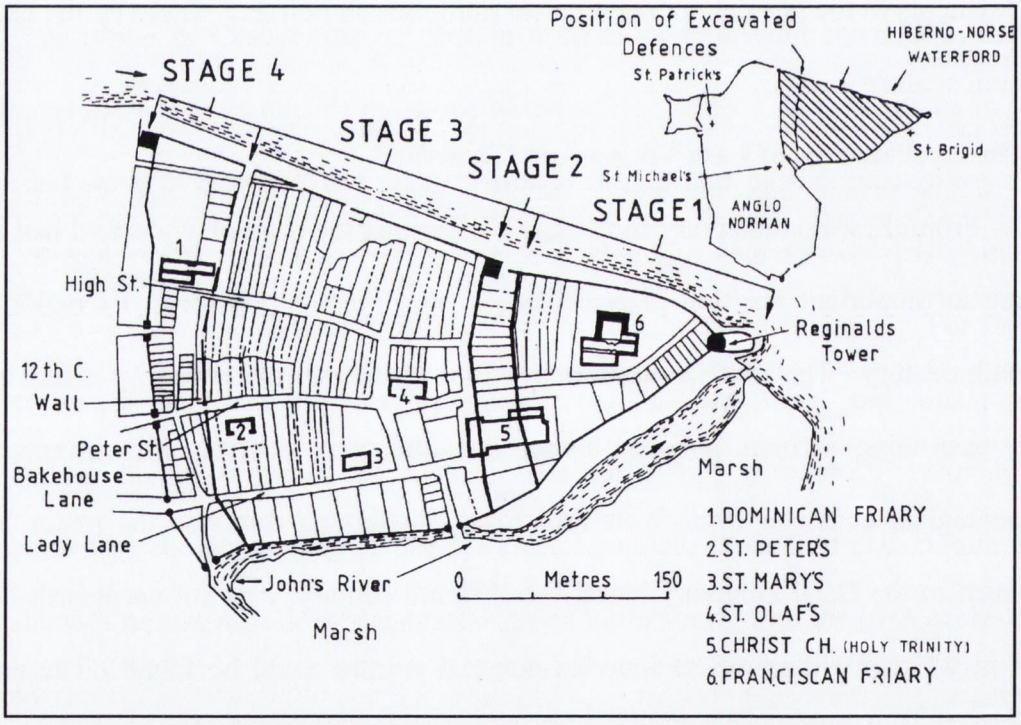

Fig. 5.1: The topographic development of Waterford town
(Hurley, Scully and McCutcheon, 1997, 7)

[132] Maurice F. Hurley and Orla M.B. Scully, with Sarah W.J. McCutcheon, *Late Viking Age and Medieval Waterford: Excavations 1986-1992*, Waterford Corporation, 1997.
[133] M.F. Hurley, 'Late Viking Age Settlement in Waterford City', in W. Nolan and T.P. Power, eds., *Waterford: History and Society*, Dublin, 1992, 49.
[134] Hurley, Scully, and McCutcheon, *Late Viking Age and Medieval Waterford.*

The excavations investigated an estimated twenty percent of the pre-Norman town, but did not uncover any trace of ninth or tenth century settlement.[135] This may relate to the location of the excavations. Bradley has argued that the earliest settlement in this location may have been a *longphort* near the point of the peninsula, now occupied by Reginald's Tower. Over time, the town grew westwards from the original encampment or fort, along a ridge of higher ground.[136] The excavated evidence from the centre of town lends support for this theory, as it is possible that the westward expansion of the town only progressed to this point by the early eleventh century. It is to be hoped that future excavations in the easternmost part of the peninsula will offer further confirmation, and will provide evidence for ninth or tenth century settlement in Waterford.

This thesis accepts the assumption that in the eleventh century, Waterford was a town that extended from Reginald's Tower westwards at least as far as the late-eleventh century defences found in excavations at Bakehouse Lane. On the basis of the excavated evidence from the central portion of this eleventh century town, and on the available documentary evidence, it is possible to offer answers to a series of questions about how the town functioned, and what roles it played within its region. These questions include the following:

- What can the excavated evidence from Waterford town tell us about the functions and economy of that settlement? What evidence do we have for Waterford's participation in local and long-distance trade?
- How did Waterford participate in local, regional, and super-regional politics?
- How did Waterford fit into the overall settlement hierarchy and settlement pattern in its region? Did its growth disrupt or change the overall settlement pattern and distribution of human activities? Did Waterford compete or collaborate with other central places in Déisi territory during this time, particularly Lismore?
- Ought we to characterize Waterford as an independent or semi-independent 'city-state', or should we view it as a central place that enhanced spatial integration in its region?

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[135] Maurice F. Hurley, 'The Excavations: General Introduction', in Hurley, Scully, and McCutcheon, 1-6.
[136] John Bradley and Andrew Halpin, 'The Topographical Development of Scandinavian and Anglo-Norman Waterford', in Nolan and Power, eds, *Waterford: History and Society*, 1992, 105-30.

This last question is perhaps one of the most important. The purpose of this thesis has been to attempt to reconstruct the processes of urbanization that occurred within the kingdom of the Déisi over the period from the eighth to the eleventh centuries. It has been one of the major hypotheses of this study that the development of the Irish towns can be best understood by analyzing the pre-existing, local networks of trade and exchange within which they were established. While it is possible to view the eleventh century towns in Ireland as distinct 'islands'[137] of urbanism entirely separate from the rural communities surrounding them, the evidence from Waterford makes such a characterization appear overly simplistic.

Waterford's Eleventh Century Defences

The theories on the origins of Waterford, like the other coastal towns in Ireland, suggest that its urban features developed around a military or defensive core area, or *longphort*. The excavations in Waterford indicate that the eleventh century town retained some defensive features, although not its presumed original military character. The situation of the town on the high ground at the confluence of the Suir and John's rivers is in itself strategic and defensive, and leaves only the western end of the settlement open to attack by land.

This western side of the settlement is where excavators uncovered eleventh century defences in the form of a deep ditch and internal bank. The ditch ran parallel to Bakehouse Lane, and a series of excavations uncovered approximately 35 meters of its total length. Dates for the bank were obtained by dendrochronological analysis of several wooden objects likely associated with its original construction. A wooden drain-pipe found in excavations of the defences in Arundel Square was evidently built to allow water to flow

[137] Richard Holt, 'What if the Sea were Different? Urbanization in Medieval Norway', *Past and Present* 195 (2007), 132-47. Holt offers evidence from Norway to counter Postan's characterization of medieval towns as 'non-feudal islands in the feudal seas', which existed 'almost despite' the surrounding rural society.

underneath the bank into the ditch, and was dated to 1088 +/- 9 AD.[138] Timbers found in the fill of the ditch in several locations gave similar dates centring on 1080, and may have been part of a palisade or other structure built on top of the bank as part of the original construction.[139] On balance, the excavators believe that the entire bank and ditch structure, perhaps with a wooden superstructure, was built in the last quarter of the eleventh century.

This line of defences was built to enclose and protect the western end of the town, which had evidently expanded west to the Peter Street area by the mid-eleventh century without the benefit of a protective enclosure. The earliest occupation layers of the houses excavated in the Peter Street area clearly pre-date the construction of the bank and ditch, and have been dated to the middle of the eleventh century.[140] During the raids on Waterford recorded in the annals in the 1030s, homes in this area must have been vulnerable to destruction.[141] The excavations in the Peter Street area revealed evidence of houses burning to the ground, although it is impossible to determine whether the fires were set by raiders, were accidental, or were intended to clear the site of older wooden structures in preparation for new building.[142] The decision to construct defences to protect the western limits of the settlement at Waterford may have been related to an attack on Waterford by the Laigin recorded in the *Annals of Inisfallen* in 1088.[143] However, it is unclear from the very limited documentary evidence whether the construction of the bank and ditch preceded the attack. Bradley and Halpin interpret the evidence to mean that the settlement was enclosed and defended at the time of the attack, while Hurley is more cautious in his analysis.[144]

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[138] Hurley, 'The Defences', 26, 31.
[139] Ibid., 26-7, 31.
[140] Ibid., 20-1.
[141] AI1031.9; AI1037.2.
[142] Hurley, 'The Defences', 21.
[143] AI1088.3. Hurley, 'The Defences', 21. Bradley and Halpin, 'The Topographical Development', 107-8, 111.
[144] Bradley and Halpin, 'The Topographical Development', 111. Hurley, 'The Defences', 21.

Although it is not possible to securely link the building of the eleventh century defences to a specific historical incident, the manner in which it was constructed can provide insights into the nature of the settlement at the time. The bank was largely built from the upcast produced by the digging of the ditch. The layers of this yellowish clay are alternated with layers of turves, possibly intended to pack down and stabilize the clay bank.[145] Excavations demonstrated that both the bank and ditch were constructed in sections. It appears that groups of labourers worked on different portions of the defences at the same time, building towards one another and then joining their sections together. Such a join was visible at one site along the bank, to the south-west of St. Peter's Church.[146] Hurley postulates that teams of workers might have been sponsored by individual wealthy townsmen,[147] and argues that, 'whatever the method of labour organization involved, the scale of the defences is indicative of a well developed municipal system capable of organizing and sustaining such a project'.[148] Furthermore, by the late eleventh century, control over the coastal towns was integral to regional kings' authority within their provinces, and the construction of defences should be seen in light of this increasing royal interest in the towns' economic and political life.[149]

The eleventh century bank and ditch were in use until the early twelfth century, when the bank was partially demolished and pushed into the ditch in preparation for the construction of a stone wall.[150] During the fifty years in which the bank and ditch defended the western limits of the settlement at Waterford, it does not appear to have been repaired, and there is evidence to suggest that the ditch was slowly filling with silt and organic material.[151] Finds from this fill included animal bones representative of food waste, red deer antler off-cuts from comb making, two bone motif-pieces, a leather

[145] Hurley, 'The Defences', 25-6. Hurley, 'Late Viking Age Settlement', 52-3.
[146] Hurley, 'The Defences', 24, and Fig. 5.4.
[147] Ibid., 24.
[148] Hurley, 'Late Viking Age Settlement', 52.
[149] Hurley, 'The Defences', 32-3.
[150] Hurley, 'The Defences', 27. Hurley, 'Late Viking Age Settlement', 53.
[151] Hurley, 'The Defences', 23-4, and Fig. 5.2.

scabbard, part of a yew bow, and a single sherd of Leinster Cooking Ware, all of which relate to the late eleventh or early twelfth century.[152] In other words, while the bank and ditch had an essentially defensive function, the excavated evidence also provides insight into eleventh century domestic and manufacturing activity in the immediate vicinity.

Although the specific reasons for enclosing and defending the western end of the settlement at Waterford in the late eleventh century remain impossible to ascertain, the general consensus is that the major stimulus was the growing wealth of the town and its inhabitants.[153] In order to assess the validity of this theory, it is necessary to examine the evidence for domestic life, manufacturing and trade in eleventh century Waterford.

Habitation and Domestic Life in Eleventh-Century Waterford

As Scully points out, a large proportion of the information gained from the excavations in Waterford city relates to habitation and domestic life.[154] To the east of the eleventh century bank and ditch, Waterford's street layout exhibits a regular, rectilinear pattern, which has led some scholars to suggest a degree of organized town planning during the early stages of the town's growth. The core area of the town is organized in a checkerboard layout along three east-west streets, High Street, Peter Street and Lady Lane, and four north-south streets.[155] The authority behind this effort at town planning may be the same as the authority under which the building of the eleventh century defences was conducted. However, Hurley points out that the shape of the town is also related to the topography of the peninsula on which it is situated. The main east-west streets are parallel to the ridge of high ground, and the smaller north-south streets and lanes provide access from these main roads to the rivers.[156]

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[152] Hurley, 'The Defences', 23-4, and Fig. 18.13.3. Hurley, 'Late Viking Age Settlement', 52.
[153] Hurley, 'The Defences', 20. Hurley, 'Late Viking Age Settlement', 52.
[154] Orla M.B. Scully, 'Domestic Architecture: Houses in Waterford from the Eleventh Century to Post-Medieval Times', in Hurley, Scully and McCutcheon, 34.
[155] Bradley and Halpin, 'The Topographical Development', 109-10.
[156] Hurley, 'Late Viking Age Settlement', 58.

Excavations at Peter Street in Waterford provide unique evidence for the development of streets in Irish towns in the pre-Norman period.[157] Prior to the late eleventh century, the surface of Peter Street was not paved, and Hurley hypothesizes that it may have represented a right-of-way rather than a formalized street in the typical urban sense. A metalled surface of pebbles and gravel was added later, probably at the end of the eleventh century, and excavators found no evidence to suggest subsequent repairs or resurfacing.[158]

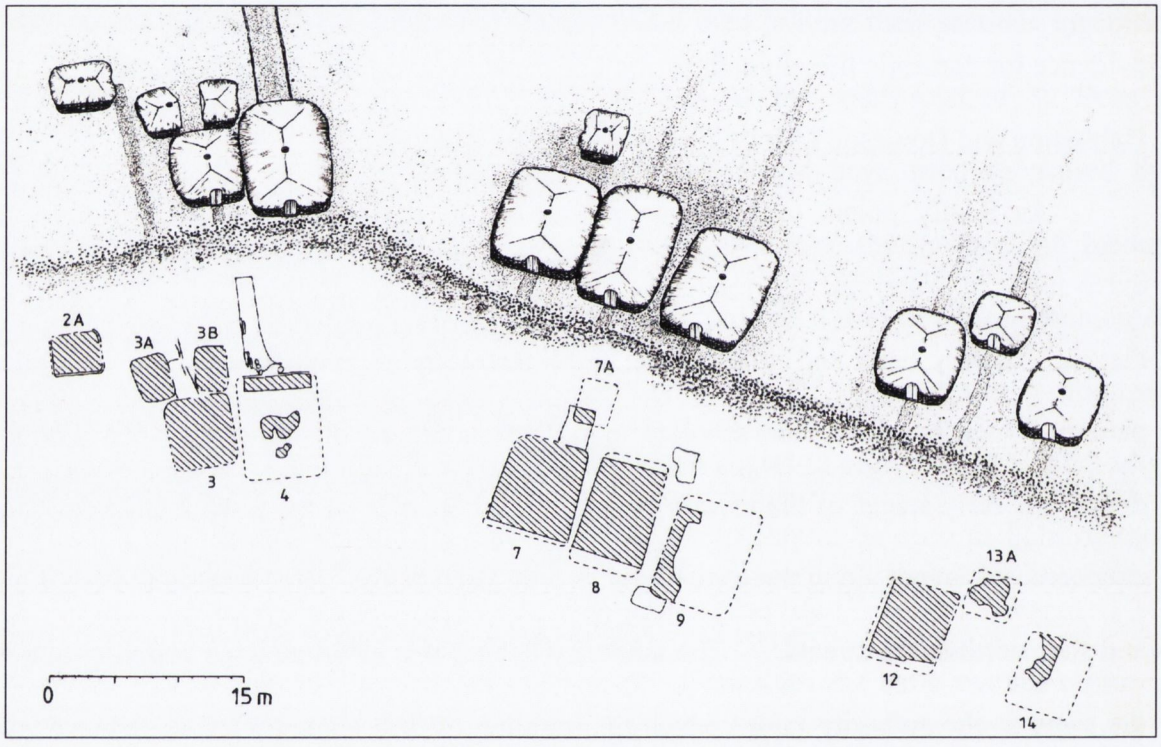

Fig. 5.2: Eleventh century houses from Peter Street, Waterford
(Hurley, Scully and McCutcheon, 1997, 62)

The Peter Street excavations also provided evidence for several phases of houses built on fourteen contiguous properties or plots (see Fig. 5.2). The earliest of these structures were built in the mid-eleventh century, and on some plots, excavators were able to distinguish twelve or more phases of occupation.[159] While the plots themselves fronted onto the street, there were significant variations in the locations of houses and other

[157] Ibid.
[158] Ibid.
[159] Scully, 'Domestic Architecture', 34-5.

buildings within the property. On some plots, the houses were built fronting onto the street, while on others they were located in the middle of the property with no obvious access to the street. In many cases, the location or orientation of the structures changed over phases of rebuilding.[160] Thus, while the overall layout of Waterford street pattern seems to indicate town planning and uniformity, there was a great deal of variation and flexibility in the ways in which individual householders organized their properties.

In general, the domestic architecture in eleventh century Waterford was similar to contemporary house types found in Dublin. In total, 118 house foundations were recorded in the course of the excavations in Waterford in the late 1980s and early 1990s.[161] The best evidence for occupation generally derived from surviving floor layers, and above-ground features like walls and roof supports were rarely extant.[162] The excavators followed Wallace's characterization of the Hiberno-Norse houses by floor plan, and found that Type 1 houses predominated in Waterford as they did in Dublin.[163] Type 1 houses are of post-and-wattle construction, and are rectangular in plan with doors typically placed on the short sides. The roof is usually supported by two sets of posts inside the walls, and the interior is divided longitudinally into a central aisle and two side aisles. The middle aisle contains the central hearth, while the side aisles are usually occupied by raised benches or beds.[164]

Forty-three Type 1 houses ranging in date from the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries were identified in the Waterford excavations.[165] They exhibit the same basic characteristics as the Dublin Type 1 houses, with a few local variations. This includes the unique 'fireside benches' found in some Waterford Type 1 houses. These are found on one or both sides of the house between the central hearth and the side aisles, and may have

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[160] Hurley, 'Late Viking Age Settlement', 61.
[161] Scully, 'Domestic Architecture', 34-5.
[162] Hurley, 'Late Viking Age Settlement', 61-2.
[163] Scully, 'Domestic Architecture', 34-5.
[164] P.F. Wallace, *The Viking age buildings of Dublin*, Dublin, 1992, 9-14.
[165] Scully, 'Domestic Architecture', 34.

been related to socializing or cooking.[166] The floors of these houses were made of local boulder clay, sometimes with a sub-floor constructed of turf, clay, or gravel. Unlike in the Dublin Type 1 houses, the floor of the central aisle was kept bare, with no covering of plant material or gravel. Some of the central hearths found in the Waterford Type 1 houses had formal stone settings, but most were simple mounds of burnt clay and ash. A layer of occupational debris was found overlying many of the surviving floor layers, and typically included animal bones, straw, charred plant parts, and other organic material. The side aisles were separated from the central aisle by rows of small posts or thin planks, and their clay floors were covered with layers of brushwood, usually interpreted as bedding material.[167]

The Waterford Type 1 houses were generally situated on the street-fronting portion of their properties, and where the front of the plot was available for excavation, many seem to have had small paths leading from the front door to the street. Most also had paths leading from their back doors, constructed of a variety of combinations of gravel, wattle mats, stone slabs and timbers. The property plots themselves were sometimes separated by wattle fences, although these were not evident in every phase of occupation, and in some cases, fence locations changed over time.[168]

Some Type 1 structures were associated with smaller Type 2 houses, which have been interpreted as extra accommodation for members of households too numerous for their Type 1 houses.[169] The Waterford Type 2 houses are similar to Wallace's Dublin Type 2 structures, although the Waterford examples seem to be generally more substantial and more comfortable. While all Dublin Type 2 houses are single-walled wattle structures, about half of the Waterford Type 2 buildings are double-walled, and the cavity between the layers of wattle was stuffed with bracken ferns for insulation. Similarly, most of the

[166] Scully, 'Domestic Architecture', 36.
[167] Ibid., 36-7.
[168] Hurley, 'Late Viking Age Settlement', 63.
[169] Ibid., 63.

Waterford Type 2 buildings were provided with hearths, while few hearths were found in Dublin Type 2 houses. Finally, some Waterford Type 2 houses had evidence for internal subdivision into aisles, while this was not a feature of Dublin Type 2 structures. Overall, the Waterford Type 2 houses appear to have been designed as comfortable sleeping quarters, and may have been 'a major development towards privacy for the principal residents of Type 1 houses'.[170]

It is challenging to draw any general conclusions based on the changing fortunes of the owners of particular properties for which archaeological evidence is available. Without written records, it is not possible to discern when property was bought or sold, or to link an occupation phase to any individual person or family. Hurley points out that while the largest Waterford Type 1 houses were built in the early eleventh century, on an individual plot houses could be bigger or smaller in successive building phases.[171] The same is true of phases that included construction of additional buildings. While wattle structures like Type 2 houses were relatively low-cost building projects, investment in subsidiary sleeping quarters would seem to indicate that the household in question had an increasing population, disposable wealth, or both.

In addition to the post-and-wattle Type 1 and 2 houses, excavations in parts of Waterford where the subsoils are free-draining gravel revealed evidence six remarkable sunken-featured buildings.[172] Of these, four were fully excavated, while only the entrances to the other two were available for study. All of the buildings were apparently very similar in design and construction, and all date to a short period from the late eleventh to the mid-twelfth centuries. The buildings were constructed within pits dug into the gravel subsoil to a depth of over a meter. Timber roof supports were set into the floor around the inside of the cut and in the middle of the chamber, and may have supported an upper floor at the

[170] Hurley, 'Late Viking Age Settlement', 65.
[171] Ibid., 63.
[172] Claire Walsh, 'Sunken Buildings', in Hurley, Scully and McCutcheon, 45-53. Hurley, 'Late Viking Age Settlement', 65-8.

surrounding ground level in addition to the roof.[173] Access from the backyard to the lower chamber was via a stone-built stairway or ramp, five examples of which were excavated in Waterford. No trace of an upper story has survived for any of these buildings, but if present, this ground level would likely have been accessed from the street.

Walsh notes that all of the sunken buildings excavated in Waterford were located with access to the main thoroughfares of Peter Street and High Street. Three of the six buildings were situated on their plots to provide the houses with direct street frontage, while the remaining three were sited either at the back of their plots, or without obvious reference to known property boundaries.[174] Some tentative suggestions can be made about the relationships between these buildings. On the one hand, the dating evidence suggests that they were built and in use contemporaneously. Two sunken buildings from Olaf Street were in fact constructed simultaneously in one large pit, although their entrances may have faced in opposite directions. Behind these two sunken houses was a third sunken building, and Walsh hypothesizes that three structures may have shared a common yard area.[175] East of this cluster of houses, another sunken house fronted onto Peter Street, and access to the lower level of the building was from the back yard.[176] A plot adjacent to this structure was unoccupied at the time, although excavation revealed a large, deep pit that may represent preparation for the construction of another sunken building. The building project was apparently abandoned, and the pit was rapidly backfilled.[177] Backfilling was also evident at the end of these buildings' period of use. Some of the sunken houses may have fallen into disrepair for some time before being demolished and their pits backfilled, while others seem to have been dismantled so that the large structural timbers could be reused.[178]

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[173] Walsh, 'Sunken Buildings', 49-50.
[174] Ibid., 45.
[175] Ibid., 47, and Fig. 6.93.
[176] Ibid., 47, and Figs. 6.2, 6.30, 6.35 and 6.93.
[177] Ibid., 47.
[178] Walsh, 'Sunken Buildings', 46-8.

The excavated evidence offers limited insight into the possible functions of the Waterford sunken buildings. In general, they appear to have been very high quality constructions, and are typically considered to be linked to commercial activity.[179] While the below-ground chambers of these sunken buildings must have been damp much of the year, living conditions otherwise appear to have been very good. The floors were level, and appear to have been kept very clean, and there was no evidence to suggest that animals were kept in the buildings. There has been a suggestion that the sunken chambers were used for storage of valuable merchandise, perhaps including slaves, and Walsh points out that three keys were found in the fill of the entrance of one of the sunken buildings.[180] Another possibility is that these chambers were workshops for weaving, although there is no botanical or artefact evidence to conclusively support this theory.[181]

A few other Irish examples of sunken buildings have been excavated outside of Waterford, in Dublin and Limerick.[182] As a group, these structures are likely based on similar types common in English towns in the tenth and eleventh centuries and Walsh has argued that Waterford's sunken buildings provide strong evidence for the town's economic, social and political ties to English towns in the eleventh century.[183] While excavated English examples of sunken buildings tend to have been constructed about a century before those found in Waterford, there may be similarities in the circumstances under which they were built. For instance, sunken buildings found at Coppergate in York and Lower Bridge Street in Chester both date to the period immediately following the end of Scandinavian kingship over those towns.[184] Likewise, the Waterford sunken buildings seem to have been constructed during a period in which Irish kings were taking an

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[179] Walsh, 'Sunken Buildings', 51-2. Maurice F. Hurley, 'Viking Age Towns: Archaeological Evidence from Waterford and Cork', in Monk and Sheehan, eds., *Early Medieval Munster*, 1998, 170.
[180] Walsh, 'Sunken Buildings', 51.
[181] Ibid.
[182] Ibid., 45. Three are known from Dublin, and three from Limerick. See H. Murray, *Viking and early medieval buildings in Dublin*, BAR 119, 1983; P.F. Wallace, *The Viking age buildings of Dublin*, Dublin, 1992; K. Wiggins, 'King John's Castle', in I. Bennett, ed., *Excavations 1990*, 1991, 43.
[183] Walsh, 'Sunken Buildings', 45.
[184] Walsh, 'Sunken Buildings', 52.

increasing interest in the town. The overall impression of late eleventh-century Waterford provided by the excavated evidence indicates a period of rapid expansion and investment in the town's infrastructure. These hints make it possible to imagine that late eleventh century Waterford was experiencing a period of prosperity and population growth, thanks to increasing links both to the local political and economic networks, and to long-distance trade with Britain and beyond.

Trade, Crafts and the Economy in Eleventh Century Waterford

Direct evidence for long-distance trade in eleventh century Waterford is somewhat limited. Hurley has pointed out the 'notable scarcity' of coin finds in the artefact assemblage recovered from Waterford.[185] There were no finds of Hiberno-Norse coins, and very few high medieval coins were identified.[186] This may indicate that the major commercial life of the town was occurring somewhere outside the excavated area, perhaps further towards the waterfront. At the moment, it is necessary to look elsewhere for insights into the trading activities of Waterford's inhabitants.

The most substantial evidence for long-distance trade in Waterford is provided by ceramics, which confirm Waterford's trade links to western England and north-west France in the pre-Norman period.[187] Almost all of the ceramics associated with eleventh- and early twelfth-century levels in Waterford are of English manufacture, including a small amount of Cornish ware, coarsewares of probable southwest English origin, Bath Fabric 'A' ware, Proto-Ham Green ware, and south-east Wiltshire wares. This dominance of English ceramics extends into the thirteenth century, and almost half of the total ceramic assemblage consists of Ham Green ware from near Bristol.[188] The only non-English ceramic found in eleventh-century contexts in Waterford was Normandy cooking ware.[189]

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[185] M.F. Hurley, 'General Conclusions', in Hurley, Scully and McCutcheon, 899.
[186] Michael Kenny, 'Coins, Jetons and Tokens', in Hurley Scully and McCutcheon, 536-8.
[187] Hurley, 'General Conclusions', 899. Audrey Gahan and Clare McCutcheon with M.F. Hurley and J.G. Hurst, 'Medieval Pottery', in Hurley, Scully and McCutcheon, 285-355.
[188] Gahan, McCutcheon, Hurley and Hurst, 'Medieval Pottery', 288-303.
[189] Ibid., 304.

Although as a total assemblage, the ceramics can provide a certain amount of economic information about Waterford and its inhabitants, the excavators found that it was not possible to determine the level of affluence of any given property or building phase based on pottery finds.[190] They state that 'it is noteworthy that the distribution of material, within each period, remained relatively constant throughout the site, i.e. most pottery types were evenly distributed and were apparently ubiquitous in the community'.[191] There is no obvious difference between the ceramic assemblages recovered from the Type 1 houses as compared to the sunken buildings.[192] Although eleventh-century ceramics were generally found in occupation deposits from the houses, other fragments were recovered from the fills of associated backyard pits.[193]

These pits also provided the anaerobic conditions necessary for the preservation of textiles, rope, basketry and other plant fibre material. Two women's headdresses of knotted silk mesh, as well as a length of silk cord were almost certainly imported as finished products.[194] Other textiles found in eleventh-century contexts included a few pieces of woollen twill cloth, of a type common in many Viking Age towns in Scandinavia, and cloth of this type may have been imported. However, woollen twills were definitely being produced in Dublin during the Viking Age, and Wincott Heckett notes that finds of weavers' swords, spindles and other tools for textile production indicate that Waterford may also have produced some of its own cloth.[195]

A piece of much rougher woollen cloth, usually regarded as packing material or other general purpose plain fabric, was found in an eleventh-century context. The excavators note that this type was found in much greater quantities in towns like Cork and

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[190] Ibid., 286.
[191] Ibid., 329.
[192] Ibid., 329-35.
[193] Orla M.B. Scully and Éamonn McEneaney, 'Pits', in Hurley, Scully and McCutcheon, 244-72. Gahan, McCutcheon, Hurley and Hurst, 'Medieval Pottery', 330-1.
[194] Elizabeth Wincott Heckett, 'Textiles, Cordage, Basketry and Raw Fibre', in Hurley, Scully and McCutcheon, 749-53.
[195] Ibid., 749.

Newcastle, but they hypothesize that the difference is related to the types of sites excavated. The excavations in Waterford were based far from the waterfront, and that part of the town may not have been a place where such textiles were often used or discarded.[196] Again, it is difficult to determine whether such cloth was made locally or was imported from Dublin or other towns with which Waterford maintained trading links. Finally, the eleventh century deposits also contained a number of fragments of yarn, string and rope of various thicknesses and made out of both animal and plant fibres. While some simple kinds of string may have been produced locally, Wincott Heckett argues that most of the cordage found in Waterford was probably imported, perhaps from England.[197]

The evidence for long distance trade clearly demonstrates the links between Waterford, Britain and north-western France in the pre-Norman period. The evidence for the day-to-day workings of Waterford's economy, however, is more challenging to assess. The artefact assemblage from Waterford indicates that locally based craftspeople were creating objects from a variety of materials, including metals, wood, stone, leather, bone, horn and antler. However, Hurley notes that the excavations in Waterford revealed only limited evidence for areas of concentrated craftworking or manufacturing.[198] Naturally, it is possible that there were concentrations of manufacturing activity outside the excavated area in the eleventh century.

Metalworking in iron, lead, copper alloy and precious metals was likely happening in many areas in or near the town, and even non-specialists probably conducted minor repairs to metal objects. A large number and variety of metal objects were identified in eleventh-century contexts in Waterford, including several kinds of copper alloy stick pins. These pins, which are similar to those found in excavations in Hiberno-Norse Dublin, seem

[196] Wincott Heckett, 'Textiles, Cordage, Basketry and Raw Fibre', 743-9.
[197] Ibid., 754-6.
[198] Hurley, 'General Conclusions', 898.

to have been made by hand in a variety of styles rather than mass produced.[199] Other dress-related objects included copper alloy and iron buckles, and needles, which were likely made and sold by specialized craftsmen. Their value is demonstrated by finds of bone needle-cases for protective storage.[200] Finally, there is the beautiful silver and gilt kite brooch, which was found in an early twelfth-century context, but which belongs to a category of decorative dress-fasteners that were in use in Ireland from as early as the ninth century.[201]

A variety of tools and implements were also found in many eleventh century contexts in Waterford. Knives were a common find in all periods, and other iron tools included fish hooks, awls or punches, drill bits, chisels, a sickle blade, and a possible weaver's sword. These tools relate to a number of different crafts and activities, including leather working, carpentry, textile production and metalwork. Many other iron objects were found throughout the excavated levels, including handles, fittings, nails, rivets and other plain metalwork.[202] Several lengths of copper alloy wire may have belonged to a craftsperson of some kind, while the fragment of a copper alloy scales and finds of lead pan-weights in eleventh-century contexts may indicate the activities of merchants.[203] Several iron arrowheads were also found in eleventh-century layers, demonstrating the importance of this weapon type in the Hiberno-Norse town.[204]

Direct evidence for metalworking in the excavated portion of Waterford was discovered in the early to mid-twelfth-century occupation layers in a house on the eastern end of Peter Street (PS12:L7 and L8). In the early twelfth century, the owners of this plot built a Type 1 house with a gravel backyard. Although the building appears to have been designed as a domestic building, the accumulation of slag and charcoal on its original floor

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[199] Orla M.B. Scully, 'Metal Artefacts', in Hurley, Scully and McCutcheon, 438-48
[200] Ibid., 448-55.
[201] Niamh Whitfield, 'The Waterford Kite-Brooch and its Place in Irish Metalwork', in Hurley, Scully and McCutcheon, 490-517.
[202] Scully, 'Metal Artefacts', 454-8, 461-5, 469-74.
[203] Ibid., 466-8, 483-4.
[204] Andrew Halpin, 'Archery Material', in Hurley, Scully and McCutcheon, 538-45.

surface indicates that some metalworking may have been taking place in or near this structure soon after it was built.[205] In the mid-twelfth century, the floor of this building was resurfaced with clay and gravel, and the central hearth was expanded into a group of smelting hearths. Accumulated floor deposits in this layer contained a great deal of iron slag, hammerscale, charcoal and ash, and the clay and gravel floor was heavily oxidized. The excavators argue that although no tools, moulds or crucibles were found in or near the building, the bulk of evidence points toward the interpretation of the building as a blacksmith's workshop during the mid-twelfth century.[206] This may represent the intensification of early industrial activity in the building, which raises questions about the development of full-time or professional craftworking in the town. To sum up, however, there is no evidence for concentrations of metalworking activity in the excavated area within Waterford prior to the early twelfth century, despite the large numbers of metal artefacts uncovered throughout the area.

Similar difficulties arise with the interpretation of other craft activities represented in the artefact assemblage from Waterford. Woodworking and carpentry were obviously important activities in eleventh-century Waterford, and everything from houses to toys was made from wood products. Analysis of the wooden artefacts recovered in the excavations in Waterford demonstrates that craftsmen were familiar with the properties of various species, and selected types of wood suitable to their purpose.[207] Moreover, the techniques by which the Waterford wooden artefacts were made can provide some information about the craftsmen who produced them. For instance, both lathe-turning and coopering were skilled crafts, and may have been the work of full-time professionals. These artisans may have been based in the town itself, or may have been itinerant craftsmen. By contrast, basketry and wood-carving, as well as basic general carpentry,

[205] Orla M.B. Scully and Sarah W.J. McCutcheon, 'Catalogue of Houses: (a) Peter Street', in Hurley, Scully and McCutcheon, 98, figs. 6.50, 6.56.
[206] Ibid., 100-101, 104, fig. 6.57, 6.61.
[207] Maurice F. Hurley and Sarah W.J. McCutcheon, 'Wooden Artefacts', in Hurley, Scully and McCutcheon, 553.

were likely to have been skills held by many of Waterford's inhabitants, who handmade their own items as they needed them.[208]

Many of the wooden artefacts themselves contain elements of Irish influence, both in design and decoration, while others are similar to examples from other contemporary towns in Britain and the Continent. Scandinavian influence can be seen in the decoration on some fragmentary objects,[209] as well as in the discovery of a gaming board for playing *hnefatafl*, a game of widespread popularity during the Viking age.[210] Finds of boat or ship timbers also connects Waterford to a Viking or Norse shipbuilding tradition.[211] There are questions, however, as to whether the majority of wooden artefacts found in Waterford were made by town-based craftsmen, or by people living in the rural area outside the town. Hurley and McCutcheon conclude that while some wooden objects may have been brought into the town from the hinterland as finished products, woodworking was also a trade practiced by town-based craftsmen. Woodworking evidence from the town takes the form of wood chips and shavings that are found in many backyard deposits and pit fills.[212] The form and decoration of the wooden artefact assemblage leads the excavators to argue that, 'it must be assumed that locally based craftsmen working with native materials were in regular contact with all areas with which Waterford had trading connections: that is, with the hinterland and with other sea-port cities'.[213]

Objects of bone, antler and horn also feature prominently in the artefact assemblage from eleventh-century Waterford. These objects include combs, gaming pieces, handles for knives or tools, and spindle whorls, where the durability of the material was considered important. Both the finished objects and waste material associated with their production were found in floor deposits and pit fills throughout the excavated area. Waste material

[208] Hurley and McCutcheon, 'Wooden Artefacts', 557-8.
[209] James T. Lang, 'Decorated Wooden Artefacts', in Hurley, Scully and McCutcheon, 634-6.
[210] Hurley and McCutcheon, 'Wooden Artefacts', 592-3, fig 16.14.1. The board was found in a 12th century context, but resembles the 10th century Ballinderry *hnefatafl* board.
[211] Sean McGrail, 'The Boat Timbers', in Hurley, Scully and McCutcheon, 636-42.
[212] Hurley and McCutcheon, 'Wooden Artefacts', 556.
[213] Ibid., 556-7.

was also preserved among the organic layers at the bottom of the defensive ditch.[214] Given the bulk of waste material from the production of these types of objects, and the fact that no artefacts made from skeletal material can be demonstrated to be imports, Hurley argues that the manufacture of objects from bone, horn and antler was a major craft activity in eleventh-century Waterford.[215]

Antler appears to have been the preferred material for Waterford's craftsmen, especially for comb making. The excavators noted that bone was typically used to make objects where the shape of the bone itself minimized the amount of labour required. For instance, the shafts of long bones could easily be made into tubes for needle cases, or whittled into needles and pins, and the ends could be carved into spindle whorls.[216] Deposits of horn cores in ditch fills and pits were also numerous, and horn seems to have been utilized where its transparency was useful, such as for lantern or window coverings. Horn was also shaped and cut to form bowls, spoons, or combs.[217]

By the eleventh century, the production of objects made of bone, antler and horn appears to have been a specialized craft in Waterford, and the production of antler combs was its most important element. Producing objects out of bone may have been a less skilled undertaking, but working in horn or antler required special tools and knowledge.[218] The excavators have argued that the large amounts of antler waste material and horn cores found in the bottom layers of the fill of the defensive ditch represent the waste produced by a professional workshop. This may have been located outside the bank and ditch, but there are indications that the workshop may have been on Peter Street, at least in the late eleventh or early twelfth century. Early twelfth-century deposits from several properties on the street (PS1:L6, PS2:L6, and the yards of PS3 and PS4) contained large amounts of

[214] Maurice F. Hurley, 'Artefacts of Skeletal Material', in Hurley, Scully and McCutcheon, 650.
[215] Ibid.
[216] Ibid., 652.
[217] Ibid., 652.
[218] Ibid., 653-4.

antler waste, cut bone and horn cores, in addition to broken and unfinished combs and other objects.[219]

As was true of wooden objects, the bone, antler and horn objects recovered from Waterford show a combination of influences, but most closely resemble artefact assemblages from other contemporary towns, especially Dublin. This is true of the styles of decoration found on both finished objects and on late eleventh century bone motif-pieces from Waterford. O'Meadhra also points out the similarities between the Waterford motif-pieces and one found in nearby Dungarvan. In general, she argues that the carved decorations are evidence for the connections between Waterford and the rest of the Viking world in this period.[220]

There is also a significant amount of evidence for the use of leather objects in eleventh-century Waterford. Most of the artefacts were discovered in anaerobic conditions in the bottom of the defensive ditch or in backyard pits, and the bulk of leather material found dates to the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The most common leather artefacts found are components of shoes, and their fragmentary state indicates that many were thrown away when they were worn beyond repair. Several different types of shoes were represented in the Waterford assemblage, and the styles were paralleled by examples from Dublin, as well as English and Scandinavian town contexts.[221] In addition to shoes, leather was used to make various kinds of sheaths or scabbards for knives and swords, belts, straps, handles and bags.[222] All of these items are made from a range of different animal hides, including cow, calf, sheep and goat leathers, although cow and calf leathers were the most popular. Many of the objects show evidence for repairs or reuse, indicating that

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[219] Hurley, 'Artefacts of Skeletal Material', 652-3.
[220] Uaininn O'Meadhra, 'Motif-Pieces and Other Decorated Bone and Antler Work', in Hurley, Scully and McCutcheon, 699-702.
[221] Daire O'Rourke, 'Leather Artefacts', in Hurley, Scully and McCutcheon, 703-8.
[222] O'Rourke, 'Leather Artefacts', 722-35. Maurice F. Hurley, 'Sheaths and Scabbards', in Hurley, Scully and McCutcheon, 736-42.

leather was a valuable commodity not to be wasted.[223] Although leather goods and waste material are well represented among finds from Waterford, there are no indications as to where such objects might have been made or repaired, nor where the leather itself was tanned from raw hides.

Numerous stone objects were found in eleventh-century domestic contexts and pits in Waterford, including pot boilers, possible gaming disks, many hone stones, a possible net sinker and other weights, a rotary grindstone, a possible crucible or mould, and several quern stones.[224] The natural pebbles interpreted as 'pot boilers' in a number of eleventh-century domestic contexts may indicate a native Irish influence as such objects are common on early medieval Irish sites.[225] All of the stone objects found in eleventh-century contexts are of local stone, and were likely manufactured locally, although there is no direct evidence to indicate that they were produced in the town rather than in its rural hinterland.[226] It is actually possible to argue that the stone objects from Waterford reveal links to native Irish domestic practices more clearly than links to other parts of the Viking world.

In general, Waterford's material culture is typical of that found in many similar north-west European towns, or as Hurley explains, 'wherever the influences of international sea-borne trade extended'.[227] Waterford's eleventh-century architectural forms and building methods, artefact types and decorative styles are all analogous to those found in other towns of this period in Ireland, Britain and Scandinavia. In order to exist and to participate in this 'international' urban culture, however, Waterford needed to develop and maintain very strong links to the local landscape and economy. Although the

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[223] O'Rourke, 'Leather Artefacts', 735-6.
[224] Sarah W.J. McCutcheon, 'The Stone Artefacts', in Hurley, Scully and McCutcheon, 404-32.
[225] Ibid., 405-9.
[226] Richard P. Unitt, 'Rock Materials Used for the Production of Artefacts and for Construction', in Hurley, Scully and McCutcheon, 436-7.
[227] Hurley, 'General Conclusions', 898.

town benefited from a certain amount of long-distance trade, its economy was essentially reliant on that of its rural hinterland.

5.7 Waterford's Reliance on a Rural Hinterland

The excavated evidence from Waterford town can provide insights into the nature of the town's dependence on its rural hinterland. Thanks to careful post-excavation work, it is possible to discuss specific wood species needed by town dwellers for various purposes, and to assess the relative importance of different types of grain, meat products and other food supplies in the town's diet. The following section will discuss how this information can be used to reconstruct the composition, if not the precise boundaries, of Waterford's late Viking age hinterland.

Sourcing Raw Materials

Considering Irish towns in the Hiberno-Norse period, Hurley states that, 'timber was one of the most important requirements in the fabric of these towns, providing defence, shelter, artefacts, tools, furniture and firewood'.[228] Nearly all of the species represented in the wooden artefact assemblage are native to Ireland, and the excavators believe that trees were likely to have been felled in the local area.[229] They attempt to offer some assessment of the forest cover in close proximity to the town on the basis of post-medieval records,[230] and argue that oak, holly and yew would have dominated the lowland forests, while hazel, birch and ash quickly colonize cleared land. Alder, willow and poplar prefer marshy areas or riverbanks, and may have been prevalent near the town, but pine was probably only available in the uplands some distance from Waterford.[231]

The construction of Waterford Type 1 and 2 houses involved a number of different wood resources. Wattle walls were built by driving thin posts of ash, alder, hazel or other types of wood into the ground, and then thin rods of hazel were woven between them. Oak

[228] Maurice F. Hurley, 'The Use of Wood as a Structural Raw Material', in Hurley, Scully and McCutcheon, 40.
[229] Hurley and McCutcheon, 'Wooden Artefacts', 554-5.
[230] E. McCracken, *Irish woods since Tudor times*, Newton Abbot, 1971, 17.
[231] Hurley and McCutcheon, 'Wooden Artefacts', 555-6.

was the preferred type of wood for structural posts and door jambs, but almost any available type of wood was used to make the fittings and furniture inside the house. The sunken buildings had walls of ash planks, and their structural timbers were made of oak. Trackways or pathways outside the houses were often made of split logs or wattle mats.[232]

Hazel was perhaps the most important raw material for the construction of houses, fences, and paths. The hazel rods for wattle mats have to be cut in the winter months. Tierney and Hannon estimate that an acre of unmanaged woodland could produce the number of hazel rods needed to construct ten new Type 1 houses.[233] Hazel grows rapidly in the Irish climate, but the ongoing productivity of such a wood resource depends on the degree to which it is managed by coppicing. If the hazel stands near the town were carefully coppiced, very little overall acreage would be needed to satisfy Waterford's requirements. If the land was cleared or abandoned after it was cut for hazel rods, the town's inhabitants would find it increasingly difficult to meet their needs for building materials within their local area. It is not possible to determine what if any methods of woodland management were used in Waterford's eleventh-century hinterland, nor is it possible to tell if the town's inhabitants gathered hazel directly, or purchased it from a rural supplier.[234]

Similar questions relate to the purchase or felling of larger timbers. Hurley suggests that most large timbers were obtained within a four to six mile radius of the town, and that they were likely felled in the forests that grew along river banks. Many large logs may have been floated down the river rather than carted overland to the town to save time and labour.[235] Dendrochronological analysis of the large oak timbers recovered from several contexts during the excavations in Waterford indicates clusters of felling dates in the 1080s, 1100-1110, and the mid-twelfth-century. These clusters may relate to periods of

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[232] Hurley, 'The Use of Wood as a Structural Raw Material', 40-3.
[233] Tierney and Hannon, 'Plant Remains', 891.
[234] Tierney and Hannon, 'Plant Remains', 891. Hurley, 'The Use of Wood as a Structural Raw Material', 42.
[235] Hurley, 'The Use of Wood as a Structural Raw Material', 42.

expansion and renewal, as in the late eleventh century, or they may indicate episodes of land clearance in the surrounding countryside. Alternatively, there could have been an element of organization or control over the supply of timber to the town.[236]

In addition to sourcing wood as a raw material, Hurley and McCutcheon raise questions about where the wooden artefacts found in Waterford were produced. 'Was the wood brought in as unworked logs to the city where resident, specialized craftsmen manufactured artefacts, or did country people trade their craftwork with the townsfolk in exchange for exotic imports?' [237] They argue that in all probability, both raw materials and finished wooden articles were brought into the town from the local area.

The evidence for metalworking in Waterford before the twelfth century is very limited, despite the range of metal objects found in eleventh-century contexts, but it makes sense that some level of smelting and smithing occurred in or near the town in the eleventh century. It is worth noting that while the raw materials for metalworking were largely available within Ireland, transporting iron, lead and copper from their sources to the towns would have been a laborious task.[238] Furthermore, metalworking requires an enormous supply of fuel in order to obtain the high temperatures required. The assemblage of metal artefacts from eleventh-century contexts in Waterford therefore reveals the strong links the town must have had to its rural hinterland.

The horn, bone and antler artefacts and waste material that occur in so many eleventh-century contexts in Waterford are indicative of the need for a ready supply of these skeletal materials. Bone was probably widely available, because meat was typically sold on the bone.[239] Hurley and McCormick both note that the number of horn cores far exceeds the quantities of animal bones from those same species.[240] McCormick suggests

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[236] Hurley, 'The Use of Wood as a Structural Raw Material', 42.
[237] Hurley and McCutcheon, 'Wooden Artefacts', 556.
[238] P.F. Wallace, 'The archaeology of Ireland's viking-age towns', in Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, ed., *A New History of Ireland, Vol. 1: Prehistoric and Early Ireland*, Oxford University Press, 2005, 834.
[239] Finbar McCormick, 'The Animal Bones', in Hurley, Scully and McCutcheon, 824-5.
[240] Hurley, 'Artefacts of Skeletal Material', 650-1. McCormick, 'The Animal Bones', 827-8.

that these bulk supplies of horn must have been brought into the excavated area specifically for craftworking.[241] This may have been sourced from town-based or rural butchers or farmers, but conclusive evidence for the nature of this trade is unavailable.

Similarly, while there are large quantities of antler present in the excavated area, there are few deer bones present, and the excavators argue that Waterford's craftsmen generally used shed antler collected outside the town, rather than the antlers of deer killed for venison. The supply of antler to the town can be envisioned as occurring a number of ways. People living in the countryside may have gathered and then sold or traded the antler to town-based craftsmen, or the craftsmen may have spent time, perhaps seasonally, collecting antler themselves. Hurley argues that, 'in view of the scale of production in Waterford and the association of horn cores and antler, an urban-based craft in which the raw material was supplied on an organized basis seems more likely'.[242] He also points out that both the quantities of waste material and the discarding of potentially usable off-cuts indicates that antler was a readily available raw material during this period. This further strengthens the argument that there was a degree of organization in the supply of antler to the town.

Other animal products, including leather, wool and fur, may have been transported into the town from the hinterland, but again, there is no concrete basis on which to reconstruct the mechanics of this trade. The prevalence of cow and calf leathers links the leatherworking industry to the evidence for diet in eleventh-century Waterford, as discussed below. However, the excavators do not speculate about the origins and processing of the leather found in Waterford. As is true with most raw materials, it is possible to imagine different scenarios. People living in the countryside who raised animals could have slaughtered them outside the town, and then sold or traded the raw hides to tanners in Waterford. The tanners then could have processed the hides in the

[241] McCormick, 'The Animal Bones', 827.
[242] Hurley, 'Artefacts of Skeletal Material', 651.

town, and either produced leather goods themselves, or sold the tanned leather on to an additional group of town-based or itinerant craftsmen. Alternatively, the raw hides could have been sourced within the town, from live animals brought into the town on the hoof for meat. Another possibility is that some tanning was taking place outside the town, and processed leather was sold to craftsmen in the town. In all likelihood, a combination of these possibilities took place, but it is worth noting that the frugality with which tanned leather was used indicates that it was not an inexpensive commodity.[243]

Ultimately, all of the evidence from Waterford's artefact assemblage indicates its need to draw raw materials and fuel from its rural hinterland. Perhaps even more importantly, the town had to rely on the agricultural produce of its local area for a steady supply of food. Analysis of the archeo-botanical and faunal remains recovered from the excavated area provides insights into the types of foods eaten by Waterford's inhabitants, and clues as to how the trade in food products functioned in this period.

Feeding Eleventh-Century Waterford

Cattle were by far the most common source of meat for Waterford's inhabitants. Cattle on the hoof were almost certainly purchased from outside, and then slaughtered in the town.[244] At the time of their slaughter, most of the cattle represented by the Waterford faunal collection were fully mature or old, and females were disproportionately common. McCormick suggests that this is indicative of specialized production in the hinterland. He proposes a model where the meat producers slaughtered male calves for their own use, and raised female calves to maturity. They kept cows for several years to produce more calves and milk, and then sold them on to Waterford's population. The dichotomy between rural and urban slaughtering age distributions is indicative of distinctly different agricultural

[243] O'Rourke, 'Leather Artefacts', 736.
[244] McCormick, 'The Animal Bones', 822.

practices and goals, and the prevalence of older cattle in Waterford is mirrored by the assemblages from Fishamble Street in Dublin and from Anglo-Scandinavian York.[245]

That cattle came into the town on the hoof and were slaughtered on site is indicated by the presence of all types of cattle bones in the assemblage. Both 'meat-bearing' and 'non-meat-bearing' bones were in evidence, suggesting that households had access to and used all parts of the animal. McCormick notes, however, that unlike some rural contexts, few of the bones were broken open for marrow before they were discarded, and he argues that this indicates that the households in the excavated area had regular access to meat.[246] The authorities within the town would have worked hard to secure a ready supply of cattle for the town, and it is possible to imagine ongoing negotiations with suppliers in the hinterland. It would be interesting to have a faunal assemblage from earlier periods in the town's history, in order to better understand the development of specialized meat production in the hinterland in response to the needs of the growing town.

Pigs were another important source of meat for Waterford's inhabitants, and may have been raised within the town, purchased from outside, or both. The faunal assemblage from Waterford indicates that pigs were slaughtered when they reached full size. This age distribution is paralleled by contemporary evidence from both rural and urban contexts in Ireland.[247] The same age profile can be seen in the assemblage of sheep bones from Waterford. Although sheep may have been raised for wool, they seem to have been a minor source of meat, and were slaughtered at an advanced age.[248] Although goat horn cores are a common find in Waterford, they seem to have been brought in exclusively for craftworking purposes, and goat meat does not seem to have been a typical foodstuff. Again, this is true of both Viking Dublin and early medieval Irish rural sites.[249]

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[245] McCormick, 'The Animal Bones', 822-3.
[246] Ibid., 824-6.
[247] Ibid., 830-1.
[248] Ibid., 828-9.
[249] Ibid., 828.

Horse, dog and cat bones were also found in some eleventh-century contexts. Cut marks on the horse bones indicate that horse-meat may sometimes have been eaten, and there is evidence from later periods to suggest that horse hides may occasionally have been made into leather.[250] There are only a few dog bones, and there are cat bones representing several individuals. Dogs and cats may have been kept as pets or for other purposes, but there is some evidence to suggest that cats in particular were raised for their furs. This fur was unlikely to have been used by the town's population or sold to people living in the countryside, and was probably exported.[251]

In addition to these domesticated animals, there is some limited evidence to indicate the use of wild animals as food in eleventh-century Waterford. Two bottlenose dolphin vertebrae were found in an eleventh-century context in Peter Street, as were the bones of red deer and a hare. Game was evidently not an important source of food for Waterford's inhabitants during this period, although there was certainly a steady supply of antler coming into the town from the countryside.[252]

Both cultivated and wild plants were found to be important sources of food for the townspeople in this period, and the excavated evidence indicates that the same general mix of plants was eaten in every household.[253] Cultivated plants included cereals like oats, barley and wheat, as well as some spelt and rye. Tierney and Hannon argue that pulses were probably also grown, although they do not preserve well and did not appear among the archaeobotanical remains.[254] There was some evidence for flax, which may have been grown both as a food and for its fibre.[255] Vegetables were very likely grown by households

[250] McCormick, 'The Animal Bones', 832.
[251] Ibid., 833-6.
[252] Ibid., 836-7.
[253] John Tierney and Martha Hannon, 'Plant Remains', in Hurley, Scully and McCutcheon, 854-6, 892-3.
[254] Ibid., 889-90.
[255] Ibid., 888.

in the town, but again, the remains of these plants are not preserved, and it is challenging to assess the importance of gardening supplying the town with food.[256]

Blackberries grew wild within the town, and were commonly eaten, and sloes and apples were also favourite fruits. It is uncertain whether either of the latter two were grown within the town. Many hazelnuts and their shells are also found in a variety of contexts, and must have been an important food item gathered outside the town. They may also have been brought into the town in association with hazel wands gathered for making and repairing wattle structures.[257] The prevalence of wild plant foods stands in contrast to the very limited evidence for wild animal food in eleventh-century Waterford.

Analysis of the remains of the cultivated cereals presents an interesting, and somewhat contradictory impression of grain processing practices in the town and its hinterland. Oats are by far the most numerous of the plant remains found, and all parts of the plant are present in many of the samples, which would seem to indicate that the grain was brought into the town with its husks intact, and perhaps even on the sheaf.[258] By contrast, the chaff of other plants is infrequently found in the samples, and Tierney and Hannon argue that processing of barley and wheat probably took place outside the town. Generally speaking, however, grain seems to have been stored whole, and then ground in hand querns as needed in the home.[259]

Tierney and Hannon argue that the countryside around the town must have become agriculturally specialized in response to the needs of the growing town. The town needed to rely on their hinterland for a variety of wild and cultivated plants for food, building materials, fuel and animal fodder. This was grown, harvested, managed, gathered and processed by farmers who owned and worked land outside the town. Their knowledge and good management practices, and their cooperation, were vital to the survival of the town.

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[256] Tierney and Hannon, 'Plant Remains', 856, 892.
[257] Ibid., 889, 892.
[258] Ibid., 890.
[259] Ibid., 890-1.

Tierney and Hannon state that although the precise relationships between the town-dwellers and the inhabitants of the countryside near the town cannot be determined, it is probable that some town-dwellers were directly engaged in farming in the eleventh century. Furthermore, there may have been close economic, cultural and familial ties between the town's inhabitants and those of the farming communities nearby.[260]

5.8 Reconstructing Waterford's Late Viking Age Hinterland

The key challenge in understanding Waterford in the eleventh century is the question of the relationship between the town and its hinterland. It is clear that the town absolutely required a wide variety of resources from the surrounding local area, including plants for food, fibre and domestic purposes, animal products for food, clothing, leather production, and bone, horn or antler working, wood products for building, fuel and artefact production, stone and metals. There are two major ways that the town may have maintained a ready and reliable supply of these materials. The first is that some or all of the inhabitants of the town directly engaged in agricultural activity or the gathering of various resources. The second is that the inhabitants of the town enjoyed close economic, social or familial ties to the people who owned the land outside the town, engaged in agricultural activity, and collected the other resources. Hurley and others who have worked on the Waterford material are inclined to believe that some of Waterford's inhabitants may have engaged in direct agricultural activity or the gathering of raw materials and other resources, at least from time to time. He argues that Waterford's inhabitants 'certainly would not have been confined to an entirely urban experience'.[261]

Other evidence uncovered during the excavations indicates that many of the resources brought into the town from rural areas were first processed outside the town. This includes cereal products, which were apparently dried and winnowed prior to their transportation to the town. The over-representation of horn cores from various species is

[260] Tierney and Hannon, 'Plant Remains', 891-3.
[261] Hurley, 'The Use of Wood as a Structural Raw Material', 44.

also indicative of a specialized trade in just this one part of an animal, the slaughtering and processing of which evidently took place outside the town.

Taken together, the evidence from Waterford seems to indicate that while some of the raw materials and food supplies required by the town were purchased from rural-dwelling producers, some were directly grown or collected by town-dwellers. This raises another set of questions about the nature of town living in eleventh-century Waterford. What level of craft or trade specialization did the town's inhabitants exhibit? Did those who farmed also have a craft, or did those who made wooden furniture also collect and trade in wood supplies? If there were town dwellers who made their primary living from the land, what made living in the town an attractive prospect?

Sindbaek has argued that long distance trade in the early medieval period was conducted on a personal, face-to-face basis by a small group of people at a small number of sites. When those personal networks broke down due to conflict, deaths or for other reasons, long-distance trade was temporarily restricted.[262] Perhaps a similar model can be envisioned for the provisioning of towns from their local hinterlands during this period. Perhaps rather than imagining the hinterland purely in terms of physical geography, it would be useful to imagine the human geography, and personal networks that facilitated the maintenance of supply lines. A carpenter in the town might have a brother who owned land outside the town. This brother might grow grain, but also own a stretch of forest, from which the carpenter was permitted to take wood products on a regular basis. Their ongoing relationship would ensure a supply of both grain and wood into the town, and could be characterized as essentially informal rather than mediated by a central authority. As is true of Sindbaek's long-distance trade model, these links to the local economy were potentially vulnerable, and renegotiation would be required on a regular basis. The growing interest of regional kings in the long-distance trading and military capabilities of

[262] Søren M. Sindbaek, 'Networks and nodal points: the emergence of towns in early Viking Age Scandinavia', *Antiquity* 81 (2007), 119-32.

the towns over the eleventh and twelfth centuries may have led them to attempt to impose a higher degree of control over the agricultural hinterland, in the form of taxation or renders, in an effort to regulate and ensure that raw materials and food were always accessible to the towns.

While the human geographical element of hinterland reconstruction is certainly important to consider, there are also practical upper limits on the physical geographical size of the area from which the town could afford to draw basic staples. In her discussion of Dublin's Viking age hinterland, Valante argued that the town had direct control over an area known as *fine gall* or *crích gall*, which extended approximately 25 kilometres from the town. This 25 kilometre zone was the basic area from which staple supplies were obtained, while in a wider, 75 kilometre zone, the town dwellers raided or traded less frequently to obtain additional foodstuffs or raw materials (see Fig. 5.3).[263] Holm provides a more conservative reconstruction, drawing on Hansen's work on city-states. He suggests that Dublin's direct control only extended to about 10 to 15 kilometres from the town, perhaps extending further to the south at certain times (see Fig. 5.4).[264] He argues for this more limited hinterland size on the basis of Hansen's observation that city-states typically controlled a territory extended no further than 30 kilometres from the town, the distance of a single day's march.[265] As both Valante and Holm explain, there is no easy way to prove the validity of either of these models for the size of Dublin's hinterland at any given point in time, and it seems very likely that the size and shape of the territory under the direct or indirect control of the town and its inhabitants were fluid in this period.

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[263] Mary Valante, 'Dublin's economic relations with hinterland and periphery in the later Viking age', in Seán Duffy, ed., *Medieval Dublin I*, Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000, 69-83.
[264] Poul Holm, 'Viking Dublin and the City-State Concept: Parameters and Significance of the Hiberno-Norse Settlement', in M.H. Hansen, ed., *A Comparative Study of Thirty City-State Cultures*, 2000, 251-62.
[265] M.H. Hansen, 'Introduction: The Concepts of City-State and City-State Culture', in Hansen, ed., *A Comparative Study*, 11-34.

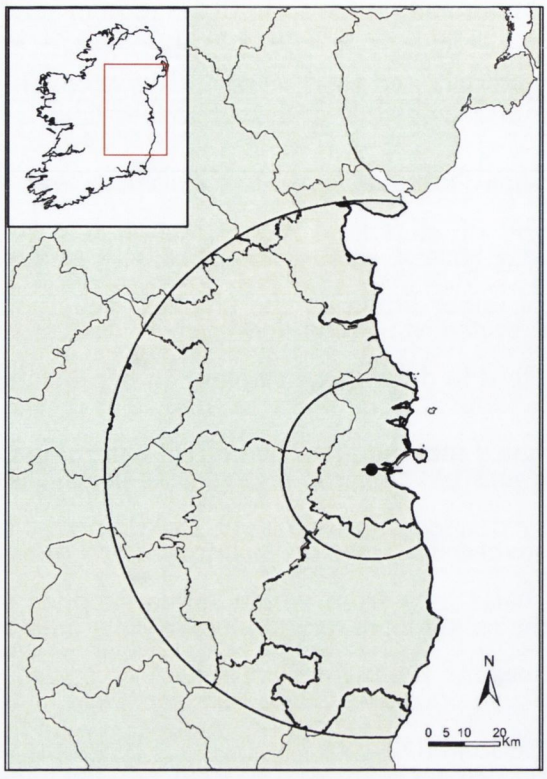

Fig. 5.3: Valante's reconstruction of Dublin's Viking age hinterland
(after Valante, 2000, 72)

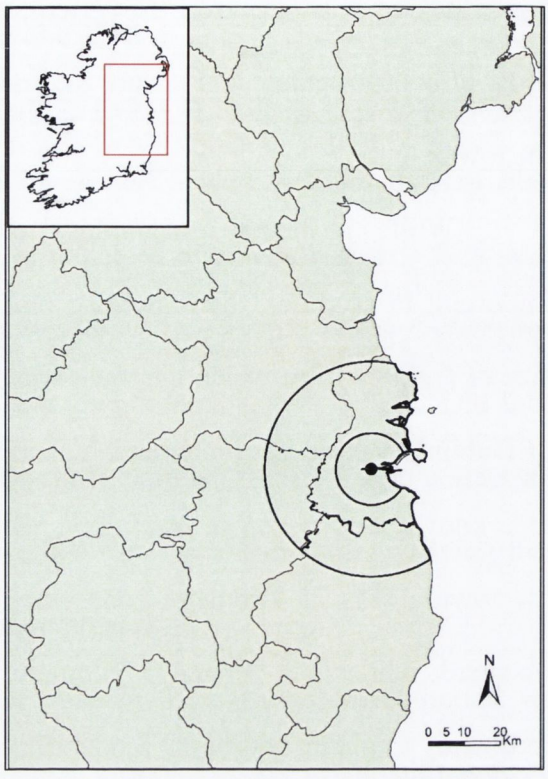

Fig. 5.4: Holm's reconstruction of Dublin's Viking age hinterland
(after Holm, 2000)

The same was undoubtedly true of Waterford's hinterland, but unlike Dublin, few studies have set out to offer hypotheses about the geographical area of Waterford's hinterland. Bradley follows Empey in suggesting that late Viking Waterford's hinterland can be equated with the later medieval cantred of Offath, and Bradley argues further that the town's influence probably stretched west along the coast to Dungarvan.[266] However, Empey has also suggested that late Viking Waterford is best understood as a city-state that dominated a compact territory. If this is the case, then Holm's reconstruction of Dublin's hinterland may be an appropriate starting point for Waterford. Rather than assuming that Waterford's hinterland was restricted to territories south of the Suir, this model reflects the possibility that the inhabitants of Waterford drew supplies from areas north of the Suir, and from territories accessed via the southern ends of the rivers Nore and Barrow (see Fig. 5.5).

[266] John Bradley, 'The Interpretation of Scandinavian Settlement in Ireland', in John Bradley, ed., *Settlement and Society in Medieval Ireland*, 1988, 49-78.

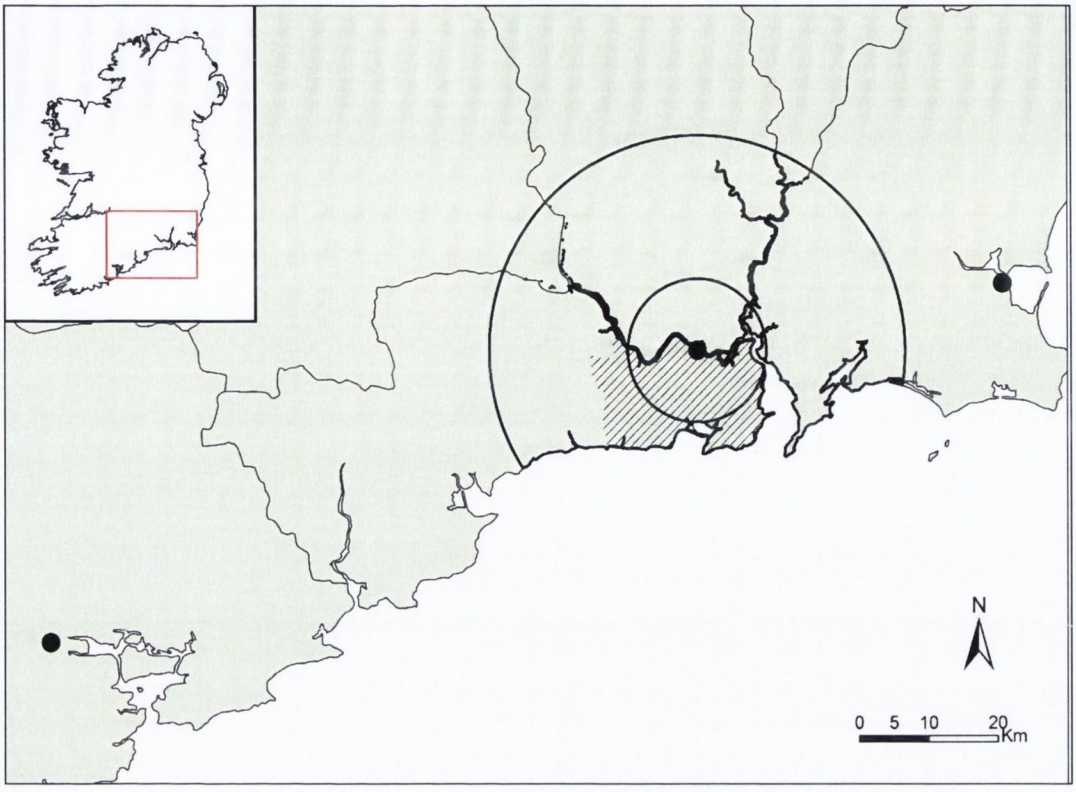

Fig. 5.5: Possible reconstructions of Waterford's late Viking age hinterland

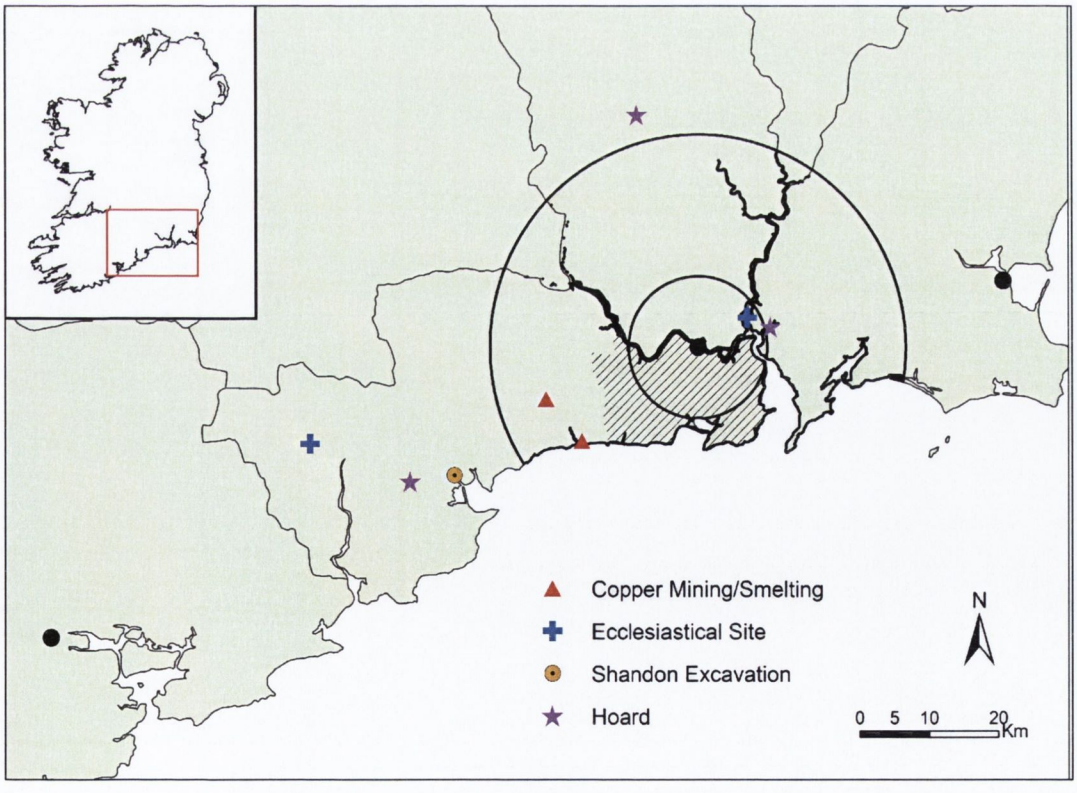

Fig. 5.6: Sites in and near Waterford's reconstructed late Viking age hinterland

Hansen's model of the 30 kilometre radius for the territorial unit under town control also offers intriguing results in Waterford. It is interesting to see what lies within the 30 kilometre zone, and what lies outside it (see Fig. 5.6). Dungarvan, for instance, is several kilometres outside this zone. It has long been believed that there was some degree of Scandinavian settlement in the Dungarvan area, and as mentioned in chapter 4, a ninth or tenth century trial piece was found in nearby Shandon in the early twentieth century. [267] Further possible evidence was uncovered in the course of an amateur excavation led by a local pharmacist named Mongey in the 1930s and 1940s. Mongey excavated a ditch said to be near the North Quarry in Shandon townland, and he and his workers uncovered a large number of finds, including a copper alloy pin, a bronze bell, a bone pin, iron hooks, some pottery sherds, teeth, bones and shells, charcoal and metal slag.[268] Some of these finds, particularly the copper pin, are contemporaneous with the trial piece, and Mongey's excavations almost certainly had a ninth or tenth century component.[269] Primarily on the basis of the finding of the trial-piece at Shandon, Bradley, Halpin and King postulated that the earliest Viking settlement in the Dungarvan area was at Shandon, rather than at the town's current, coastal location.[270]

More recently, pre-development archaeological monitoring, testing and excavation carried out by Eachtra Archaeological Projects between 2000 and 2002 revealed evidence for a sub-rectangular enclosure in Shandon townland.[271] The enclosure was defined by the remains of a ditch, although only approximately half of the enclosing ditch was extant. The northern and western half of the site has been destroyed by quarrying, and the edge of the North Quarry abuts the excavated area. The surviving portion of the ditch, which

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[267] NMI reg. 1947:237. U. O'Meadhra, *Early Christian, Viking and Romanesque art. Motif pieces from Ireland, volume 2*, Stockholm, 1987, 55-6.
[268] Topographical Files, NMI.
[269] Elder et al., 'Archaeological Excavation Report', 3-4; O'Meadhra, *Motif pieces, volume 2*, 55-6.
[270] J., Bradley, A. Halpin, H. and King, *Urban Archaeological Survey of Waterford City and County*, unpublished report commissioned by the Office of Public Works, 1989, 43.
[271] S. Elder, E. Dennehy, J. Tierney, D. Noonan and A. Doolan, 'Archaeological Excavation Report, Shandon Td., Dungarvan, Co. Waterford', Eachtra Archaeological Projects, July 2007.

includes an entrance at the southern end of the enclosure, measures approximately 76 m east to west and 34 m north to south.[272]

Within the enclosure, a number of features were identified, and were either cleaned, sectioned, or fully excavated. These included a large number of pits, post- and stake-holes, although it was not possible to reconstruct any internal buildings with any certainty. A number of features located outside the ditch were excavated, and three sections were cut across the ditch itself.[273] The investigations in the interior of the enclosure indicate that it was used for habitation and domestic activity. The remains of shell and fish bones, as well as some iron fish hooks, indicate the exploitation of riverine and marine resources.[274] Other animal bones were found in refuse deposits, indicating meat consumption alongside fish and shellfish.[275] The plant remains from Shandon, although fragmentary and degraded, are a mixture of cultivated and wild food plants typical of Irish rural settlement sites. Cultivated plants were predominantly barley and oats, with some wheat and rye. Wild food plants included blackberries and sloes, represented by their seeds and stones, and hazelnuts, represented by their shells. Because weeds of cultivation were also found in the archaeobotanical samples retrieved during the excavations, Brewer argues that crop processing as well as food production may have taken place on the site.[276]

In addition to these domestic activities, there is some evidence for both ferrous and non-ferrous metalworking on the site.[277] The remains of a possible iron-working or smelting hearth and some ferrous slag indicate that ironworking may have occurred in or near the enclosure, but Fairburn argues that the quantities of slag are insufficient to consider this an ironworking site. Other evidence for metalworking includes fragments of

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[272] Elder et al., 'Archaeological Excavation Report', 3.
[273] Ibid., 3-9.
[274] Ibid., 10-1.
[275] Ibid., 10-1.
[276] Abigail Brewer, 'Appendix 8: Report on the Plant Remains from Shandon', in Elder et al., 'Archaeological Excavation Report', 84-5.
[277] Neil Fairburn, 'Appendix 7: Report on Industrial Residues from Shandon', in Elder et al., 'Archaeological Excavation Report', 79-83.

crucibles, of both local manufacture and one of an eleventh- or twelfth-century southeast Wiltshire ware. Evidence for non-ferrous metalworking also includes a small copper alloy ingot. Fairburn points out that this is the second site in the vicinity of Bunmahon, a known source of copper ore, to produce evidence for copper smelting or casting. The other was found during recent excavations along the proposed route of the N25 at Cooltubbrid East, Co. Waterford, where excavators found evidence for early medieval copper smelting. A radiocarbon date from that smelting-hearth indicated that it was in use during the seventh or eighth centuries.[278] The evidence for metalworking at Shandon has not been securely dated, although the imported crucible indicates that some casting was being done into the eleventh or twelfth century, if not later.

The excavators argue that the ditch they investigated is likely to be the same as that excavated by Mongey in the 1930s and 1940s, given its similarities to Mongey's statements about the location and morphology of his site.[279] For this reason, they argue that substantial habitation of the enclosure must include a ninth- or tenth-century phase, although no absolute dates in that range resulted from the Eachtra excavations. The charcoal from the fill of the ditch returned a date range of AD 1080-1150, and a coin found on the site dates to c. 1066-1087. Much of the ceramic assemblage dates to the twelfth or thirteenth century, and there is also artefact evidence for activity on the site during prehistory, and during the post-medieval period. While it seems probable that there was some degree of Norse or Hiberno-Norse activity in Shandon before the eleventh century, it is interesting to note that as was true of the excavated area in Waterford, most of the surviving evidence relates to the late eleventh century or later.

The limited excavation undertaken on the site, and the restricted number of datable artefacts or samples prevents a more firm assessment of the pre-Norman occupation of this

[278] Penny Johnston, Jacinta Kiely and John Tierney, *Near the bend in the river: the archaeology of the N25 Kilmacthomas realignment*, NRA Scheme Monographs 3, 2008.
[279] Elder et al., 'Archaeological Excavation Report', 7.

site. Indeed, the excavators do not rule out the possibility that this sub-rectangular enclosure is a high medieval moated site.[280] For the purposes of this thesis, it is only possible to say that some kind of settlement was located at Shandon during the eleventh century, and perhaps earlier. While there are some indications of Norse influence, the ethnicity of the occupants cannot be determined. Perhaps the most important feature of the site is the presence of non-ferrous metalworking, further highlighting the importance of Bunmahon as a copper source during this period. Shandon, or other similar sites, may have been involved in some degree with supplying copper ingots or finished items to the growing town at Waterford, and may in turn have traded with Waterford's inhabitants for other goods.

Bunmahon and Cooltubbrid East are both well within the 30 kilometre zone proposed by Hansen, but are outside both the 10 kilometre radius and the cantred of Offath proposed as the core area of Waterford's late Viking hinterland. This raises an additional important point about the reconstruction of these hinterlands. Social and political factors and sheer physical distance were undoubtedly important determinants of the shape and size of these hinterland territories, but so was the distribution of scarce natural resources like copper. While most natural resources, like timber and grain, were readily available almost everywhere, and could therefore be gathered in a way that took into account only the political, social and distance factors mention above, copper was only available in certain locations, including Bunmahon. Waterford's inhabitants may not have been willing to travel over 10 or 15 kilometres to gather wood or grain, they may have done so to obtain such rarer natural resources. Although Waterford's copper artefacts might have been made of copper from other sources, some of the copper in use in the town probably derived from the mines at Bunmahon. If the demand was high enough, and the sources limited enough,

[280] Elder et al., 'Archaeological Excavation Report', 11.

then control over the most convenient source of copper or other rare commodities would become quite valuable.

The townland along the western side of Bunmahon Bay is called Templeyvrick, or *Teampaill Uí Bhric*. Further west along the coast, an island, once a promontory projecting into the sea from the townland of Ballynarrid, is called *Oileán Uí Bhric* on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey maps. As mentioned above, these placenames appear to preserve the name of the Uí Bricc lineage of the Déisi ruling line, which rose to prominence in the 1030s and continued to dominate the Déisi kingship during the high medieval period. While there is no way to prove a connection between the Uí Bricc and the Bunmahon copper source, it seems possible that their sudden ability to challenge their rivals, the Uí Fháeláin, in the 1030s was related to their control over a rare and valuable resource. While earlier Déisi ruling lines seem to have had their base of power in the western part of the kingdom, this shift toward the middle of the south coast may be explainable in part by such a mechanism.

If the Uí Bricc were active in this part of the Déisi kingdom, it would be interesting to be able to say more about their interactions both with the Waterford town-dwellers and with the inhabitants of Shandon. One possibility is that a growing demand for copper by the mid-eleventh century led Waterford's leaders to establish an alliance or contract for supply of copper ore or ingots with the head of the Uí Bricc. This in turn would tend to bolster the authority of that lineage within the kingdom, but would also create a steady source of wealth for the Déisi kings. Some of this revenue might have been gathered and deposited in the early eleventh-century silver hoard from Knockmaon, again, only a few kilometres from Dungarvan.[281] As discussed above, the Déisi forces were seen as valuable allies by regional kings of the day, and this wealth would help to explain both their prestige, and their ability to participate in military campaigns on a regular basis. This entire

[281] John Sheehan, 'Viking Age Hoards from Munster: A Regional Tradition?', in M. Monk and J. Sheehan, eds., *Early Medieval Munster: archaeology, history and society*, Cork: Cork University Press, 1998, 157.

line of thought is based on relatively slim evidence, but it does provide a possible example of the ways in which the development of Waterford's hinterland could have helped to shape the political geography of the pre-existing kingdom in which it was situated.

This investigation of Waterford's late Viking hinterland tends to lead to more questions than answers, but it highlights three important avenues for future work on this and other sites. The first is the need to consider human relationships, both formal and informal, and their role in creating and maintaining supply networks in this early period. The second is the limits placed on travel and transport by the physical geography of the area around the town. As discussed in other chapters of this thesis, increased spatial integration and urbanization can only occur when travel and transport is reliable, safe, and efficient, and investigations into the available routes of travel, both natural and man-made, will provide new insights into the nature of the links between the town and its hinterland. Finally, to the extent that it is possible, hinterland reconstructions should look not only at staple commodities like grain and timber, but at rarer natural resources. This may be a line of inquiry to which artefact specialists and metallurgy experts can contribute unique perspectives. Overall, it has been the purpose of this section to examine the evidence for town life in Waterford against its local and regional backdrop, and to demonstrate the usefulness of a regional approach to the study of urban life in late Viking age Ireland.

Conclusions, Problems and Further Possibilities

At the heart of this thesis are two major arguments or premises. First, it is argued that town development and urbanization form only one strand in a wider process of spatial integration. Because increasing spatial integration has an impact on rural areas as well as towns, any study of urbanization or town development must take a regional, rather than town-centred approach. More specific to the Irish context, the second premise is that the monastic town hypothesis is not incompatible with the idea that the coastal towns developed as specialized trading and manufacturing centres. The impression held by some scholars that these are polar opposites has created problems in understanding and describing changes in Irish settlement patterns and economic and political organization between the seventh and eleventh centuries, many of which have been highlighted above.

These are the essential points this thesis seeks to make, but there are also a number of conclusions to be drawn about the evidence from the Déisi kingdom. During the eighth century, as discussed in Chapter 3, there are challenges in working with the archaeological evidence for settlement pattern, particularly difficulties of chronology. However, because documentary evidence from eighth-century Ireland indicates the need for cooperative agriculture, and highlights the wide variety of situations that would require meetings between individuals and groups, an effort was made to re-envision how communities were constituted in what appears to be a dispersed settlement pattern. The suggestion that clusters of ringforts in the Blackwater valley were so situated in order to provide their inhabitants with easy access to neighbours is dependent upon the premise, which may or may not be correct, that these ringforts were in use simultaneously. In Co. Waterford, as elsewhere, there is no relative chronology for ringforts, and until refinements can be made in the chronological scheme, these ideas about community organization will be impossible to confirm.

The case study in the eighth-century Blackwater valley also seemed to point out the strong role of the church in facilitating spatial integration within that local area, but also in connecting that local area to wider political, and presumably economic, networks. In Déisi territory, the most important ecclesiastical centre was undoubtedly Lismore, and the abbot of that community appears to have served an important role in regional politics. One of the major questions that remain unanswered about this ecclesiastical network is the nature of Ardmore's character during this period. As discussed, documentary evidence relating to Ardmore's early history is almost entirely lacking, and it is not until the twelfth century that the importance of this ecclesiastical centre becomes 'visible' in the written record. However, the presence of the small shrine chapel at Ardmore absolutely indicates new building occurring during this early period. It would seem logical that if Ardmore were an important ecclesiastical centre between the eighth and the eleventh centuries, it would appear in the written record. There are therefore three possibilities to explain its absence. Either Ardmore was not important before the twelfth century, or it was, but sources relating to its early history have been lost over the centuries. The third alternative is that relations were so poor between Ardmore and Lismore at some critical period during the composition of the documentary sources that survive that Lismore successfully suppressed the transmission of Ardmore's early history. Given the abbreviated nature of the *Annals of Inisfallen*, such a selective suppression would have been possible, although it cannot now be proven. Either way, Ardmore's role in the political geography and in the settlement pattern of the Déisi kingdom remains obscure.

If there are challenges with assessing the evidence for settlement patterns in the eighth century, it is even more difficult to see how those patterns changed during the ninth and tenth centuries. Lack of a tight chronology on settlement sites is at the heart of this problem, but so is the lack of information about unenclosed settlement forms and their potentially increased importance from the tenth century onward. These underlying

problems mean that any assertions about the impact of Viking settlement on Irish settlement patterns are tenuous at best. However, as far as can be determined from the examination of the site of Woodstown and its immediate locality, it would seem that later ninth- and tenth-century Scandinavian settlements were established in places that were already well-connected to networks of communication and transport, and in economically and politically valuable areas.

This turns the discussion around, in a sense, and allows for consideration of the Viking response and adaptation to their new environment, rather than simply an Irish reaction to an unstoppable and impersonal force. The locations of the Viking coastal settlements, or of smaller sites like Woodstown, were intentionally selected from a range of choices, and were considered the most convenient for whatever their founders intended. In order to assess this, Woodstown's builders must have learned about the physical, political and economic geography within which they were placing their settlement. The methods and means by which they gathered this information, either directly or indirectly, over the first few decades of Viking activity in Ireland, are a topic worthy of further thought.

The Déisi kingdom itself was undergoing major changes that did not necessarily play out in immediate changes to the settlement pattern, but were vitally important in increasing spatial integration in this period. The Déisi genealogies for this period become narrow linear pedigrees rather than wide, branching genealogic schemes, and as mentioned above, this is usually interpreted as evidence for increasing restriction on the numbers of lineages eligible for the kingship. This in turn is seen as related to the increasing centralization of authority, which in the Déisi case was probably necessitated by their need to respond to the Viking threat in the early ninth century. Because the Eóganacht were weak during this period of time, the Déisi were more independent, and although this might have had its drawbacks when trying to repel a Viking raid, it may have had its benefits when capitalizing on lucrative alliances with Scandinavian settlers. The Kilmacomma

hoard, deposited quite far inland on the Suir, probably came from Woodstown, and probably represents the type of wealth that could result from such Irish-Scandinavian alliances during this period.

The suggestion that the massive wealth in Irish hands in this period is related to the slave trade is a topic that requires further research. The slave trade is unlike trade in other commodities, both on a symbolic and on a practical level. Although there is no doubt that slave raiding, trading and ownership were a feature of Irish, Scandinavian and Northern European society at this time, the mechanics of the Irish slave trade are unclear. In particular, the idea that Scandinavian settlements obtained slaves from the same territories from which they obtained timber or grain seems logically untenable. It may well be that the same secular and ecclesiastical authorities who helped to guarantee steady supplies of food and raw materials to the Scandinavian settlements also helped to procure slaves from other regions to be sold by the Vikings. Perhaps the evidence does not permit a closer analysis of this topic, but if that is the case, then sweeping statements about the massive economic importance of the slave trade in ninth-, tenth- or eleventh-century Ireland should be taken with several grains of salt.

The sources of Ireland's wealth in this period may remain obscure, but it is clear that growing wealth in the ninth and tenth centuries inspired new ambitions in Irish leaders, both secular and ecclesiastical. This is a period in which control over valuable ecclesiastical centres became a priority for strong secular leaders and ambitious clerics alike. If nothing else, this demonstrates the increasing multi-functionality of the largest ecclesiastical centres between the eighth and the tenth centuries, and highlights their role in enhancement of spatial integration on both a local and regional level. Certainly, control over churches was one of the priorities for Brian mac Cennétig and the Dál Cais during the later tenth century, during their rise to prominence in Munster and their challenge to Uí Néill authority. Although the evidence was patchy, it was interesting to see how the Déisi

negotiated this period of inter-regional warfare, sometimes siding with the Dál Cais, and perhaps sometimes with Waterford's inhabitants. The developing relationship between the Déisi kings and the Scandinavian settlers in their eastern lands remains a topic for further thought.

In a sense, the relationships that developed during the ninth and tenth centuries reached their full fruition in the eleventh, reflected in the growth of Waterford town and its rural hinterland. Chapter 5 examined several of the models for hinterland reconstruction circulating in current scholarship in an attempt to assess the evidence for Waterford's own hinterland. However, this thesis has tried to add a caveat about the need to consider the importance of face-to-face human relationships in the provisioning of these early towns. Again, this may be a theory that cannot be thoroughly tested with evidence currently available, but it is worth bearing in mind that even as the economy became increasingly commercialized, much business still relied on direct interpersonal relationships.

On a higher plane, there seems to be a certain weight of evidence indicating that the rise of the Uí Bricc lineage in the Déisi kingdom in the 1030s was related to their control over copper resources. If this is true, it provides one example of the potential of a growing town to reshape neighboring polities. More generally, the eleventh century was definitely a period in which the Déisi kingdom became more connected to the wider world, both via links to the town of Waterford, and through the church's involvement in the wider European reform movement.

In addition to these conclusions, this thesis raises many possibilities for further work. There are unresolved questions regarding changes in secular settlement and land-use that will probably remain unresolved for many years to come. However, one very viable avenue for further research would be inquiry into the development of networks of travel and transport, both natural and manmade, over the period from the eighth to the eleventh centuries. This thesis has hinted at those possibilities in a number of ways, but further

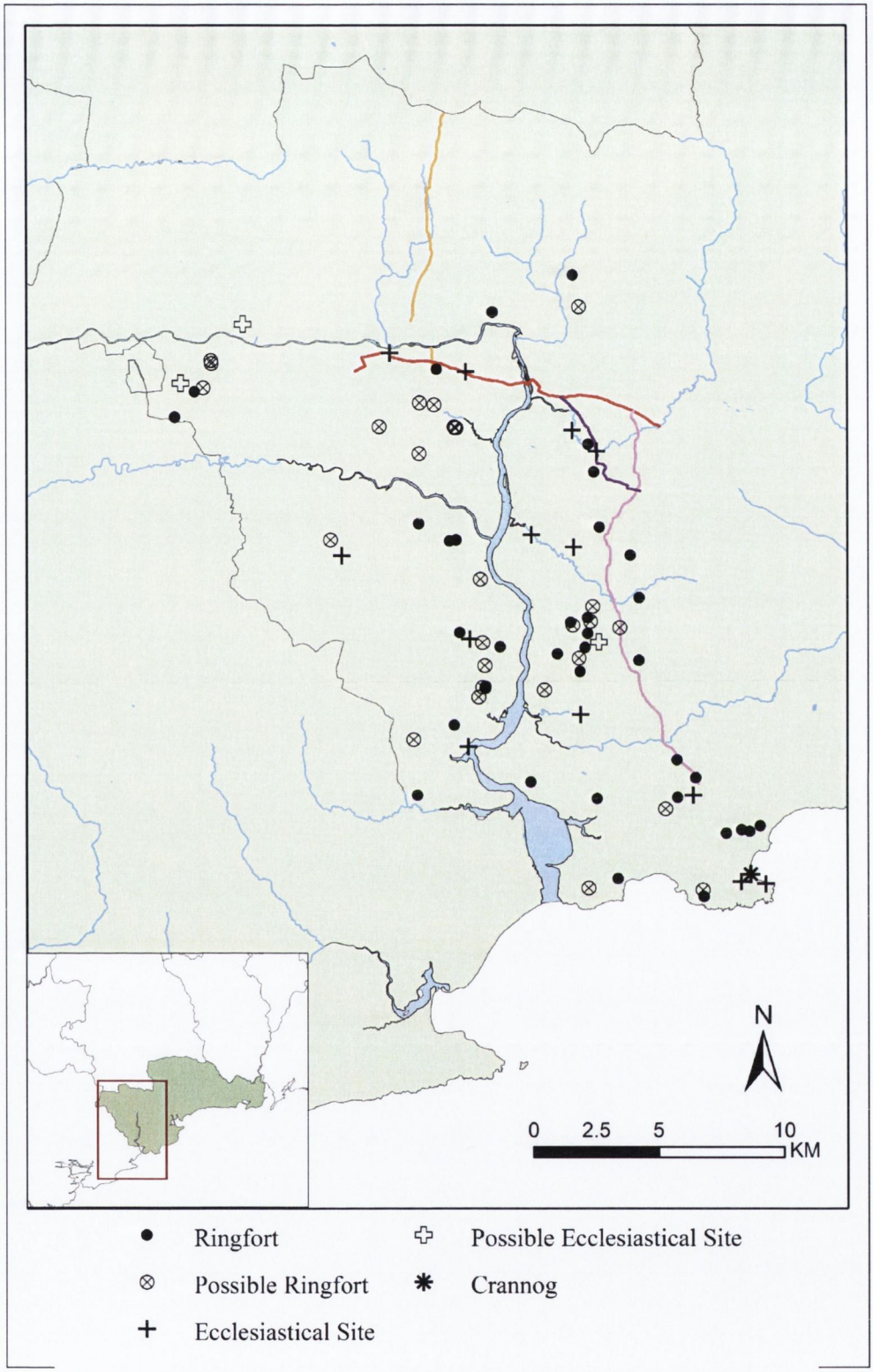
systematic work is needed on this question. If urbanization is tied to spatial integration, and spatial integration is limited by the possibilities for communication, travel and transport, then the best way to assess the processes of urbanization occurring in a given region will be to examine changes in the routes, quality and use of networks of travel.

This concept, and the broader ideas presented here about how and why urbanization can happen, ought to be tested in other parts of Ireland, perhaps especially Cork and Limerick, but certainly also Dublin. This study has attempted to demonstrate that it is possible to study the development of Irish towns other than Dublin, and it seems likely that intensive studies on Cork and Limerick and their localities will raise additional new questions. Furthermore, it would be interesting to further test these ideas in other parts of Northern Europe, particularly Scandinavia and Britain, where there are a range of assumptions about settlement patterns and economic organization that differ greatly from the assumptions commonly held about early medieval Ireland. The available evidence from those regions is also very different from the Irish evidence in form and quantity, so it is to be expected that those studies would take on their own character. Nevertheless, it is possible that by widening the scope, new hypotheses can be formed about urbanization during this period, and about the role of short-distance, local exchange and community organization on those processes.

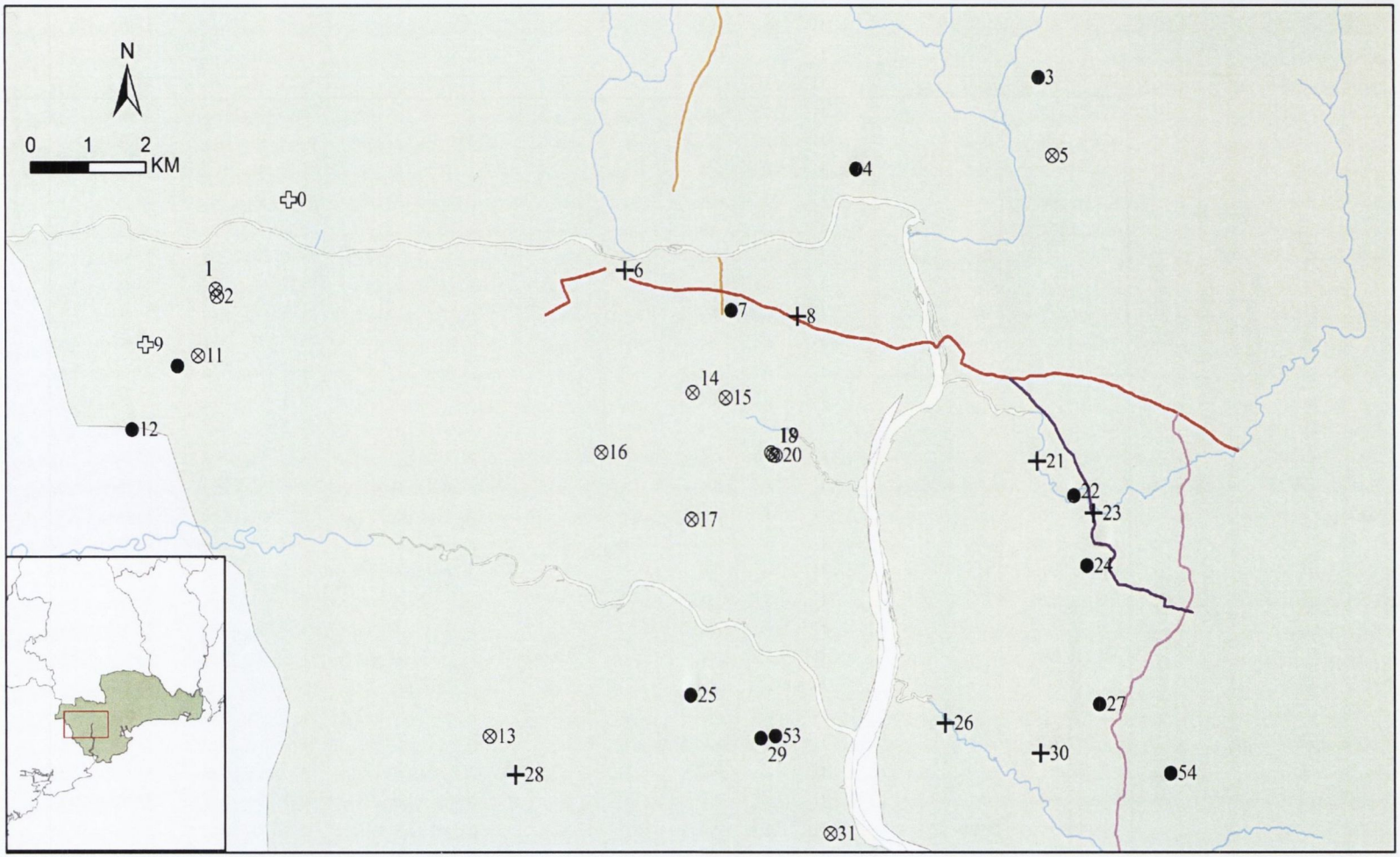
As stated in the introduction to this thesis, the purpose of this study has been to raise new questions and test old assumptions, and to highlight the importance of an understudied region. This thesis does not provide an entirely new model for Irish town development, nor does it present a definitive picture of settlement or politics in the Déisi kingdom during this period. However, this is only the first of hopefully many efforts to approach these issues over the years to come.

Gazetteer of Early Medieval Sites in the Blackwater Valley, Co. Waterford

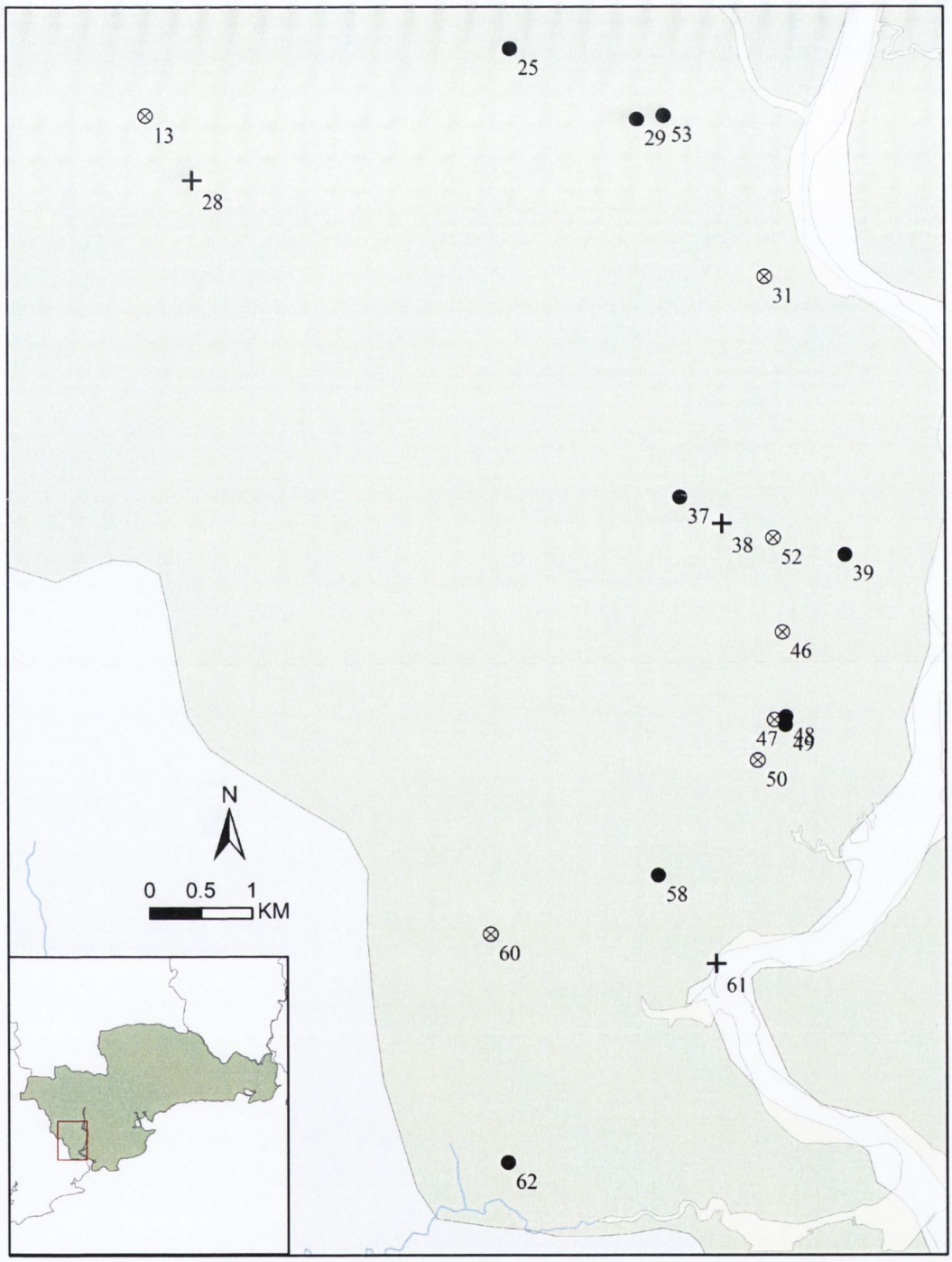




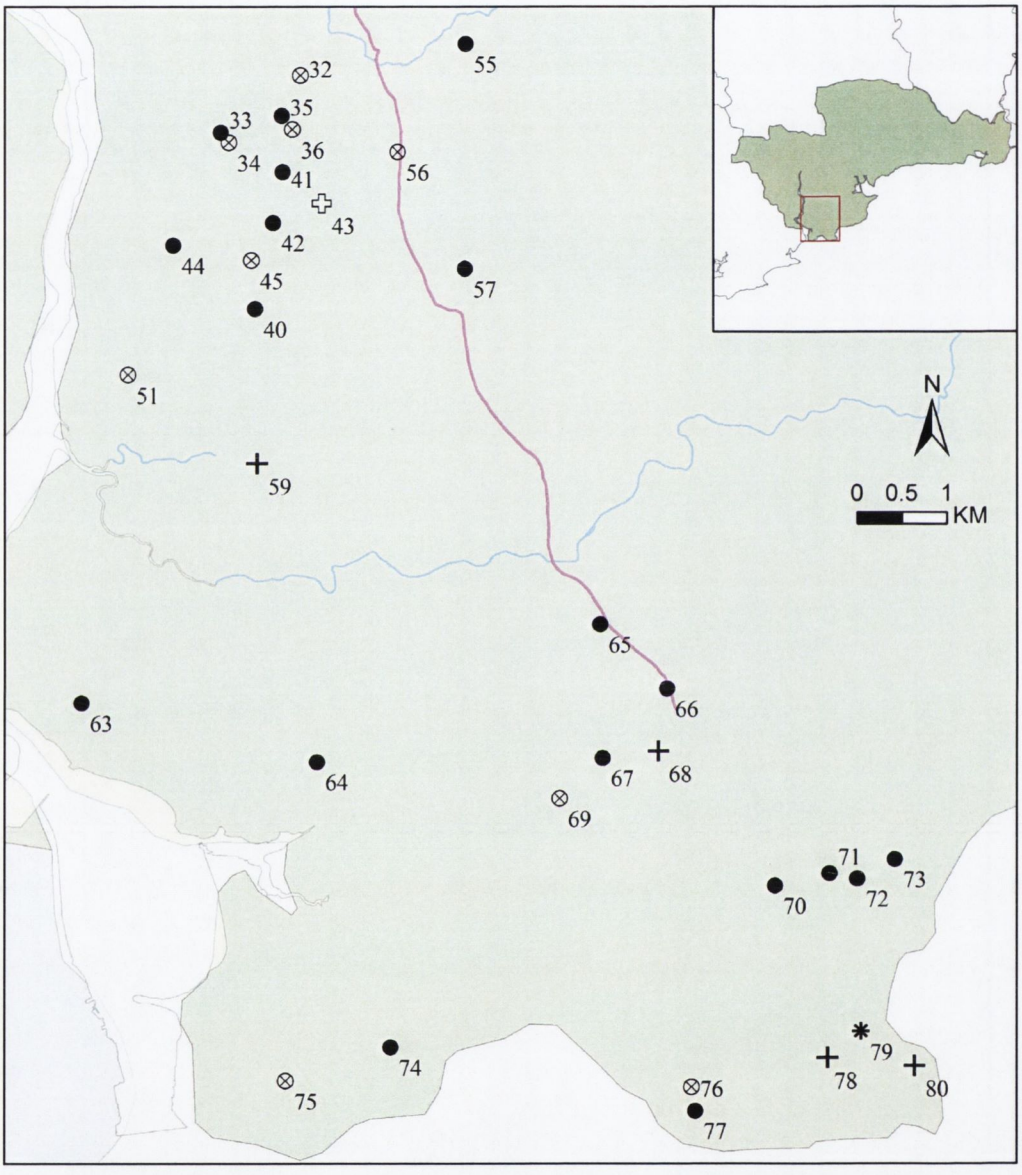
Early medieval archaeology in the Blackwater valley



Gazetteer index map 1



Gazetteer index map 2



Gazetteer index map 3

Index Map No.	Townland	Site Type	SMR No.	Nat'l Grid East	Nat'l Grid North
0	Flowerhill	Ecclesiastical Site (Possible)	WA020-010001-	199004	99731
1	Glen Beg	Ringfort (Possible)	WA020-017----	197737	98285
2	Glen Beg	Ringfort (Possible)	WA020-027----	197760	98170
3	Cluttahina	Ringfort	WA021-008001-	212162	101684
-	Cluttahina	Souterrain	WA021-008002-	212165	101684
4	Fadduaga	Ringfort	WA021-013----	208959	100210
5	Turbeha	Ringfort (Possible)	WA021-017----	212406	100426
6	Lismore	Ecclesiastical Site	WA021-019002-	204880	98580
7	Deerpark North	Ringfort	WA021-024----	206750	97934
8	Drumroe Upper	Ecclesiastical Site	WA021-025001-	207917	97840
9	Tober	Ecclesiastical Site (Possible)	WA028-002001-	196512	97387
10	Coolydoody North	Ringfort	WA028-003----	197072	97047
11	Coolydoody North	Ringfort (Possible)	WA028-004----	197430	97211
12	Shean More	Ringfort	WA028-005----	196280	96031
13	Ballyhamlet	Ringfort (Possible)	WA028-017----	202492	91136
14	Deerpark East	Ringfort (Possible)	WA029-002----	206070	96611
15	Deerpark East	Ringfort (Possible)	WA029-004----	206652	96531
16	Ballysaggartbeghill	Ringfort (Possible)	WA029-016----	204460	95656
17	Ballynaraha	Ringfort (Possible)	WA029-018----	206046	94581
18	Deerpark Hill	Ringfort (Possible)	WA029-019001-	207450	95650
19	Deerpark Hill	Ringfort (Possible)	WA029-019002-	207480	95610
20	Killahaly West	Ringfort (Possible)	WA029-019003-	207529	95608
21	Bewley	Ecclesiastical Site	WA029-024----	212129	95510
22	Bewley	Ringfort	WA029-026001-	212771	94958
23	Kilmolash	Ecclesiastical Site	WA029-027001	213113	94678
24	Woodstock	Ringfort	WA029-034----	213000	93850
25	Fountain	Ringfort	WA029-039----	206028	91788

26	Dromore	Ecclesiastical Site	WA029-042----	210510	91340
27	Ballynaparka	Ringfort	WA029-043----	213218	91645
28	Kilwatermoy	Ecclesiastical Site	WA033-004003-	202943	90506
-	Kilwatermoy	Souterrain	WA033-004004-	202963	90521
29	Headborough	Ringfort	WA034-002----	207260	91099
30	Aglish	Ecclesiastical Site	WA034-003----	212180	90850
31	Ballyphilip West	Ringfort (Possible)	WA034-008----	208484	89566
32	Lackensillagh	Ringfort (Possible)	WA034-011----	212951	88476
33	Tinnascart	Ringfort	WA034-013----	212062	87836
34	Tinnascart	Ringfort (Possible)	WA034-014----	212151	87725
35	Curradarra	Ringfort	WA034-015----	212743	88024
36	Curradarra	Ringfort (Possible)	WA034-016----	212860	87870
37	Kilcockan	Ringfort	WA034-018----	207660	87420
38	Kilcockan	Ecclesiastical Site	WA034-019----	208063	87159
39	Crossery	Ringfort	WA034-020001-	209258	86857
-	Crossery	Souterrain	WA034-020002-	209259	86848
40	Knockanearis	Ringfort	WA034-021----	212443	85861
41	Craggs	Ringfort	WA034-022001-	212754	87393
-	Craggs	Souterrain	WA034-022002-	212752	87393
42	Knockanearis	Ringfort	WA034-023----	212644	86824
43	Knockanearis	Ecclesiastical Site (Possible)	WA034-024----	213188	87041
44	Coolbagh	Ringfort	WA034-025----	211528	86571
45	Knockanearis	Ringfort (Possible)	WA034-026----	212403	86406
46	Ballybrack, Ballyroe	Ringfort (Possible)	WA034-028----	208650	86097
47	Newport West	Ringfort (Possible)	WA034-029----	208570	85230
48	Newport West	Ringfort	WA034-030----	208683	85261
49	Newport West	Ringfort	WA034-031----	208677	85179
50	Newport West	Ringfort (Possible)	WA034-032----	208410	84830
51	Ballynaclash, Clashmore	Ringfort (Possible)	WA034-035----	211014	85120
52	Crossery	Ringfort (Possible)	WA034-070----	208560	87022

-	Headborough	Souterrain	WA034-073----	207441	91121
53	Headborough	Ringfort	WA034-074----	207517	91135
54	Killatoor	Ringfort	WA035-001----	214460	90530
55	Monagally West	Ringfort	WA035-003----	214810	88830
56	Curradarra	Ringfort (Possible)	WA035-004----	214043	87620
57	Ballindrumma	Ringfort	WA035-010----	214800	86310
58	Ballynatray Demesne	Ringfort	WA037-002----	207445	83695
59	Clashmore	Ecclesiastical Site	WA037-008001-	212463	84121
60	Ballycondon	Ringfort (Possible)	WA037-010----	205816	83117
61	Ballynatray Demesne	Ecclesiastical Site	WA037-011001-	207999	82822
62	Castlemiles	Ringfort	WA037-022----	205977	80871
63	Tinnabinna	Ringfort	WA037-026----	210488	81406
64	Pilltown	Ringfort	WA037-028----	213132	80736
65	Drumgallane East	Ringfort	WA038-012----	216310	82300
66	Cush of Grange	Ringfort	WA038014----	217070	81570
67	Lissaniska	Ringfort	WA038-025----	216340	80780
68	Mill and Church	Ecclesiastical Site	WA038-026----	216970	80860
69	Rodeen	Ringfort (Possible)	WA038-033----	215860	80320
70	Monea	Ringfort	WA038-037----	218280	79330
71	Ballynamertinagh	Ringfort	WA038-038----	218890	79470
72	Curragh	Ringfort	WA038-039----	219200	79410
73	Curragh	Ringfort	WA038-040----	219620	79630
74	Ballysallagh	Ringfort	WA040-001001-	213963	77498
-	Ballysallagh	Souterrain	WA040-001002-	213963	77498
75	Monatray Middle	Ringfort (Possible)	WA040-002----	212780	77120
76	Ardoginna	Ringfort (Possible)	WA040-003----	217350	77050
77	Ardoginna	Ringfort	WA040-004----	217390	76780
78	Ardocheasty	Ecclesiastical Site	WA040-008----	218870	77380
79	Duffcarrick	Crannóg	WA040-009001-	219240	77680
80	Dysert	Ecclesiastical Site	WA040-011----	219840	77290

Townland Name: Ardoginna
Site Type: Ringfort
SMR Number: WA040-004001-
Date Visited: 13 August 2010
Comments:
This circular ringfort (diam. 33m) is defined by a very slight scarp on the upslope side, from north to eastand by a low bank (ext. H < 1m). There is no sign of an external fosse, and the possible entrance recorded by Moore at southeast may be modern. The interior slopes towards the south and southwest, and is overgrown with bracken and shrubs, and no sign remains of the reported possible souterrain (WA040-004002-). The enclosure stands in a wheat field with wide views over the ocean towards the south. Another enclosure (diam. c. 40m) further northwest (WA040-003----) is shown on the 1st ed. OS maps, but is now destroyed, and visible only as a cropmark. A third possible enclosure site (WA040-006----) to the southeast is not visible at ground level. These sites are close together and were most likely intervisible until the construction of Ardoginna House between them.
References:
M. Moore, *Archaeological Inventory of County Waterford*, 1999, 72, no. 517.



1st edition Ordnance Survey 6-inch map

Townland Name: Ballybrusa West
Site Type: Ringfort
SMR Number: WA038-028----
Date Visited: 14 August 2010
Comments:
The interior of this ringfort is extremely overgrown and inaccessible, and the enclosing bank appears to be somewhat truncated by the road at southeast The bank that defines the enclosure (diam. c. 31m) is incorporated into the field wall along the roadside at southeast, and elsewhere is made of earth (H up to 1m). Moore reports an entrance ramp at north-northeast which was not visible at the time of this visit. The site is in pasture with views south over the sea.
References:
M. Moore, *Archaeological Inventory of County Waterford*, 1999, 73, no.529.

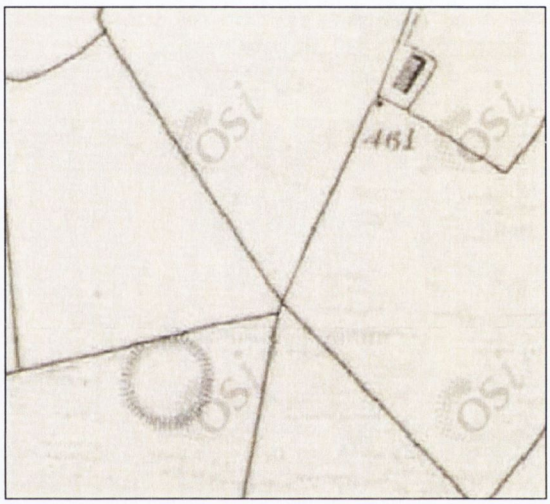


1st edition Ordnance Survey 6-inch map

Townland Name: Ballycondon
Site Type: Ringfort (probable)
SMR Number: WA037-010----
Date Visited: 9 July 2009
Comments:
This probable ringfort is on a wide, east facing, gentle slope in farmland, just west of the powerlines. It is marked as a circular enclosure on the 1st edition OS maps. It is a very overgrown, circular area, roughly 30 m in diameter, defined by an earth and stone bank less than a meter high and about 3.5 m wide in places. The bank is best preserved at the south, and shows possible signs of interior and exterior stone facing. There is no evidence of an external ditch. There is an opening in the bank at the east side, with some stone lining, but it is less than a meter wide, and probably caused relatively recently by animals.
References:
M. Moore, *Archaeological Inventory of County Waterford*, 1999, 103, no. 774.



2005 OSI ortho photo



1st edition Ordnance Survey 6-inch map



South external elevation, facing north

Townland Name: Ballyea West
Site Type: Road/Ford (*Rían Bó Phadraig*)
SMR Number: WA021-021----
Date Visited: 19 July 2009
Comments:
The *Rían Bó Phadraig* is reputed to cross the river here at Ballyea West, where the crossing point is overlooked by an impressive motte and bailey. The road is preserved and modified as a modern path down to the river for access to fishing leading down from the modern road towards the river on the east side of the motte. It is approximately 3m wide with stone walls on both sides, and passes through dense forest and overgrowth. The river at the bottom of the road is approximately 15-20m wide, quite deep and fast moving, and is labeled on the 1st ed. OS map as 'the bishop's fisheries'. The land on both sides is low-lying but not marshy, rising to hills. There is no obvious continuation of the roadway on the north bank. The site is about 1.5km east of Lismore, which is the next major crossing point to the west, and about 1.5km from the next crossing point to the east at Glenribbeen Bridge.
Reference:
Rev. P. Power, 'The 'Rian bo padruig' (the ancient highway of the Decies)', *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 35 (1905), 110-29.



2005 OSI ortho photo



1st edition Ordnance Survey 6-inch map

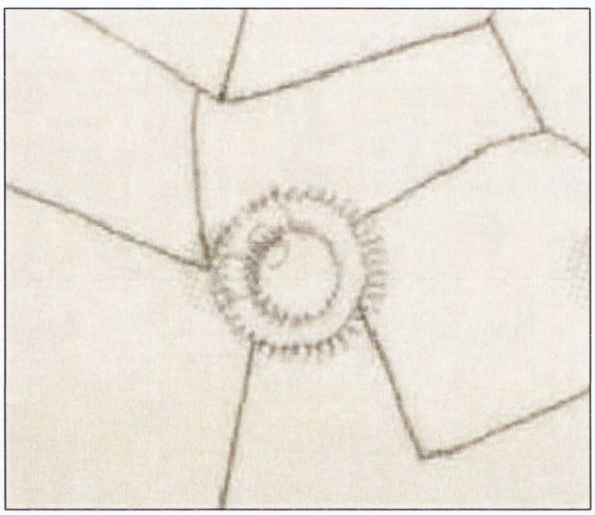


View of the river crossing, looking north

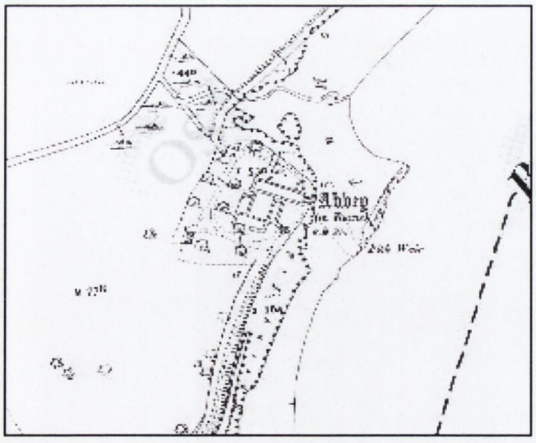
Townland Name: Ballynamertinagh
Site Type: Ringfort
SMR Number: WA038-038----
Date Visited: 13 August 2010
Comments:
This site is the fourth and furthest west of the group of ringforts that sit along this east-west ridge. The circular area (diam. 30m) is defined by an overgrown earth and stone bank (H up to 1m), which is reduced to a slight scarp from northwest to north-northeast. At the west, the bank is incorporated into a field boundary, and elsewhere there are slight traces of an outer fosse, now quite shallow. At the time of this visit, the site was too overgrown to admit access to the interior, but Moore reports that there are no internal features. A possible entrance in the bank is at the southeast. As with the other sites on this ridge, there are views to the east through south to west.
References:
M. Moore, *Archaeological Inventory of County Waterford*, 1999, 75-6, no. 552.



2005 OSI ortho photo


1st edition Ordnance Survey 6-inch map

Townland Name: Ballynatray Demesne
Site Type: Ecclesiastical Site (Molana Abbey, *Dairinis*)
SMR Number: WA037-011001-
Date Visited: 9 July 2009
Comments:
Molana Abbey, or the early medieval ecclesiastical site of *Dairinis*, stands on a circular piece of raised dry ground bounded on the east by the River Blackwater and by marshland on all other sides. The land was formerly an island, but is now connected to the mainland due to silting and the development of the marsh. Further to the west, the site is overlooked by hills used for both grazing and tillage. The shoreline on the opposite side of the river is wooded, and the river here is wide and shallow, largely dry at low tide. The remains of several fish weirs are visible near the abbey. The abbey is probably situated on the site of an early ecclesiastical foundation, *Dairinis*, established by St. Molana in the 6th century. The upstanding remains consist of a nave (c. 17 x 7.5m internal) and later chancel (c. 19 x 7.5m internal). The nave incorporates the masonry of an earlier church, particularly towards the west, the masonry style of which consists of large, roughly squared sandstone blocks. There are signs of later disturbance or inserted masonry: a door inserted into the west end of the north wall of the nave, and perhaps a blocked doorway in the west wall. The east wall of the nave was reused to form the chancel arch when the chancel was added. There is no evidence for an enclosing feature or a cemetery. All of the standing remains are high to late medieval.
References:
M. Moore, *Archaeological Inventory of County Waterford*, Dublin: Stationary Office, 1999, 167-8, no. 1326.
Anon., 'Proceedings', *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 32 (1903), 313-4.
W.H. Grattan-Flood, 'Molana Abbey, Co. Waterford', *Journal of the Waterford and Southeast of Ireland Archaeological Society* 22 (1916), 1-7.
Peter Harbison, *Guide to the national and historic monuments of Ireland*, Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1992, 86-7.
Rev. P. Power, 'Ancient ruined churches of Co. Waterford', *Journal of the Waterford and Southeast of Ireland Archaeological Society* 4 (1898), 209-12.



Depiction of Molana Abbey on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey 25-inch map



South side of Molana Abbey, looking north



Remains of a fish weir at low tide,
just south of Molana Abbey



Molana Abbey at lower right,
Ballynatray ringfort at upper right.

Townland Name: Ballynatray Demesne
Site Type: Ringfort
SMR Number: WA037-002----
Date Visited: 18 July 2009
Comments:
This circular ringfort (69m diam) stands on the side of an east facing slope in arable land. The area is defined by an impressive earth and stone bank with an interior H of up to 1.2m and an exterior H up to 2.5m. The width varies up to 6-8m at the base, and there is an outer fosse, 2m wide and about 1m deep. There are several gaps in the bank, but none of them are definite entrances. One gap, at the northeast, looks like a potential entrance, 2.8m wide. The interior is overgrown, and planted with deciduous trees, but otherwise level. There is another, smaller enclosure to the south that looks like a landscaped folly associated with the Ballynatray estate landscape. Both sites overlook the Blackwater and are just upslope from Molana Abbey, although the trees prevent perfect intervisibility. If the abbey lay on an island, then much of their produce must have come from the slopes on the west bank of the river, suggesting a close association between the abbey and the inhabitants of this ringfort.
References:
M. Moore, *Archaeological Inventory of County Waterford*, 1999, 76, no. 555.



2005 OSI ortho photo
Enclosure at upper left is a ringfort,
earthwork at lower right is a folly



External elevation of the ringfort, facing west

Townland Name: Bewley
Site Type: Ecclesiastical Site (possible)
SMR Number: WA029-024
Date Visited: 10 October 2009
Comments:
A supposed ruined Templar priory is located at the bottom of a gentle slope in pasture, on the east bank of the Finisk River. Extant remains include parts of an enclosing masonry wall and the footings and gable ends of some of the buildings in the complex. The area is level and flat, and somewhat wet, and has recently been cleared of overgrowth by the owner, Mr. David Pace. The 1st ed. OS maps show the enclosed area covered in forest or orchard. There are records of an altar stone and a bullaun stone having been located within the enclosure, but they were not found on this visit. The owner says that he looked for them during the process of clearing the site without success and that he suspects they were removed in the past several years. There is little about the physical remains at this site to suggest that there was an early medieval church at this location, aside from its position not far to the northwest of a ringfort (WA029-026) and close to the intersection of Saint Declan's Road (WA029-015) with the *Bóthar na Naoimh* (WA029-014). The site is therefore considered a possible early medieval ecclesiastical site.
References:
M. Moore, *Archaeological Inventory of County Waterford*, 1999, 168, no. 1329.

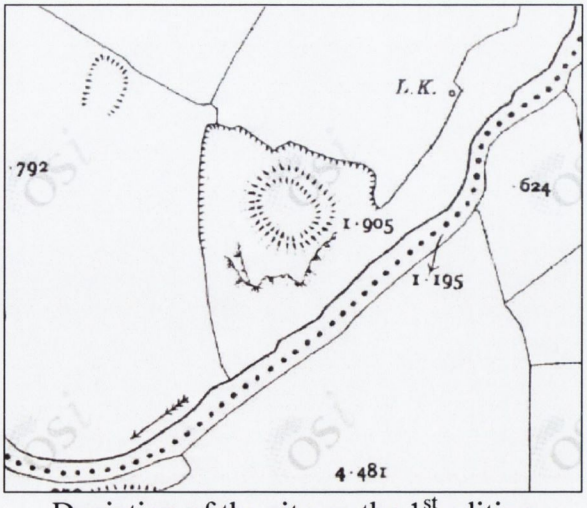


1st edition Ordnance Survey 6-inch map

Townland Name: Bewley
Site Type: Ringfort
SMR Number: WA029-026
Date Visited: 10 October 2009
Comments:
The remains of a ringfort lie at the bottom of a gentle slope in pasture, just a few meters north and west of the Finisk River. The appearance of the site is much modified by quarrying, and the ringfort is now isolated on a natural outcropping within the quarried area. Some parts of the outer bank remain, particularly on the north side of the site, where the bank is composed of earth and stone. A natural cave is at the northwest of the site, within the outer bank. Overall, the site looks very strange, and measurements were not taken because of the difficulties of interpreting the site after the quarrying damage it has incurred. In particular, the low-lying position of the site is unusual in comparison to other ringfort sites in the area.
References:
M. Moore, *Archaeological Inventory of County Waterford*, 1999, 77, no. 572.



Break in the outer bank on the southwest side of the site, facing northeast



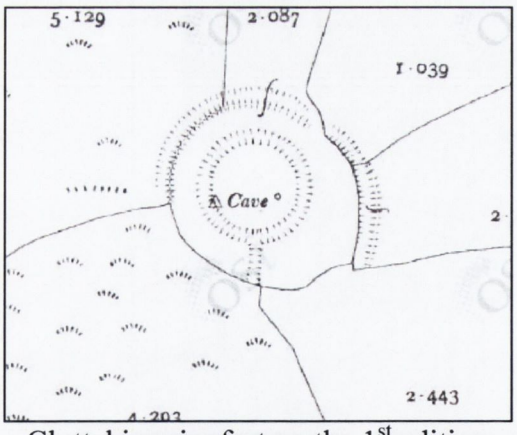
Depiction of the site on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey 25-inch map

Townland Name: Clashmore
Site Type: Ecclesiastical Site
SMR Number: WA037-008001-
Date Visited: 19 July 2009
Comments:
Clashmore is reputed to have had an early ecclesiastical site founded by St Cronin or Mochua in the 7th century. The modern church at Clashmore lies within a rectangular graveyard, and the site as a whole shows no indications of an earlier structure in the same location. There is nothing to suggest the line of an earlier enclosing element, although there is a slight curve to the road respecting the line of the current church site, and the land on which the church stands is significantly raised in comparison to the road level and the ground level in the surrounding town. The site is almost certainly early, and it is interesting to note continued associated settlement in the area, as well as the conjunction of several roads at the site of the settlement. Clashmore Bridge is a crossing point over the Greagagh River, and a castle site lies c. 1km south of the town.
References:
M. Moore, *Archaeological Inventory of County Waterford*, 1999, 170, no. 1334.
A. Gwynn and R.N. Hadcock, *Medieval religious houses Ireland*, Dublin: Irish Academic Press, Ltd., 1970, 31.
Rev. P. Power, 'The ancient ruined churches of Co. Waterford', *Journal of the Waterford and Southeast of Ireland Archaeological Society* 2 (1896), 201-2.



Clashmore Church and St. Mochua's Well
1st edition Ordnance Survey 6-inch map

Townland Name: Cluttahina
Site Type: Ringfort and souterrain
SMR Number: WA021-008001, WA021-008002
Date Visited: 10 October 2009
Comments:
A well preserved, bivallate ringfort lies on a ridge in pasture and forestry with views in all directions. The inner enclosure (diam. 36m) is defined by a wide earthen bank (W. 6-7.5m, int. H. 0.5m, ext. H. 1-1.5m) with an exterior fosse (D. up to 1m). This enclosure is non-concentrically placed within a larger enclosure (diam. 73m) defined by an earthen bank (W. 3-5m, int. H. 1m, ext. H. 0.6-2m) with some stone facing inside and out. The entrance and causeway into the inner enclosure are at east-northeast, with a modern entrance through the outer enclosure at north-northeast. Three radial banks connect the inner and outer enclosing elements, with one continuing south of the outer enclosure as a field bank. The interior of the inner enclosure is overgrown at the northeast with gorse and brambles, but is otherwise level and hummocky, with large amounts of stone barely covered by the grass and topsoil. The remains of a souterrain (WA021-008002) are centered in the interior. Local knowledge suggests that there may have been one or two other souterrains in the enclosure that have since been destroyed. The extant souterrain is comprised of a sunken, collapsed passage (L. 13m) oriented east-west with a modern opening into the passage near the interior chamber at east. This was closed off until reopened recently by the owner, and the eastern extremity of the entrance passage and chamber appear to be intact.
References:
M. Moore, *Archaeological Inventory of County Waterford*, 1999, 80, 150, nos. 588 and 1254.



Cluttahina ringfort on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey 25-inch map


2005 OSI ortho photo



External elevation of outer enclosure facing north



Collapsed souterrain passage in Cluttahina ringfort inner enclosure interior, facing west



Opening into souterrain at east



View of souterrain interior taken through above opening

Townland Name: Coolbagh
Site Type: Ringfort
SMR Number: WA034-025----
Date Visited: 19 July 2009
Comments:
This ringfort lies on high, level ground in pasturage with a commanding view of the valley to the south and southwest. The ringfort is a grassy circular area (diam. 37m) defined by an overgrown earth and stone bank (W 3.5-5.5m, int. H 1-1.3m, ext. H 1.3-1.5m) with an entrance (W 2.9m) at the northwest. The bank is incorporated into a field bank at northeast, and there is no evidence of a fosse. The site is just south and west of Coolbagh Crossroads where the modern north-south road that follows the Blackwater intersects with the modern east-west road that heads toward a crossing place on the river. Crossery ringfort is on the opposite bank of the Blackwater.
References:
M. Moore, *Archaeological Inventory of County Waterford*, 1999, 80, no. 591.



External elevation, facing south-east,
with possible entrance at north-west



Ringfort and crossroads, 1st edition
Ordnance Survey 6-inch map



Ringfort and crossroads,
2005 OSI ortho photo

Townland Name: Coolydoody North
Site Type: Ringfort
SMR Number: WA028-003
Date Visited: 24 October 2009
Comments:
This well-preserved ringfort stands on a north facing slope in pasture, with a stream running past its west side. The site is overgrown with trees and brambles, and is currently surrounded by a very deep, wide, water-filled ditch. The landowner reports clearing household and farm refuse out of this ditch upon purchasing the land about 10 years ago, but says that he did not dredge or re-cut the fosse; the accumulated water may derive from the stream or from other drainage works. The interior of the ringfort appears level, but it was not possible to access it on this occasion due to the ditch. There is reportedly an entrance at southeast and the dimensions of the site are recorded as 67m east-west by 50m north-south. The site is just on the boundary between the townlands of Coolydoody North and Tober, and the townland boundary deviates to the west at this point to include the ringfort within Coolydoody North.
References:
M. Moore, *Archaeological Inventory of County Waterford*, 1999, 81, no. 596.



External elevation, facing west



Water-filled fosse at east, facing north

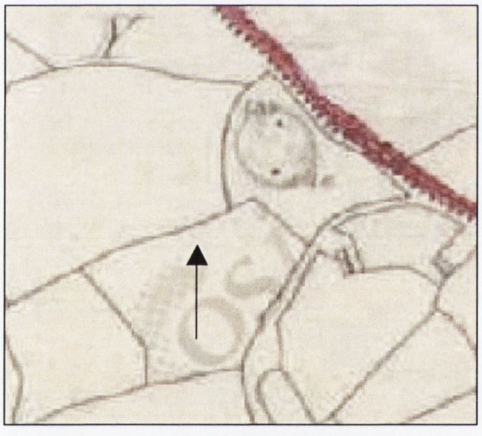


2005 OSI ortho photo

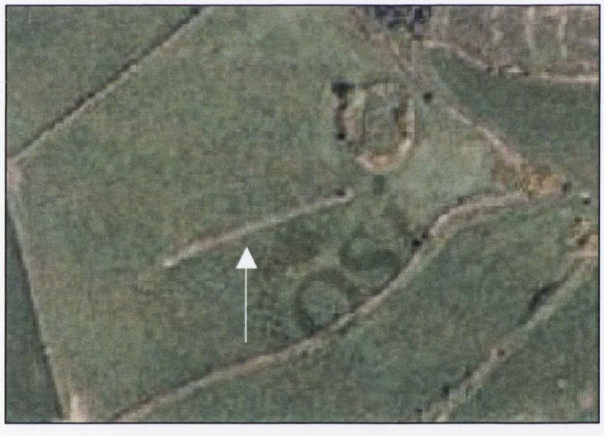


Ringfort and townland boundary,
1st edition Ordnance Survey 6-inch map

Townland Name: Crossery
Site Type: Ringfort
SMR Number: WA034-020001-
Date Visited: 18 July 2009
Comments:
This ringfort stands on a south-facing slope in pasture land with forestry to the north, and has a commanding view of the Blackwater River and the slopes of its valley on both sides. The sub-circular enclosure (36m N-S and 31m E-W) is defined by the remains of a substantial earth and stone bank, with no visible fosse. The inventory reports a blocked entrance at the southeast, about 2.4m wide, but that was not visible at the time of this visit. Rather, another possible entrance was identified at the north, 1.2 m wide and lined with stone, although this may be a later modification. The interior is very overgrown, and a hollow to the south of the centre indicates the presence of a reported souterrain site. There is a significant amount of loose pieces of sandstone in the interior, perhaps indicative of a collapsed stone facing or revetment on the banks. To the southwest of the ringfort, running off to the west, there is an overgrown field bank that looks different from, and possibly older than, the other field walls in the immediate area. Many field boundaries appear to have been removed, and as can be seen on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey map below, there may have been a larger enclosing element associated with this site which has since been removed.
References:
M. Moore, *Archaeological Inventory of County Waterford*, 1999, 81, no. 600.



Crossery ringfort and field boundary on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey 6-inch map



Crossery ringfort and field boundary, 2000 OSI ortho photo



Western external elevation of
Crossery ringfort, facing east



Possible entrance through bank at north, external view

Townland Name: Curradarra
Site Type: Ringfort and Road (disused)
SMR Number: WA034-015----
Date Visited: 19 July 2009
Comments:
This eroded ringfort (diam. 28 m) is planted with deciduous trees and stands on a broad hill in pasture land. The site is in relatively poor condition and there are no signs of a fosse or entrance. A modern house on a triangular plot just north of the ringfort was formerly a shop, and fronted onto a small road that has since become entirely overgrown. The householder says he was told that the road is the ancient road to Clashmore. The roadway is sunken to a depth of a meter below surrounding ground level, and is defined on both sides by earth and stone banks. It is quite narrow, only about 2m wide. It was difficult to follow the line of the road for more than 50-100m, due to vigorous overgrowth, but it runs through fields on both sides. This road is pictured on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey maps, as shown below, but if it did ever proceed directly south to Clashmore from this townland, such a direct route had disappeared before those maps were made. A direct route south would have passed by several other ringforts on its way to Clashmore.
References:
M. Moore, *Archaeological Inventory of County Waterford*, 1999, 82, no. 605.



View of disused road, facing south-southeast



Ringfort and road as marked on 1st edition Ordnance Survey 6-inch map

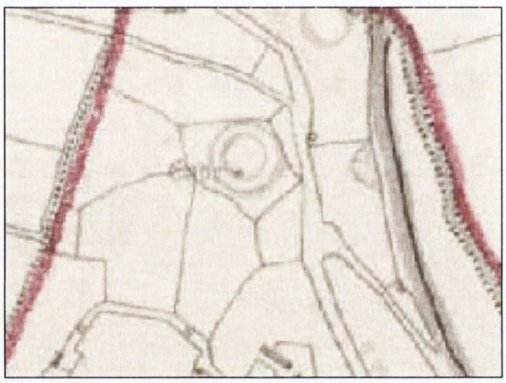


Ringfort and road, now disused and overgrown, on 2005 OSI ortho photo

Townland Name: Curragh
Site Type: Ringfort
SMR Number: WA038-040001-
Date Visited: 13 August 2010
Comments:
Considering that this ringfort is surrounded by modern houses, a laneway and a fence, it is in quite good condition. The enclosure (diam. 37.5m N-S, 33m E-W) is defined by an earthen bank (ext. H 2m at E, 0.5m at W) with some traces of a stone facing and wide outer berm (up to 5m W). On the down-slope side, the edge of the berm is higher than the surface of the laneway by up to 0.5m. The enclosure stands on a northeast facing slope, and the berm may originally have been constructed to assist in creating a level area for habitation or other activities. There is no sign of an entrance, and there is no trace of the souterrain marked on the 1st ed. OS maps. The interior is very overgrown, but level. The site has wide views to the north through east to south, and is situated between a later bridge to the north and a ford to the south. Another substantial ringfort (WA038-039----) is further east in the same townland.
References:
M. Moore, *Archaeological Inventory of County Waterford*, 1999, 82, no. 607.



Curragh ringfort (WA038-040), 2000 OSI ortho photo

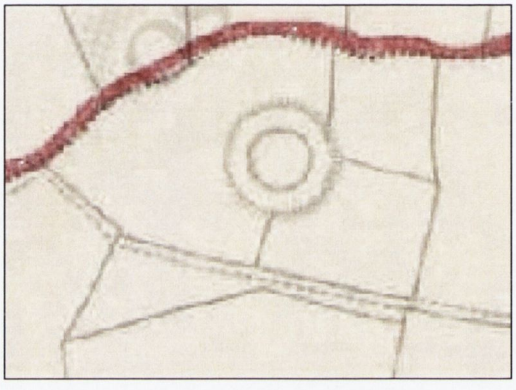


Curragh ringfort, with souterrain marked, 1st edition Ordnance Survey 6-inch map



Enclosed area, raised above the surface of the laneway, viewed facing west

Townland Name: Curragh
Site Type: Ringfort
SMR Number: WA038-039----
Date Visited: 13 August 2010
Comments:
To the east of WA038-040001-, this large enclosure (53m E-W, 45m N-S from outer edge of fosse to outer edge of fosse) is defined by a deep fosse (3.5m W, 1.8m D) and a flat-topped bank (2.5m from bottom of fosse to top of bank). The interior is too overgrown to allow access, but again appears intentionally built up above the surrounding ground level. There are no signs of an entrance or causeway. The site is on a ridge with views to the east, south and west.
References:
M. Moore, *Archaeological Inventory of County Waterford*, 1999, 82, no. 606.



Curragh ringfort (WA038-039) and townland boundary on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey 6-inch map

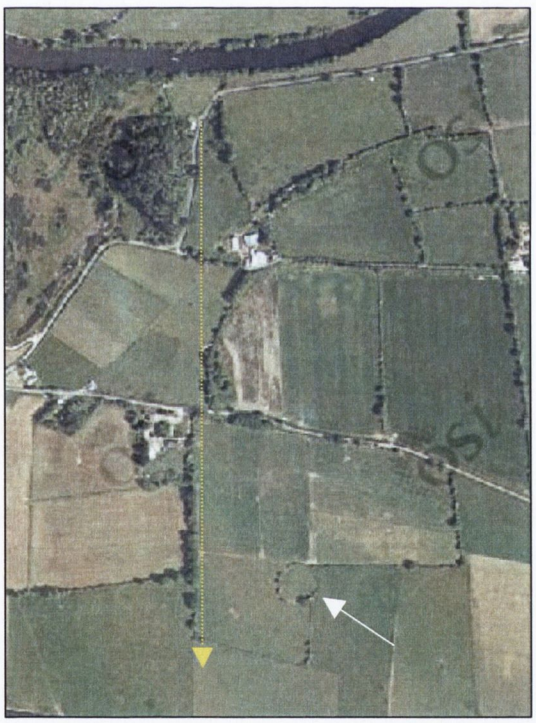


2005 OSI ortho photo; note changes in field boundaries



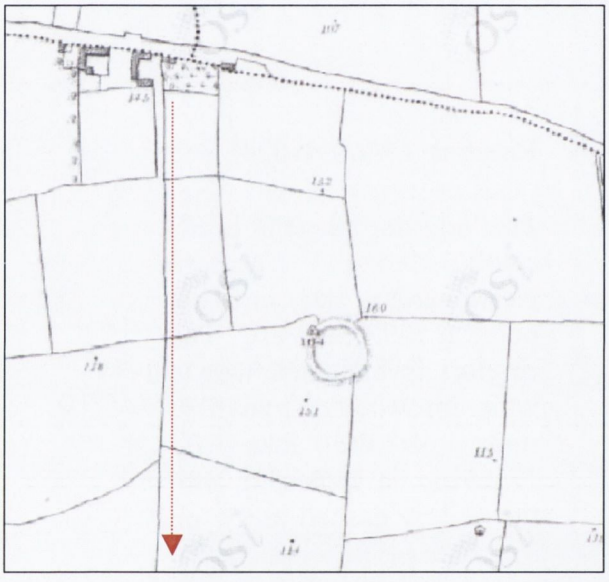
West external elevation, facing east

Townland Name: Deerpark North
Site Type: Road (*Rían Bó Phadraig*)
SMR Number: N/A
Date Visited: 19 July 2009
Comments:
The route of the *Rían Bó Phadraig* runs through rolling pasture here, just downslope and to the west of the ringfort (WA021-024) in Deerpark North. It is an overgrown, sunken road running between fields on both sides. The sides are comprised of earthen banks, and loose stone on the roadway may indicate that the banks were originally reveted with stone. The road runs directly south from the current road, and has an average width of 5m and a depth of about 1m below the surrounding ground level. It is a continuation of the route that crosses the Blackwater west of Cappoquin at Ballyea West and continues south through Deerpark East. The main road here, with which the *Rían Bó Phadraig* intersects just north and west of the ringfort (WA021-024), follows the route of the *Bóthar na Naoimh*. This may indicate the strategic importance of the ringfort described below.
References:
Rev. P. Power, 'The 'Rian bo padruig' (the ancient highway of the Decies)', *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 35 (1905), 110-29.



Ringfort (WA021-024) and possible route of the *Rían Bó Phadraig* where it heads south through Deerpark North from the crossing point at Ballyea West. The ringfort is indicated with a white arrow and the possible route of the *Rían Bó Phadraig* is indicated with the yellow dashed arrow on this 2005 OSI ortho photo.

Townland Name: Deerpark North
Site Type: Ringfort
SMR Number: WA021-024----
Date Visited: 19 July 2009
Comments:
This ringfort lies south of the *Bóthar na Naoimh* and east of the *Rían Bó Phadraig*, on the top of a hill in pasture land with commanding views on all sides. The circular area (diam. 64m) is defined by a very eroded earth and stone bank (W 2-3m, int. H 0.3-1.3m, ext. H 1.5-1.8m), and is grassy and relatively free of overgrowth. The interior is level and slightly raised above the surrounding ground level, and has been disturbed by cattle. The bank is incorporated into a field bank at the east and is reduced to a scarp at the south. There is no visible fosse and the original entrance cannot be identified.
References:
M. Moore, *Archaeological Inventory of County Waterford*, 1999, 84, no. 626.

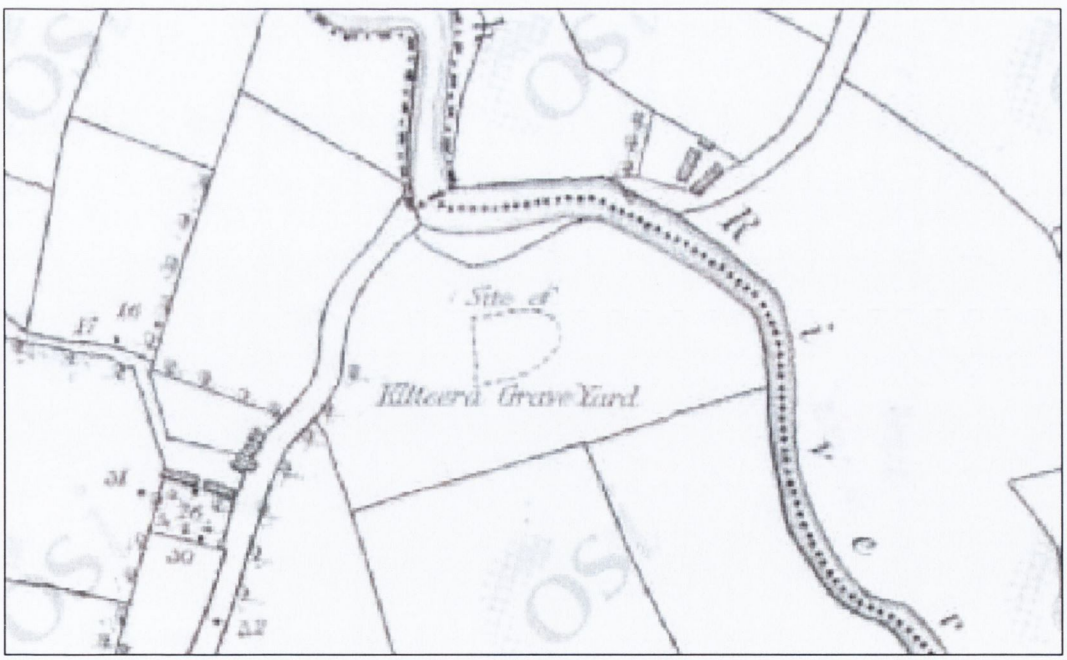


Deerpark North ringfort depicted on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey 6-inch map. The field boundary indicated west of the ringfort, marked here with a red arrow, is the proposed route of the *Rían Bó Phadraig* discussed above.



External elevation of the ringfort bank at south

Townland Name: Dromore
Site Type: Ecclesiastical Site (Cill Tire)
SMR Number: WA029-042001-
Date Visited: 18 July 2009
Comments:
This early ecclesiastical site lies in level pasture on the south side of the Goish River and 1km from its confluence with the Blackwater. It was originally a circular graveyard (diam. 36m) defined by a low stone bank, no trace of which survives today, due to excavations by Macalister in the 1930s. A number of trenches and a pit containing iron slag were found in the interior. These were overlaid by 52 inhumations, which were themselves sealed by a stone-faced wall which contained three reused ogham stones. Today, two of the ogham stones are displayed at the site. There is no trace now of Macalister's enclosing bank, although a roughly circular area within the field is somewhat raised. In addition, the road and field boundaries to the west, north and east are curved, giving the impression of a larger enclosing element. A stream lies north of the site, across the road.
References:
M. Moore, *Archaeological Inventory of County Waterford*, 1999, 172, no. 1347.
R.R. Brash, 'On an ogham inscribed stone and Kiltera, Co. Waterford', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 15c (1872-9), 4-7.
Peter Harbison, *Guide to the national and historic monuments of Ireland*, Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1992, 326.
R.A.S. Macalister, 'The excavation of Kiltera, Co. Waterford', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 43c (1935), 1-16.
Rev. P. Power, 'Another ogham discovery in Co. Waterford', *Journal of the Waterford and Southeast of Ireland Archaeological Society* 12 (1909), 76-8.



Site of Cill Tíre on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey 6-inch map

Townland Name: Drumroe Upper
Site Type: Ecclesiastical Site
SMR Number: WA021-025001
Date Visited: 23 October 2009
Comments:
This ecclesiastical site, traditionally known as the birthplace of St. Declan, stands in level pasture, just at the junction of the boundaries of Drumroe Upper, Bawnmore and Kilbree West. The small, D-shaped, slightly raised enclosure is very overgrown but level. Within the enclosed area, the coursed rubble footprint of a small rectangular stone structure (c. 6.8m E-W x 4.9m N-S, walls c. 0.8m wide) can be seen. A large cement grotto takes up the enclosed area north of the structural remains. There is no other evidence of burials in the enclosure, an original entrance or an external fosse. Just to the east of this site, in the same townland, the 1st ed. OS maps show what appears to be a substantial ringfort (WA021-027----), no trace of which is extant. The modern east-west road which runs along the southern end of this site reputedly follows the course of the *Bóthar na Naoimh*.
References:
M. Moore, *Archaeological Inventory of County Waterford*, 1999, 173, no. 1350.
Rev. F. O'Brien, 'The birthplace of St. Deglan', *Journal of the Waterford and Southeast of Ireland Archaeological Society* 1 (1895), 39-44 .



Site of 'St. Declan's Chapel' as depicted on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey 6-inch map, with the course of the *Bóthar na Naoimh* marked in red



Elevation of the ecclesiastical enclosure, facing west. The site is fenced off and densely overgrown.

Townland Name: Dysert
Site Type: Ecclesiastical site, holy well
SMR Number: WA040-011001-, WA040-011002-
Date Visited: 15 August 2010
Comments:



Interior elevation of the west gable end

On the peninsula south and slightly east of Ardmore is the early ecclesiastical site of Dysert, or *Dísert Deagláin*. Close to the edge of a cliff over Ardmore Bay, the site consists of the remains of a rectangular church and a holy well with a two-opening masonry surround. The surround of the well has sockets for three late medieval stone crosses, two of which remain in situ. The masonry of the surround includes many pieces of reused dressed stone from the church. The church itself is a rectangular structure (23m E-W, c. 6m N-S), represented by the upstanding west gable and parts of the south and east walls (H up to 1.5m). The north wall is entirely destroyed. Features in the remaining walls include a damaged opening or doorway in the west gable end with a window above it. The south wall has a blocked doorway at the west end, and another doorway or large window at the east end. A pier associated with the still-observed pattern of St. Declan has been built in the church interior against the east wall, and is topped by a stone cross. There is an aumbry in the east wall itself. Moore believes that the whole eastern part of the church is rebuilt rather than original, but that the structure in its original form could have been built in the early medieval period. There is a stone or stone-faced enclosing element on the landward side of the church, which appears also to act as a retaining wall, but the enclosed area is not much larger than the church itself. There is no evidence for burial in the enclosure. Overall, the site is almost certainly early medieval in origin, but has been adapted over the centuries, most recently as a major focus of the pattern of St. Declan.

References:

M. Moore, *Archaeological Inventory of County Waterford*, 1999, 174, no. 1354.
T. Nolan, 'Listing of monastic possessions of Waterford c. 1540', *Decies* 26 (1984), 48.
Rev. P. Power, 'Excursion guides II – Ardmore', *Journal of the Waterford and Southeast of Ireland Archaeological Society* 4 (1898), 160-1.
T.J. Westropp, 'Notes on the antiquities of Ardmore', *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 33 (1903), 375-8.



External elevation of the doorway in the surviving south wall at Dysert

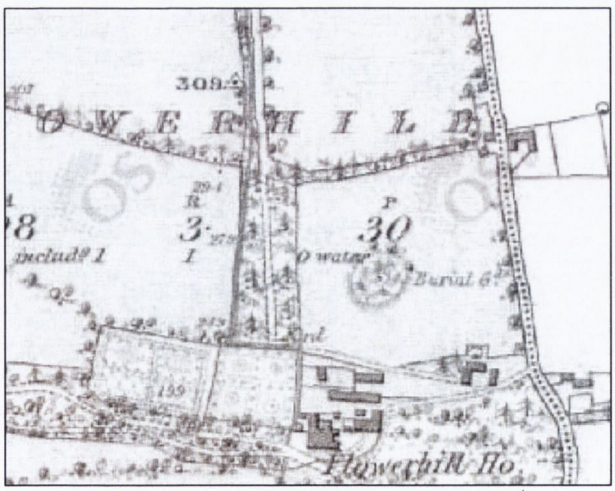


Holy well at Dysert, with stone surround and two surviving late medieval stone crosses

Townland Name: Flowerhill
Site Type: Ecclesiastical Site (possible)
SMR Number: WA020-010001
Date Visited: 23 October 2009
Comments: This site lies on a south facing slope, and it appears on the 1st ed. OS maps as a circular enclosure, marked as a graveyard. The enclosure is 39 m in diameter, defined by a somewhat collapsed masonry wall overgrown with ivy. The enclosure is higher above ground level at south, as though built up to compensate for the naturally sloping terrain, but the interior of the enclosure still slopes to the south. The interior is over grown with trees and underbrush, and a few grave markers as recent as the 19th century are still standing. There are exposed and buried piles of stone, and some linear scatters of stone that may indicate structural remains within the enclosure, oriented roughly east-west. A modern gate interrupts the enclosing wall just south of east. Overall, it is difficult to say for certain whether or not this site is early ecclesiastical, but the circular enclosure and the longstanding tradition of association with burials, if not with a church, seem to support that identification.
References:
M. Moore, *Archaeological Inventory of County Waterford*, 1999, 193-4, no. 1459.



External elevation of the enclosure, facing west

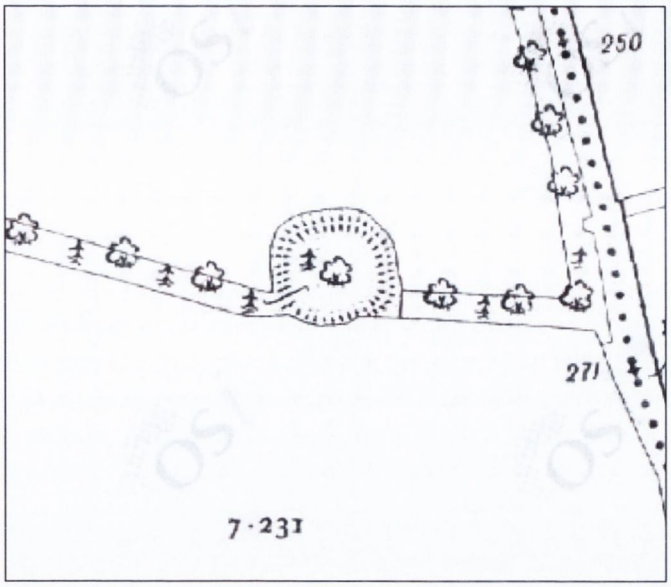


Marked 'burial ground' on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey 6-inch map

Townland Name: Fountain
Site Type: Ringfort and Road (disused)
SMR Number: WA029-039
Date Visited: 24 October 2009
Comments: This well preserved univallate ringfort stands towards the top of an east facing slope in pasture lands. The circular area (c. 28m) is defined by an earthen bank up to 1.6m in height and approximately 6m wide at the base, with some traces of external stone facing. The original entrance is at east-southeast, and there seems to be some evidence for an external fosse at the northwest. The interior of the ringfort is dished, contains several deciduous trees, and is somewhat higher than the surrounding ground level, particularly to the south. The ringfort is incorporated into the north bank of a disused trackway running east-west immediately south of the site. The track skirts around or incorporates the ringfort bank, rather than truncating it, suggesting that construction of the road postdates the ringfort. This trackway is shown on the 1st and 2nd ed. OS maps, but was disused even then, and appears to be intersect with modern roads east and west of the site. The road surface is 5m wide and is sunken below the surrounding ground level. It is defined by two earth and stone walls approximately 1m high and 0.65m wide, of which the north wall is the better preserved. The area is overgrown with brambles and mature trees, including a large common beech. The site of an earthwork (WA029-036) identified by Power as the 'trench of the calf' which represented the southern terminus of the *Rían Bó Phadraig* lies to the north and west of this ringfort, but is no longer visible at ground level.
References:
M. Moore, *Archaeological Inventory of County Waterford*, 1999, 86, no. 640.



External elevation, facing west

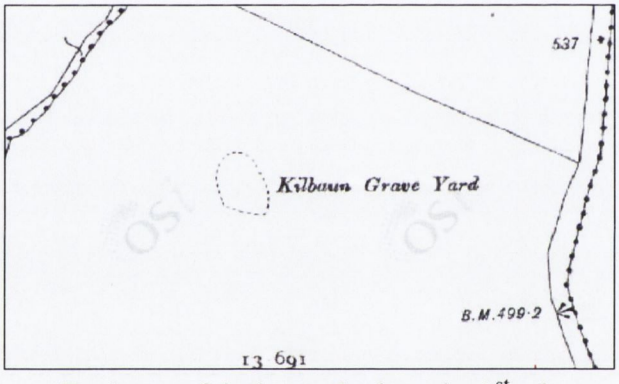


Enclosure and disused trackway as depicted on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey 25-inch map



View of the overgrown roadbed, facing east

Townland Name: Garrison
Site Type: Ecclesiastical Site (Possible)
SMR Number: WA020-008001
Date Visited: 23 October 2009
Comments:
A possible ecclesiastical site, marked on the 1st ed. OS maps as 'Kilbaun grave yard' and identified by Power as 'Cill Breac' lies on a west facing slope in pasture. The enclosure is irregular in shape (c. 25m diam.) and is defined by an earthen and stone bank from southwest through south and east to northeast, and elsewhere by a low, collapsed stone wall. A modern gate interrupts the bank at the east. The interior is largely clear, although lumpy and sloping to the southwest. The enclosed area contains a significant amount of sandstone fragments that could represent either grave markers or structural remains. Overall, the site looks somewhat disturbed, and the landowners report local knowledge of occasional burials at the site as recently as the 1960s. Accordingly, the site is still treated as a burial ground. Due to the disturbed nature of the extant remains, the original character and the age of this site remain uncertain.
References:
M. Moore, *Archaeological Inventory of County Waterford*, 1999, 194, no. 1460.
Rev. Patrick Power, *The placenames of Decies*, Cork, 1952, 44.



Enclosure faintly marked on the 1st ed.
Ordnance Survey 25-inch map


Collapsed and eroding bank or wall at northwest,
facing south

Townland Name: Kilcockan
Site Type: Ecclesiastical Site (Kilcockan Church)
SMR Number: WA034-019001-
Date Visited: 18 July 2009
Comments:
Kilcockan parish church lies within a circular graveyard defined by an earth and stone bank, and in places by a stone wall. The enclosing element is collapsed in places, but the bank is best preserved at the south, where it contains more stone. It is most collapsed at northeast (at N: H 0.7m, W 1.7m; at SW: H 1m, W 2.4m). The enclosure is roughly 57m in diameter. The southern part of the enclosure, south and east of the church contains grave markers and what look like collapse stones set up like gravestones. The church itself is an undifferentiated rectangular structure (16.7m x 8m), still upstanding. The west end of the church was modified as a mausoleum in 1830, but the original doorway, a stoup and an aumbry survive in the south wall, and ogee-headed windows with nicely dressed stone are in the east and north walls. Another window in the south wall is blocked up. Overall, the extant structure is high/late medieval, although there are some large sandstone blocks in the masonry fabric that may represent reuse from an earlier structure. More of these large sandstone blocks lie in the graveyard. A road runs along the west side of the enclosure, coming to a dead end just south of the church, although as shown on the 1st ed. OS maps, it originally continued south toward Carrigeen and Molana. Kilcockan ringfort (WA034-018----) is just to the northwest.
References:
M. Moore, *Archaeological Inventory of County Waterford*, 1999, 177-8, no. 1372.
Rev. P. Power, 'Ancient ruined churches of Co. Waterford', *Journal of the Waterford and Southeast of Ireland Archaeological Society* 4 (1898), 213.



North wall and east gable end of Kilcockan Church



Kilcockan church enclosure and north-south road, now disused past point marked with arrow, 1st ed. Ordnance Survey 6-inch map

Townland Name: Kilcockan
Site Type: Ringfort
SMR Number: WA034-018----
Date Visited: 18 July 2009
Comments:
This ringfort lies on the top of a west facing slope in grazing land. The sub-circular overgrown area (diam. 43m E-W, 36m N-S) is defined by the remains of an earth and stone bank, now much collapsed and reduced to a scarp, particularly at the south and west. At north and west, the bank is truncated by and incorporated into field banks, and a stream runs along the southern side of the enclosure. There is no evidence for an entrance, but there is a shallow external fosse.
References:
M. Moore, *Archaeological Inventory of County Waterford*, 1999, 90, no. 678.

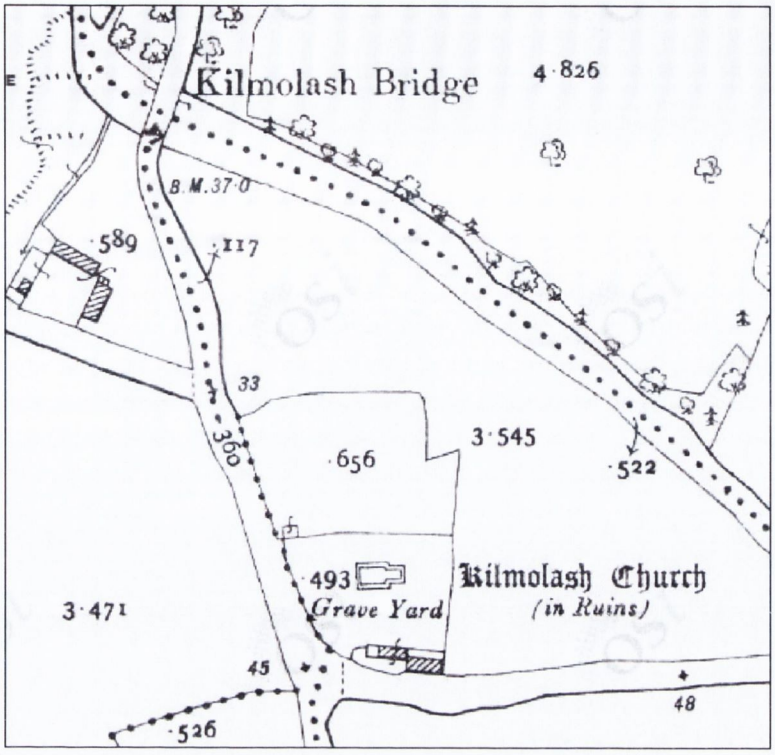


Kilcockan ringfort and church, 1st ed. Ordnance Survey 6-inch map

Townland Name: Kilmolash
Site Type: Ecclesiastical Site (Kilmolash Church)
SMR Number: WA029-027001-
Date Visited: 19 July 2009
Comments:
Kilmolash church lies within a D-shaped graveyard on level ground. The enclosure is defined at the north by a stone wall, at east by an earth and stone bank, and at south and west by roads. The enclosure measures roughly 40m north-south and 42.5m east-west. The area within the enclosure is occupied by grave monuments as well as by many piles of collapsed masonry. The nave and chancel are both largely intact, except for the south nave wall. There is a 12th century door inserted into the north wall of the nave, while the chancel arch has an inscription dating to 1635. It seems likely that the nave represents the original or earliest church still surviving on the site, dating to the 12th century or perhaps earlier, and that the chancel is a later addition. Two ogham stones are incorporated into the church masonry, as is a cross-inscribed slab, and a slab bearing an effigy of an ecclesiastic formerly believed lost is currently located 5m north of the church, within the graveyard. The remnant of a stone wall runs east-west within the enclosure south of the church, but it could be a recent decorative feature rather than the remains of an enclosing element.
References:
M. Moore, *Archaeological Inventory of County Waterford*, 1999, 180-1, no. 1396.
M.J.C. Buckley, 'Notes on Kilmolash Church, near Cappoquin, Co. Waterford', *Journal of the Waterford and Southeast of Ireland Archaeological Society* 2 (1896), 212-20.
Tadgh O'Keeffe, 'Lismore and Cashel: reflections on the beginnings of Romanesque architecture in Munster', *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 124 (1994), 129-32.
Rev. P. Power, 'Ancient ruined churches of Co. Waterford', *Journal of the Waterford and Southeast of Ireland Archaeological Society* 4 (1898), 89-92.



West gable end of Kilmolash church

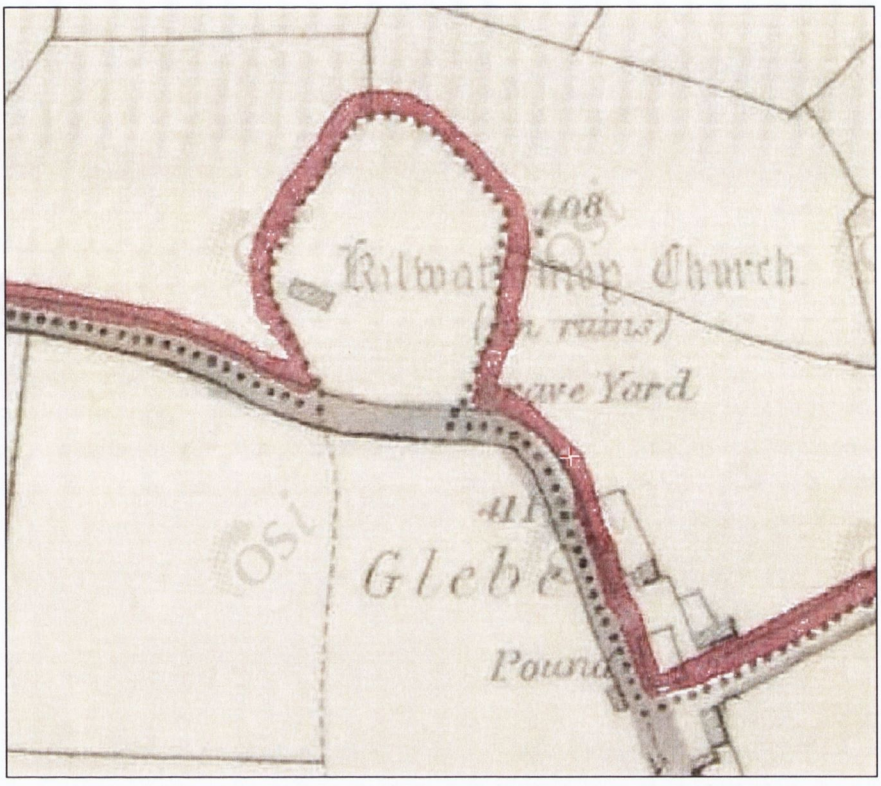


Depiction of church and graveyard on 1st edition Ordnance Survey 25-inch map



Effigy slab, located within the enclosure, north of the church

Townland Name: Kilwatermoy
Site Type: Ecclesiastical Site (Kilwatermoy Parish Church)
SMR Number: WA033-004003-
Date Visited: 9 July 2009
Comments:
This undifferentiated rectangular (c. 14 x 6 m) parish church lies off-center in a rectangular graveyard. The graveyard is defined by masonry walls at southeast, east and north, but by an earthen and stone bank at the west and southwest. This bank continues to the east and north of the rectangular graveyard, and appears to represent an earlier circular or sub-circular enclosure around the site. This enclosure can be seen very clearly on the 1st ed OS maps, where the townland boundary between Kilwatermoy and Churchquarter has a distinct, rounded extension to include the church site in Kilwatermoy townland. The sub-circular enclosure is roughly 100m north-south, 60m east-west, and is visible on both the OS maps and aerial photos. The line of the modern road appears to respect its southern extent, and its west bank is incorporated into a field bank. The area of the enclosure outside the modern graveyard is very overgrown with briars and scrub, and it was not possible to find the site of a souterrain reported located in the north part of the enclosure. Within the rectangular graveyard, and the church itself, much of the ground surface is taken up with graves, as well as smaller, roughly worked pieces of stone set into the ground like gravestones. The church itself is much reworked. O'Donovan reported that c. 1840 the west wall with a window and parts of the north and south walls were original and upstanding. The ruin was modified as a mortuary enclosure, particularly at the east end, and only the west wall is likely to be original, although there is no evidence of O'Donovan's window. The west wall looks significantly reworked. A holy well is east of the church behind a stone wall to the side of the road, and although its site is overgrown, it appears to be in use still.
Overall, there is nothing in the upstanding remains of the church to suggest an early structure, but the presence of a large, oval enclosure with continued use as an ecclesiastical site indicates that the site may indeed be early. The site is just west of a small tributary of the River Bride to the north, and it may have an association with another enclosure just to the northwest in Ballyhamlet.
References:
M. Moore, *Archaeological Inventory of County Waterford*, 1999, 182, no. 1405.
M. O'Flanagan, (compiler), *Letters containing information relative to the antiquities of the county of Waterford collected during the progress of the Ordnance Survey in 1841*, Bray: Typescript, 1929, 71-2.
Rev. P. Power, 'Ancient ruined churches of Co. Waterford', *Journal of the Waterford and Southeast of Ireland Archaeological Society* 4 (1898), 213-4.



Kilwatermoy church and the deviation in the townland boundary, 1st edition Ordnance Survey 6-inch map



Church and enclosure, 2005 OSI ortho photo

Townland Name: Knockanearis
Site Type: Ringfort
SMR Number: WA034-023----
Date Visited: 19 July 2009
Comments:
This ringfort lies in level pasture, and is a circular scrub covered area (diam. 32m) defined by the remains of an earthen bank. The bank is low, a maximum exterior height of 1m, and is truncated at the south by quarrying. The hollow formed by quarrying is now filled with refuse. There is no visible fosse or entrance extant. This site is part of a group of sites; to the northeast there is an earthwork that represents a possible early church site (WA034-024----), and to the south are another definite ringfort (WA034-021----) and a possible ringfort (WA034-026----). This Knockanearis group is part of a larger group of sites that cluster north of Clashmore on the slopes east of the Blackwater.
References:
M. Moore, *Archaeological Inventory of County Waterford*, 1999, 92-3, no. 701.

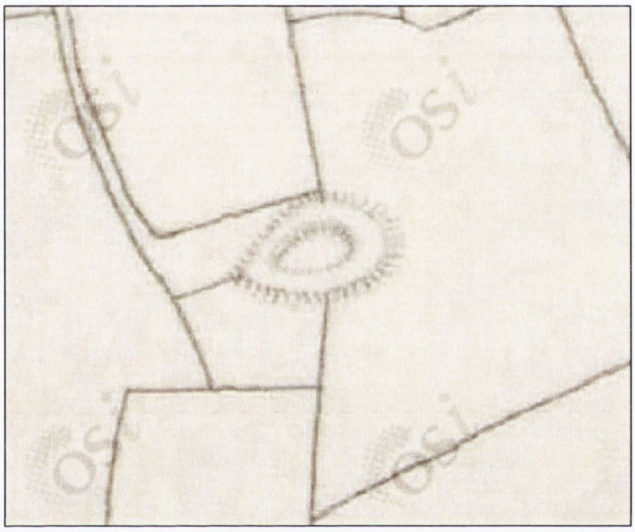


West external elevation of Knockanearis ringfort



Knockanearis ringfort, 1st ed. Ordnance Survey 6-inch map

Townland Name: Lissaniska
Site Type: Ringfort
SMR Number: WA038-025----
Date Visited: 14 August 2010
Comments:
Standing on a broad south facing slope with views to Ardmore, this overgrown, oval enclosure (diam. 37m, 54m) is defined by a substantial earthen bank (W up to 8m, H 1.5m above ground level) and an external fosse (W up to 3.5m, D 1m). The fosse is wet, and there is no sign of an entrance or causeway. The interior is inaccessible, due to overgrowth by shrubs and nettles. The site has broad views over the ocean to south.
References:
M. Moore, *Archaeological Inventory of County Waterford*, 1999, 94, no. 717.

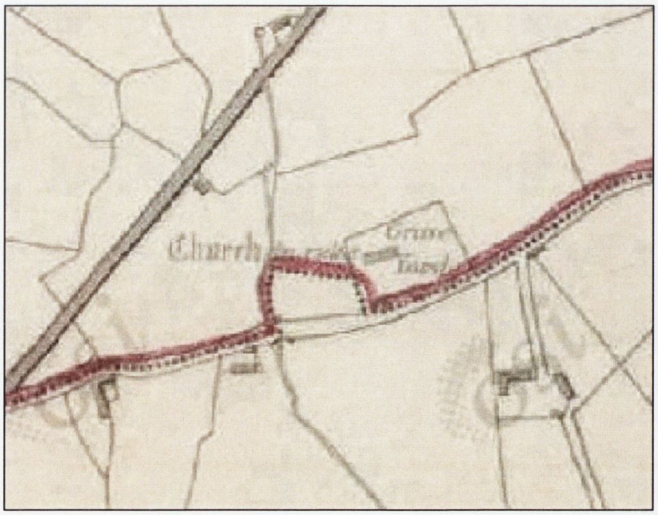


1st edition Ordnance Survey 6-inch map



Lissaniska ringfort, at left, and Mill and Churchquarter ecclesiastical site, on the 2005 OSI ortho photo

Townland Name: Mill and Churchquarter (Lisgennan)
Site Type: Ecclesiastical site
SMR Number: WA038-026002-
Date Visited: 14 August 2010
Comments:
The ruins of this church are enclosed by a rectangular graveyard defined by a stone wall. At the west and southwest, there is some evidence to suggest that the rectangular enclosure was superimposed on a previously round enclosure. Someone has recently cut a path around the edge of the graveyard, which, at the west end, creates a ditch between the bank/field boundary and the earth and stone edge of the graveyard. An ogham stone (WA038-026003-) stands in a non-original location at the western edge of the graveyard. The interior is significantly raised above the surrounding ground and road level, and the remains of the church are the highest point of the interior. The nave and chancel church (nave: 13m E-W, 6m N-S; chancel: 6m E-W, 6m N-S) is represented by remnants of the north, south and east walls of the chancel, and elsewhere by stone foundations, wall fragments, and piles of rubble. The east wall is leaning badly to the outside. There is an aumbry in the east wall, and the broken remains of windows in the east and south walls. Several burials are in the interior of the church, as well as many more in the surrounding graveyard. Other objects in the graveyard include three fragments of window tracery and large piece of octagonal cut stone pierced by a 10cm wide hole. Overall, this site has early features, including the ogham stone and the possible circular enclosure, but the church itself is probably at least partly high medieval in date.
References:
M. Moore, *Archaeological Inventory of County Waterford*, 1999, 186, no. 1416.
G.M. Atkinson, 'Notes and queries- 'cill-caet-iairn' and ogham stones at Lisgenan and Glenawillen'', *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 16 (1883-4), 307-9.
R.A.S. Macalister, *Corpus inscriptionum insularum Celticarum*, vol. 1, Dublin: Stationary Office, 1945, 265.
M. O'Flanagan, (compiler), *Letters containing information relative to the antiquities of the county of Waterford collected during the progress of the Ordnance Survey in 1841*, Bray: Typescript, 1929, 167.
Rev. P. Power, 'Ancient ruined churches of Co. Waterford', *Journal of the Waterford and Southeast of Ireland Archaeological Society* 4 (1898), 196-7.



1st edition
Ordnance Survey
6-inch map

Townland Name: Monea
Site Type: Ringfort
SMR Number: WA038-037----
Date Visited: 13 August 2010
Comments:
This ringfort stands in pasture on a south facing slope. The enclosure (27m E-W, 24.5m N-S) is defined by a badly eroding bank of earth and stone (H 0.5m upslope at W, 1.4m downslope at S). There was no external fosse, and no obvious entrance, although Moore describes a narrow break at the southeast as a possible entrance. The interior of the site slopes down to the south and is slightly dished, and there were a number of fragments of stone in the interior, on the bank, and outside the enclosure, perhaps from the demolition of a field boundary.
References:
M. Moore, *Archaeological Inventory of County Waterford*, 1999, 95-6, no. 725.



South external elevation

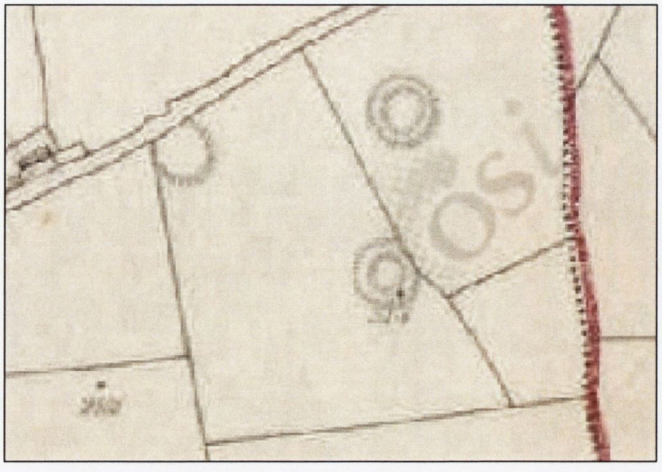


Ringfort, townland boundaries and roads, 1st edition Ordnance Survey 6-inch map

Townland Name: Newport West
Site Type: Ringfort Cluster
SMR Number: WA034-030, WA034-031
Date Visited: 24 October 2009
Comments:
A pair of ringforts is located at the top of a gentle slope in a field under tillage. Just to the west of these two sites, another ringfort (WA034-029) is shown on the 1st ed. OS maps, but no trace of it remains. The two extant ringforts are overgrown to the point of inaccessibility, but are largely intact. The northern one, WA034-030, is a subcircular area (c. 26m E-W, 20m N-S) defined by an earthen bank (ext. H up to 1.3m) with a shallow outer depression that may represent the remains of an external fosse. No original entrance is visible, although the bank is somewhat damaged at south. The southern ringfort, WA034-031, is similarly overgrown, and is slightly larger than the northern site (diam. c. 30m). An earthen bank (ext. H up to 1.6m) defines the enclosed area, and is surrounded by traces of a wide, shallow external fosse. There is no visible original entrance, although the western portion of the bank may have been damaged by incorporation into a field bank that previously bisected the field. That bank has since been demolished.
References:
M. Moore, *Archaeological Inventory of County Waterford*, 1999, 96, nos. 727 and 728.

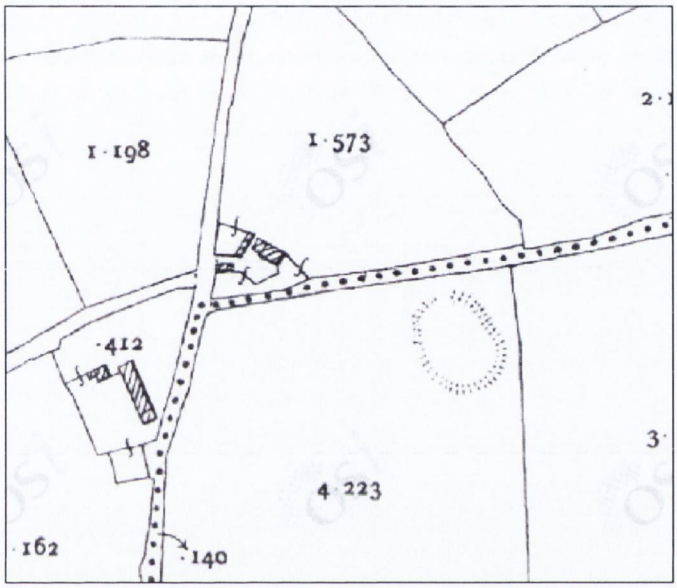


2005 OSI Ortho photo; note removed field banks and removed enclosure west of the two extant sites



1st edition Ordnance Survey 6-inch map

Townland Name: Pilltown
Site Type: Ringfort
SMR Number: WA037-028----
Date Visited: 14 August 2010
Comments:
This ringfort stands near the top of an east facing slope, and the overgrown enclosure (diam. 35m) is defined by a slight scarp or bank (H less than 1m). There is no visible fosse or entrance, and the interior is too overgrown to allow access. The site is badly damaged and not impressive to look at, but the location has good views over Youghal to the west.
References:
M. Moore, *Archaeological Inventory of County Waterford*, 1999, 97, no. 731.



Enclosure faintly marked on the 1st ed.
Ordnance Survey 25-inch map

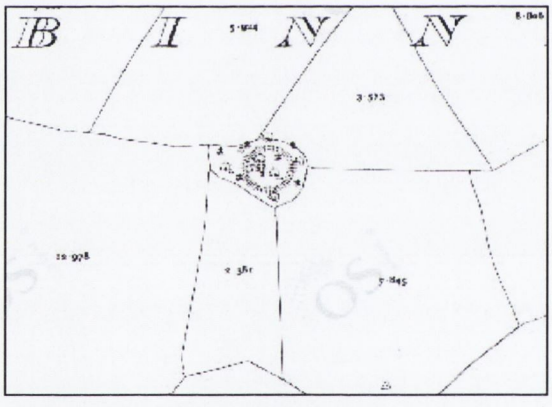


2005 OSI Ortho photo

Townland Name: Tinnabinna
Site Type: Ringfort
SMR Number: WA037-026
Date Visited: 24 October 2009
Comments:
This impressive bivallate ringfort stands at the top of a broad hill with wide views across to Youghal and the Blackwater estuary. The site is comprised of a heavily overgrown circular area (c. 38m) defined by an earthen bank (up to 1.5m high) with an outer fosse. On the west portion of the site, a square annex projects from the main ringfort along a radial field bank and then south to meet the ringfort bank again at south where another radial field bank continues south. This annex is approximately 20m by 20m. The original entrance is at north-northeast, although there is another modern breach at east-southeast. As mentioned, a number of radial field banks extend outwards from the ringfort bank, at northeast, south and west. Other radial banks may have been destroyed. This appears to be indicative of the former field system associated with the ringfort. Overall, the site is impressive for its location and commanding views. Without excavation, it is impossible to determine the relationship between the original enclosure, the annex, and the radial banks. It is important to note that the annex does not appear on the depiction of this site on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey maps, but it does appear on later editions, so it is possible that the banks enclosing the annex actually represents the ends of demolished field boundaries.
References:
M. Moore, *Archaeological Inventory of County Waterford*, 1999, 98, no. 746.



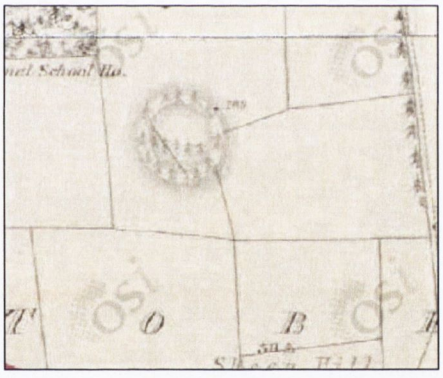
2005 OSI ortho photo



1st edition Ordnance Survey 25-inch


External elevation, facing north

Townland Name: Tober
Site Type: Ecclesiastical site (probable)
SMR Number: WA028-002001
Date Visited: 23 October 2009
Comments:
This bivallate enclosure, listed as a ringfort in the Waterford inventory, stands on a commanding site at the top of a ridge in pasture with views over the Blackwater valley to the north. The outer enclosure is defined by a scarped earth and stone bank with traces of an outer fosse, and from top of bank to top of bank, measures approximately 72m north-south. The outer enclosing element disappears from west to south. The south part of the enclosed area is taken up by an internal enclosure, defined by an earthen bank. The two enclosures are not concentric. The inner enclosure measures approximately 30m across, and its interior contains some loose stone that may represent markers for the Children's Burial Ground reputed to exist at the site. There are no signs of any buildings in the interior. A holy well, known as *Tobar Mochuda*, lies to the northwest of the site, and a piece of masonry known as 'St. Carthage's Stone Altar' could not be found on this visit. This site may have been a large, bivallate ringfort later reused as a burial ground, or it may be an early ecclesiastical enclosure. Based on the state of the extant remains, this cannot be determined with any certainty, although the townland name and various local traditions ascribing an ecclesiastical function to the site offer support for its identification as an ecclesiastical enclosure.
References:
M. Moore, *Archaeological Inventory of County Waterford*, 1999, 99, no. 751.



1st edition Ordnance Survey 6-inch map depicts the Tober enclosure overgrown with trees



Profile of inner bank at SW

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