PREFACE

> *Kaupskip mun ek fá þér í hendr ok þar með kaupeyri; farðu síðan suðr til Dyflinnar; sú er nú ferð frægst*
>
> 'I'll give you a trading ship and cargo. Go south to Dublin: that's the most renowned of journeys these days'

In chapter thirty-two of *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar* these words are spoken by a Norwegian chieftain to his rather headstrong son, and seem appropriate to open this collection of papers on Celtic-Norse relationships in the Irish Sea in the Middle Ages, 800–1200. The genesis of this volume was in a conference of the same name, held in Oslo University on 3–6 November 2005. All but two of the contributions here were offered in an earlier form at that gathering. The issues raised and discussed there in a meeting of scholars from Ireland, Great Britain and Scandinavia, from a number of disciplinary backgrounds, have remained current and valid in the course of the last few years, and so revised and updated versions of their papers have been collected together in this publication to make them more widely available.

As is often stated, the medieval Norse societies were fundamentally maritime ones, and the sea formed a quick and efficient conduit between homelands, colonies and areas to raid and trade with. The Irish Sea stretches from the North Channel (that between north-east Ireland and south-west Scotland) southwards to a point between Wicklow Head in Ireland and the Llyn Peninsula in Wales, widening from approximately 20 miles between County Antrim and the Rhinns of Galloway to over 100 miles between the River Boyne and the Lancashire coastline. It dominated the Norse world, and directly brought together Ireland, the Isle of Man, the Danelaw and the west of England, Wales, Scotland and the Isles, and indirectly through the passage northwards the Orkneys, the Faeroes, the Shetlands and eventually mainland Scandinavia and Iceland, and through the passage southwards Normandy and the Continent, forming what has been termed the Irish Sea Province (in its widest sense here). Sailing times within this region were relatively short: Gerald of Wales noted in the twelfth century in his *Topographia Hibernica* that the passage from St. David's in south-western Wales to Ireland was one day's sailing, and in the later Middle Ages even vessels built for capacity

rather than speed, such as a heavily laden merchant ship, could make the passage from the Isle of Man to Dublin in a day.[1] Further afield, the sea-route from the Irish Sea to the Orkneys took about 30 hours with a good wind, and that from the north of Ireland to Iceland about 5 days in good weather.[2] Moreover, numerous anecdotal pieces of evidence attest to the wealth of Irishmen, Scandinavians, and Scandinavian-colonists engaged in such travel: *Landnámabók* claims that in the tenth century there was an Icelandic skaldic poet, Þorgils orraskáld, at the court of King Óláfr kváran in Dublin, and *Eyrbyggja saga* mentions trips from Dublin to Iceland by two different Icelandic traders, as well as a voyage from Dublin to Iceland by a crew consisting mainly of Irishmen and Hebrideans, with a few Norsemen. Clearly, between 800 and 1200 a significant number of Scandinavians came into contact with the resident Celtic and English populations in this region, and a wide variety of political, cultural and artistic interactions took place, forming a number of hybrid cultures.

The last century and a half of scholarship has not served the question of contact in this region in equal measure, and the hardening of the parameters of study along modern national or linguistic boundaries which did not exist in the Middle Ages, has hardly been conducive to the development of a fair and comprehensive view of the societies within it. The two extremes of Irish and Norwegian historiography illustrate this well.[3] In the nineteenth century, scholars of both countries utilised the sources of evidence for the Viking raids for their own nationalistic ends. To the Irish these sources indicated that the Vikings were nothing more than heathen raiders and plunderers:

> For three or four hundred years after the time of St. Patrick the monasteries were unmolested; and learning was cultivated within their walls. In the ninth and tenth and the beginning of the eleventh century, science and art, the

[1] See Gerald of Wales, *Topographia Hibernica*, in *Giraldi Cambriensis Opera*, eds. J. S. Brewer, J. F. Dimock and G. F. Warner, Rolls Series 21 (London: Longman, 1884) 22 for the former; the latter recorded by a fifteenth-century Dublin merchant named Bartholomew Rossynell. See T. O'Neill, *Merchants and Mariners in Medieval Ireland* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1987), 118.

[2] *Íslendingabók / Landnámabók*, ed. Jakob Benediktsson (Reykjavík: Íslenzk fornrit I, Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1968), 34.

[3] Norwegian scholarship has been selected here to demonstrate these differences primarily because it (more than that of Denmark or Sweden) has shown the greatest interest in Viking Age contact within this Irish Sea region. Much fuller treatment of this historiography can be found in Tone Flood Strøm's unpublished MA-thesis (hovedoppgave), *Peaceful Traders or Plundering Barbarians? A Study of the Norwegian and Irish perceptions of the Vikings in Ireland* submitted at the University of Oslo 2000. In the main, our comments here follow her research.

> Gaelic language, and learning of every kind, were brought to their highest state of perfection. But after this came a change for the worse. The Danish inroads broke up most of the schools and disorganised all society. Then the monasteries were no longer the quiet and safe asylums they had been—they became indeed rather more dangerous than other places—learning and art gradually declined, and Ireland ultimately lost her intellectual supremacy.[4]

In the same period, the Norwegians saw the Viking Raids as the last wave of the great migrations, and those who undertook them as predominantly peaceful, town building traders.

> The Norse race has had a great mission in the British Isles. At a time when the Irish had no knowledge of towns or real sailing-vessels, and used no coins, the Norsemen came to Ireland, founded towns which are still the most important in Ireland, stamped coins, and established and kept up the commercial connections between Ireland and Europe.[5]

In the 1960s, perhaps driven by the discoveries of Norse material in urban deposits by Irish urban archaeologists (rather than grave and weapon finds), revisionist historians in Ireland led a change, shifting focus to the positive influences that the Vikings had had on Irish society, and developing a more nuanced picture of the hybrid communities of Viking-Age Ireland. Crucial turning points were reached in A. T. Lucas' studies: 'Irish-Norse relations: time for a reappraisal', published in 1966 and 'The plundering and burning of churches in Ireland, 7th to 16th century', published the year after, which focussed attention on the ethnic identities of those recorded as responsible for the burning and plundering of ecclesiastical sites (a crime most commonly supposed to have been Scandinavian in origin) and previously overlooked alliances between Norse and Irish groups in these acts.[6] As he notes in the latter, of 309 recorded occasions, some 139 note that the offenders were Irish in origin, some 140 that they were Norse, with a residual 19 where they acted together and presumably had shared goals.

However, Norwegian historical scholarship on the Viking Age remained firmly rooted to the spot. The early decades of the twentieth century saw

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[4] P. W. Joyce, *A Concise History of Ireland from the earliest times to 1908* (Dublin: Longman, 1909), 59–60.

[5] A. Bugge, *Contributions to the history of the Norsemen in Ireland* i–iii, (Videnskabsselskabets Skrifter, II, Historisk-filosofisk Klasse, Christiania: sold on commission by Jacob Dybwad, 1900), iii, p. 10.

[6] A. T. Lucas, 'Irish-Norse relations: time for a reappraisal' in *Journal for the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society*, lxxi (1966), 62–75, and A. T. Lucas, 'The plundering and burning of churches in Ireland, 7th to 16th century' in E. Rynne (ed.), *North Munster studies: essays in commemoration of Monsignor Michael Moloney* (Limerick: Thomond Archaeological Society, 1967), 172–229.

serious questioning of the veracity of the sagas (the principal form of evidence used by the nineteenth-century scholars), and the subsequent collapse of this source of evidence under stringent source criticism.[7] The initial charge of this assault was led by the Weibull brothers: Lauritz Weibull in his *Kritiska undersökningar i Nordens historia omkring år 1000* (Lund, 1911) and Curt Weibull in his *Saxo: Kritiska undersökningar i Danmarks historia från Sven Estridsens död till Knut VI* (Lund, 1915), and Halvdan Koht in his 'Sagaernes opfatning av vor gamle historie', published in *Historisk Tidsskrift* (Oslo) in 1914.[8] The resulting doubt about the usefulness of the sagas caused many Norwegian historical scholars to abandon the historical aspects of Viking studies and turn instead to the study of the later Middle Ages. The result of this was that the only studies of the period available to future students were those of the nineteenth-century nationalists or their immediate descendants, which became increasingly out-of-date, further adding to the impression that the historical study of the Viking Age was an outmoded, and perhaps even romantic, notion.

Viking-Age archaeology in Ireland blossomed from the 1960s onwards. In the first half of the twentieth century, the only Viking-Age sites excavated in Dublin were a small area within the precincts of Dublin Castle, and the Viking graves recovered in the Islandbridge-Kilmainham district to the west of the city. The excavations by A. B. Ó Ríordáin in the 1960s opened up rich layers of strata at High Street, Winetavern Street, and especially Christchurch Place, creating a sea-change in our impressions of life there in the Viking Age .[9] Patrick Wallace extended Ó Ríordáin's work on the Fishamble Street-Wood Quay site between 1962 to 1976, and further contributions were made throughout the 1990s by a number of further excavations and scholarly studies. From the very beginning Norwegian archaeologists took an interest in the discoveries emerging from the Irish excavations, but the impact of these findings appears to have remained

[7] For this see T. Lindkvist's 'Early Political Organisation (a) Introductory Survey', in *The Cambridge History of Scandinavia, Volume 1, Prehistory to 1520*, ed. K. Helle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 161–3, and for a recent and inspiring criticism of the Weibull's approach see M. H. Gelting, 'Uløste opgaver: Adam af Bremen, Saxo Grammaticus og Knytlinga saga', *Scandia* 77 (2011), 126–43 (with English summary).

[8] H. Koht, 'Sagaernes opfatning av vor gamle historie', *Historisk Tidsskrift* (Oslo) 5 (1914), 195–206. Cf. Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, 'Tendencies in the Historiography on the Medieval Nordic States (to 1350)' in *Public Power in Europe. Studies in Historical Transformation*, eds. J. S. Amelang and S. Beer (Pisa: Pisa University Press, 2006), 1–15.

[9] See A. B. Ó Ríordáin, 'Excavations at High Street and Winetavern Street, Dublin', *Medieval Archaeology* 15 (1971), 73–85.

isolated within the discipline of archaeology, and perhaps within its close ally of art-history.[10]

Only in recent years have these traditional disciplinary walls started to crumble, and Norwegian historical scholars begun to cast their nets further afield, embracing sources of evidence, secondary scholarship and new approaches from less familiar ground. The conference in Oslo was conceived of within this approach, as an attempt to recognise this new trend and encourage its development. The organisers sought to create a forum where scholars from a wide range of the modern nations within the Irish Sea Province could meet and discuss shared core-issues as well as present individual studies. This was the central theme of the conference and is the thread that connects all the papers here. As noted above, the papers here are the result of their presentations and the dialogues that followed.

The first contributions here are principally historical ones. The first two focus on little discussed areas of the empirical evidence. Clare Downham's study examines both the terms attested in the historical sources for the wide range of settlements of the Vikings in Ireland before 1014 as well as the nature of these settlements, from the various types of temporary camps to the larger urban sites. In a similar vein, Colmán Etchingham surveys the terms used for the Vikings in the Irish annals, detailing the patterns of usage and suggesting that while the earliest terms appear to have been borrowed from European chronicles, increasing levels of proximity to and interaction with the Norse in Ireland caused a development of the terminology employed, so that certain names may reflect differences perceived by Irish between the various Norse communities. These are followed by a contribution from Fiona Edmonds which spans the northern part of the Irish Sea, and examines the use of saints' cults around the Cumberland coast and north of the Solway Firth as evidence of cross-cultural influences in the region, including the adoption and transmission of the cults of a number of saints of Gaelic-speaking territories by Scandinavian colonists. Two further papers address the often overlooked Norse colony on the Isle of Man. That of Barbara Crawford comprehensively compares the Manx colony to its apparent sister-colony in the Orkneys, looking at the varying titles adopted by their rulers, their

[10] For early examples of Norwegian archaeologists interest in the Irish excavations see, J. Bøe, 'Norse antiquities in Ireland', in *Viking Antiquities in Great Britain and Ireland*, ed. H. Shetelig, (Oslo: Aschehoug 1940), pt. III: 11–65 and H. Shetelig, 'The Viking graves in Great Britain and Ireland', *Acta Archaeologica*, 16 (1945), I.

differing tributary status to Norway, and the processes of inheritance/election and inauguration of these rulers. Ian Beuermann's turns its attention instead to the production of royal saints in the Manx colony, in the context of the contemporary saints produced in the Scandinavian homelands. He identifies a twelfth-century potential candidate for Manx sainthood, and concludes that the reasons for the failure of the Norse on the Isle of Man to capitalise on this potential, lay in the lack of cooperation between the secular and ecclesiastical elites. Completing the historical section of this volume is David Wyatt's paper on the slave-trade in the region in the period 1066–1171; perhaps the most important economic activity through which the Norse and the Celtic populations of the region came into contact. Wyatt's contribution both questions the traditional notion that it was the Norse who introduced this trade to the region, and compares the attitudes of the various populations of the region to it, notably in the light of the developing ideas of chivalric behavior in warfare.

The contribution of Jan Erik Rekdal focuses on the religious- and art-historical evidence of the region, namely the mixing of pagan and Christian motifs on the slate crosses and cross-slabs of the Isle of Man and Cumbria. He proposes an explanation for this apparently anachronistic mixing of religious cultures in the medieval Irish literary sources, and concludes that the scenes on these monuments were created within an ambiguous bi-cultural milieu, in which they could be read by both Celtic and Norse populations within their own sets of preconceptions.

The archaeological section of the volume opens with Alan Lane's study of the changes in the ceramic assemblages of the Hebrides throughout the Early Middle Ages, casting doubt over the idea that Irish immigration can be detected in this source of evidence, and refocusing our attention on the evident arrival of the Norse colonists. Two further archaeological contributions were kindly offered by scholars who attended the conference but did not present their research there. That of Zanette Tsigaridas Glørstad is a bold study of the cultural implications of visible social markers such as ring-pins within the whole of Norse society, and interprets differences between the extant examples as marking aspects of ethnic diversity within the Scandinavian homelands and colonies. That of Julie Lund investigates the changes and continuities in cultic deposition-practices by the Scandinavians who came to Ireland, in light of the practices which continued in the homelands.

Last, but by no means least, the volume closes with the contribution of John Hines, which in a longer form was the inaugural speech of the conference. The version presented here contributes a cultural-literary study

to the volume, tracing the development of the Óláfr-**AnleifR-Havelok* legend across the Scandinavian-influenced Danelaw and Irish Sea region, and demonstrating the continuing echoes of Norse culture throughout this region up to the fourteenth century, as well as the value of interdisciplinary approaches to the study of the hybrid societies of the Irish Sea Region in the Middle Ages.