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# THE VIKINGS IN ULAID

by
Patrick James Bracken, BA

Thesis submitted for the degree of Master of Philosophy at the Department of Archaeology, School of the Human Environment, National University of Ireland, Cork

Supervisor: Mr John Sheehan
Head of Department: Professor William O'Brien

December 2020



*This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my grandfather, Tomás Bracken*

Ósnjallr maðr
hyggsk munu ey lifa,
ef hann við víg varask;
en elli gefr
hánum engi frið,
þótt hánum geirar gefi.

*Hávamál*, stanza 16

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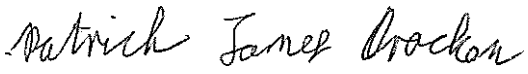
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**Declaration**

This is to certify that the work I am submitting is my own and has not been submitted for another degree, either at University College Cork or elsewhere. All external references and sources are clearly acknowledged and identified within the contents. I have read and understood the regulations of University College Cork concerning plagiarism.



Patrick James Bracken

## Abstract

The majority of archaeological research undertaken on the Viking Age in Ireland concerns Dublin and the south-east. We have, therefore, constructed an image of Scandinavian settlement in Ireland that centres on Dublin and locations further south such as Waterford. The Viking Age in the north of Ireland has not been the specific subject of previous archaeological research despite the amount of Scandinavian burial sites and silver finds on record form the region. An assessment of the Viking Age archaeology of the kingdom of Ulaid, which encompassed the territory of the modern counties of Antrim and Down, inevitably, challenges the notion that Scandinavian settlement in Ireland during the Viking Age was exclusively focused in the southern half of the island.

The purpose of this thesis is to outline and analyse the evidence for the Scandinavians in the territory of Ulaid during the Viking Age (c.800-c.1100 AD). The chapters of the thesis are divided in order to convey the various forms this evidence takes. A historical background chapter will outline the documentary evidence for Viking activities in Ulaid. A chapter on Viking bases and *longphuirt* is intended to convey the archaeological evidence for the *modus operandi* of the Vikings in Ulaid. A chapter dedicated to silver finds will assess each Scandinavian silver hoard and isolated find of precious metal on record from Antrim and Down and, thereby, demonstrate the commercial impact of the Scandinavians on Ulaid. A chapter dedicated to discoveries of Norse burials in Antrim and Down will assess the evidence for Scandinavian settlement in the coastal areas of Ulaid. The data and analysis presented in these chapters aims to provide an overall picture of the consequences of the Viking Age on the north-east of Ireland. Particular focuses will include the corresponding late ninth/early tenth century date applicable to the vast majority of the finds and the evidence for the connections established between the Norse and the Kindom of Dál Fiatach. Study undertaken in the Ulster Museum, Belfast and the National Museum of Ireland, Dublin as well as visits to sites discussed in the thesis has significantly aided research undertaken for this project

# CHAPTER ONE

## Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to provide a detailed account and analysis of the archaeology of the Viking Age in the territory of the Ulaid. Ulaid was an early medieval polity in the north-east of Ireland equivalent to the modern counties of Antrim and Down. The reason for this research is that most archaeological research undertaken on the Viking Age in Ireland concerns Dublin and the south-east. While the sites and discoveries relating to the Viking Age in the north have received considerable attention, the impact of the Vikings on the north of Ireland has not been the subject of a specific study. This thesis will demonstrate how the archaeological record of the north-east coastal region contains considerable evidence for Norse activity and settlement during the Viking Age in comparison to the south-east coast, which is renowned for Norse settlement activity. The thesis aims to convey the evidence for commercial and settlement activity involving Scandinavians that took place in Ulaid during the period from the beginning of the ninth century to the end of the eleventh. Fieldwork and museum visits were undertaken in the duration of this project in order to gain further insights regarding the artefacts and sites discussed in the thesis. Below, a literature review outlines the key secondary sources referred to during the course of the research.

Chapter Two will discuss the historical background to the Vikings in Ulaid. This chapter is intended to analyse the historical record for Viking activities in Ulaid so that the archaeological record may be contextualized. The subject of the '*longphort* phenomenon' in Ulaid will be a significant focus of the thesis and this is addressed in Chapter Three. It will assess the archaeological evidence that may be associated with locations, such as Strangford Lough, Carlingford Lough and Lough Neagh, that the annals frequently record as Viking bases. The historical record suggests that military encampments were essential to Viking activities in Ulaid. Two chapters that form that form the core analysis of the archaeology of the Vikings in Ulaid are dedicated to the silver finds and the burial evidence respectively. Chapter Four, on the Viking Age silver of Ulaid, discusses hoards containing non-numismatic silver and finds of isolated Scandinavian silver finds. The aim of this chapter is to determine the political and economic

consequences of the Viking presence in Ulaid. A chapter on the Viking burials of Ulaid, Chapter 5, will discuss the discovery and components of each Norse burial discovered in Antrim and Down. The chapter will consider what each burial may represent socially, politically and militarily. This chapter will be the most important in regard to determining the level of Scandinavian settlement that took place in Ulaid as a result of the presence of the Vikings. The Viking-age coin hoards of Ulaid, although not as significant to this thesis as the finds of non-numismatic silver, represent Ulaid in the later Viking Age and post-Viking Age. On this basis a chapter, Chapter Six, will be dedicated to the hoards made up exclusively of non-numismatic silver. A conclusion, Chapter seven, will outline and discuss the main evaluations made during this the thesis.

***Literature Review***

Although the Viking Age archaeology of Ulaid has not been the specific focus of any publication, certain locations in the region that feature prominently in this thesis have been subject to detailed archaeological examinations. Archaeological surveys of Strangford Lough (McErlean et al. 2002, 84-87) and Rathlin Island (Forsythe and McConkey, 2012, 130-150) both contain general discussions of the Viking Age archaeology of these areas.

McErleans's discussion of the Strangford Vikings includes a discussion of that part of the historical record which concerns the Vikings and the Dál Fiatach. The archaeological evidence for interactions between the Norse and the Dál Fiatach has been a core focus from the beginning of the research carried out for the current thesis. Although the archaeological evidence that concerns both of these groups has not been the focus of a specific study, it must be noted McErlean has outlined the historical evidence directly concerning this matter. The archaeological survey of Strangford Lough was published prior to the discovery of the first of the isolated metal detected finds discussed in Chapter Four. On this basis, McErlean's survey of the Viking Age archaeology of Strangford is sufficiently inclusive. The hoard from Magheralagan and the burial from Ballyholme form the main body of McErlean's discussion of Strangford's Viking Age archaeology. The extent to which each of these discoveries may relate to a *longphort* on Strangford Lough will be discussed in Chapter Three. Other miscellaneous archaeology discussed by McErlean includes the coin hoard from Scrabo Hill and an inscription from the monastic site at Nendrum.

McConkey and Forsythe's discussion on the Vikings outlines the Scandinavian archaeology of Rathlin Island in considerable detail. Brief backgrounds to both the Viking Age in Ireland and Ulster precede the analysis of the material from Rathlin. McConkey and Forsythe outline the evidence for the Scandinavian cemetery at Church Bay and provide detailed overviews of the possible Norse longhouse at Doonmore and the mound known locally as the 'Dane's Burial'. Discussions of the Rathlin coin hoard and Norse place-names on the island, as well as a detailed account of the 'Rathlin Brooch' by Cormac Bourke, are also inlcuded. Overall, McConkey and Forsythe provide a useful compilation of all the evidence for the Norse presence on Rathlin Island.

In 2014 Stephen H. Harrison and Raghnall Ó Floinn completed the publication of a 700+ page compendium on all of the recorded Scandinavian-type burials discovered in Ireland. The catalogue and discussions in this book have served as the primary database for the analysis of the Norse burials of Ulaid throughout the thesis, primarily in Chapter Five. A catalogue documents each burial in considerable detail. The archaeological history of each burial is outlined and any information that can be gleaned from antiquarian sources is included. The location of each burial is pinpointed on OS maps. However, certain details of the locations provided by Harrison and Ó Floinn seem questionable following fieldwork conducted by the author at Ballyholme and Larne. Discussions on each burial outlines previous work done on the burials and this has facilitated research undertaken for this thesis.

Coroner's reports carried out by John Sheehan between 2010 and 2019 on the isolated finds of Scandinavian silver and gold discovered in Northern Ireland, usually as a result of metal detecting, include brief overviews of the archaeological, historical and toponymal evidence for the Vikings in Ulaid. These are analyses of recent finds that have been coming to light over the past decade in the Down/South Antrim region. These papers give detailed descriptions of the silver finds and outline the results of their XRF analyses. Sheehan pinpoints the locations of the find spots and makes note of any contemporary archaeological monuments in the surrounding area. Discussions of the contemporary political context of each of the artefacts outline the early medieval territory of the location at which the artefact was discovered. Likewise, discussions of the parallels and dates of the artefacts ascribe approximate deposition dates to the finds. This is based on the

artefact's typology and correspondence among the archaeological record of Ireland and the wider Viking world.

A chapter dedicated to the evidence for *longphuirt* or Viking encampments in Ulaid is contained within the thesis. Therefore, it was necessary to cover previous archaeological commentary on what has been called the '*longphort* phenomenon'. Several publications have examined the archaeological evidence for individual *longphuirt* for which the annals contain historical references. Articles by scholars such as Thomas Fanning (1983), E.P. Kelly (1995 and 1999) and Linzi Simpson (2005) investigating the archaeological evidence for specific *longphuirt* mentioned in annalistic reports are necessary in order to identify the specific archaeological features that suggest a site to be that of a *longphort*. John Sheehan (2008), David Griffiths (2010, 30-36) and Mary Valante (2008, 37-56) have all discussed the archaeology and historiography of the *longphuirt* in attempt to provide an overview of the nature of these sites. However, only Cormac Bourke, in his account of the Blackwater assemblage, has attempted to identify the specific location of a northern *longphort* (see Chapter Three).

Daibhí Ó Cróinín's *Early Medieval Ireland* (1995, 164-175) was the source most referred to for the origin and pre-Viking Age history of Ulaid. Ó Cróinín provides an overview of the origins of both the *Dál Fiatach* and the *Dál nAiride* (or *Cruithin*), the two dominant population groups in Ulaid throughout the early medieval period. He details, in chronological order, the major political developments that took place in Ulaid from the beginning of the Early Medieval period to the end of the pre-Viking period. Ó Cróinín also accounts for the conflict that took place between the Ulaid and the Northern Uí Néill.

This thesis has a particular focus on the on the interactions between the Vikings and the Dál Fiatach. Thus far, Margaret Dobbs (1945) is the only commentator to have published specifically on the dynasty of Dál Fiatach. Her article also provides a chronological account of the political history of Dál Fiatach. However, Dobbs is, unfortunately, subjective. When discussing the naval battle that took place between the Vikings and the Dál Fiatach in 913, she writes, 'unfortunately, they were defeated by the Norse in a naval action off the English coast'.

Scholars have, in the past, considered what the Viking Age archaeology of north-east Ireland may represent. David Griffith's 2010 publication *Vikings of the Irish Sea* is a detailed account of the Viking Age archaeology of Ireland and the Irish Sea Zone. It is inclusive in the number of archaeological sites and aspects of Viking Age archaeology discussed within the text. Griffiths, when discussing the evidence from Church Bay, considers the probability of Scandinavian settlement on Rathlin Island during the Viking Age. He notes that at least semi-permanent occupation would have been required to explain what is represented by the Rathlin Island burial cluster. Griffiths also discusses the Ballyholme and Larne burials. He suggests that the Larne evidence possibly implies 'another small coastal settlement at a strategic natural harbour'.

Clare Downham's (2007, 28-30) publication *Viking Kings of Britain and Ireland* provides an inclusive overview of the historiography of the Viking Age in Britain and Ireland. Downham points out that the archaeological and historical evidence for the Viking Age in Ulaid contradicts the notion that the Vikings were entirely absent from Ireland during the period 902-914. She makes reference, in this regard, to hoards deposited in *c.*910 and to the Larne burial. Downham also suggests that the northern evidence testifies to what Ó Corráin (1998, 336) and Smyth (1975-79, I, 61) have said about this area having been a sphere of activity for the Dublin exiles.

As can be seen, the archaeological sites and discoveries that pertain to the Viking Age in the north of Ireland have been subject to examination in the past. The chapters of this thesis will examine the archaeological evidence for the Norse in the kingdom of Ulaid in the context of each site and discovery in order to reach a conclusion through which the social and political developments that characterized the Viking Age in the north of Ireland may be understood. It will be argued throughout the thesis, on the basis of the artefactual evidence, that commercial and settlement activity involving the Scandinavians in Ulaid, was, predominantly, a development that took place in the period of the late ninth and early tenth centuries.

# CHAPTER TWO

## Ulaid and the Viking Age: Historical Background

The aim of this chapter is to provide an overview of the historical background to the Viking Age in the over-kingdom of Ulaid in order to contextualize the archaeological evidence that is explored in later chapters. The chapter begins with a general discussion of the background to the Vikings, overviews of the terms 'Viking' and 'Viking Age', an analysis of the causes of the Viking Age and an overview of the broader history of Viking Age Ireland. This is followed by a discussion of Ulaid, and of its sub-kingdoms and *trícha cets*, in which the some of the main political and ecclesiastical centres of power in these territories are noted. However, the primary focus of this chapter concerns the annalistic references to Viking activity in Ulaid during the ninth and tenth centuries, and an analysis of this data.

The problem with the annalistic coverage of Viking activity in Ireland is that the overall picture presented is 'subjective and substantially unrepresentative' (Etchingham 1996, 21). In his study of the annalistic coverage of Viking raids on Irish churches Lucas came to the view that 'it is difficult to escape the conclusion that they represent a very haphazard documentation' (1967, 210). The annalists seem to have had a stronger interest in the ecclesiastical affairs of the east and midlands of the country, and as a result the coverage of all events here, including Viking activity, is disproportionally well documented. Some regions of Ireland may have simply been less attractive to the Vikings, but there is no compelling reason to believe that this was the case in Ulaid. With major ecclesiastical sites, such as Downpatrick, Nendrum and Bangor, and with its proximity to Scandinavian settlements in Scotland, with which it shares the main entrance to the Irish Sea zone, Ulaid was most likely subjected to significantly more Viking activities than are reported in the annals. The archaeology of Viking-age Ulaid supports this view, as is demonstrated by the quality and numbers of hoards, burials, and place names that are located in it. Thus, one should be sceptical about the possibility that the patterns of annalistically recorded Viking activity in Ulaid accurately reflects reality, and it needs to be acknowledged that the record is to some extent a result of the geographical bias of the annalists.

It is also the case that the Irish annals are not sources in which one would expect to find any significant degree of detail on the activities of the Vikings. Primarily they are concerned with recording the obituaries of priests, abbots and bishops, as well as those of kings. Notable political and military events are also recorded, including events that involved the Scandinavians. But the annals do not provide information on subjects such as Viking burials, hoards and settlements (apart from noting the existence of *longphuirt*), and thus the archaeological study of these phenomena has the potential to considerably add to the narrative of the annals. This thesis, in the following chapters, will explore this potential and will examine to what extent the historical and archaeological narratives overlap or contradict one another.

***The Vikings: background***

The term 'Viking', which is derived from Old Norse '*víkingr*', is generally used to refer to a northern European marauder or pirate of Scandinavia's Late Iron Age. The twelfth-century Icelandic text *Landnámabók* states that a *víking* is a piratical raid and that a *víkingr* is someone who partakes in one of these raids (Arnold 2007, 7). A common suggestion is that the word owes its origins to the place name *Víken*, and thereby denotes a raider, or any person, originating in the district of this name in south-east Norway (Arnold 2007, 7; Sawyer 1997, 8). It is also possible that *víkingr* derives from the word *víkja*, 'to turn aside' and, therefore, denote any individual leaving their home in a boat or ship (Arnold 2007, 8).

The term 'Viking Age' is used to describe the period beginning at the end of the eighth century and ending around the middle of the eleventh, characterized by Scandinavian raiding and trading, as well as settlement and assimilation, across western and eastern Europe and the North Atlantic. Through raiding and warfare, Scandinavians evolved into dominant players in the political landscapes of Ireland, Britain and Western Europe. Vikings penetrated the interior of the Mediterranean and reached North Africa. Eastern Scandinavians, through their presence in Eastern Europe, established profitable connections with the Byzantine Empire in Constantinople and the Islamic Caliphate in Baghdad. The westward Scandinavian diaspora saw the colonization of the Faroe Islands and Iceland and, later in the period, Greenland, as well as a temporary residence in North America.

The extent to which the term '*viking*' is related to the activities of traders is disputable, but the term certainly denotes seaborne raiding. Thus, the beginning of the Viking Age is marked by hit-and-run raids on coastal ecclesiastical sites in Britain and Ireland. Therefore, when trying to establish the causes of the Viking Age, the question that must be asked, is, 'what caused Scandinavian raiders to target ecclesiastical sites in the west?'. These early raiders came from western Norway, as is indicated by finds of insular grave goods from early Viking Age burial contexts in Norway (Wamers 1998, 37-72). It has been suggested that these raids may have been facilitated by Scandinavian bases in Orkney and Shetland. Any such suggestion is problematic because no solid archaeological evidence for a permanent Scandinavian presence in the Scottish Isles is datable to before the mid-ninth century, around the same time the Scandinavians first overwintered in Ireland, England and Frankia (Barrett 2008, 674). Furthermore, it is believed that the sea-voyage from Norway to Ireland could have been completed within two weeks, in which case, given that the first raids occurred infrequently up to the 820's, bases in Scotland were probably not a necessity (ibid., 675-676).

The participants of the early Viking raids in the west likely consisted of independent groupings. If this is the case, their leaders would most likely have been of the Norwegian rank *hersir* (pl. *hersar*) (Foote and Wilson 1980, 129). It is possible that these local chieftains saw the raids as a means of maintaining their own independence in the face of the encroaching power of kings and jarls during the centralization of power in Norway. Problematically, however, this suggestion relies heavily on interpretations of post-Viking Age Icelandic literature. Several Icelandic sagas describe the unification of Norway under Harald Finehair, the resulting diaspora of many local Norwegian chieftains, and how this, in turn, brought about the Scandinavian settlement of the Orkneys, Shetland, Hebrides and Dublin as well as the discovery of Iceland. Although Harald Finehair became the sole ruler of Norway too late to be responsible for the initiation of the western settlements, this saga-evidence is credited with providing an insight into the causative factors of the Viking Age (Barret 2008, 674; Hall 2007, 28).

Developments in shipbuilding technology have been suggested as a possible causative factor in the Scandinavian diaspora of the late eighth century (Hall 2007, 50). However, based on the evidence from weapon sacrifices at Nydam I, in Denmark, and because of the Anglo-Saxons ability

to undertake a full-scale migration to England in the fifth century, it can be said that the Scandinavians were capable of transporting ships full of warriors to Britain long before the beginning of the Viking Age. Climate change has also been suggested as a possible factor underlying the causes of the Viking Age. However, the Medieval Warm Period (MWP), if it ever existed, took place close to the turn of the millennium (Barret 2008, 673). On this basis, the MWP may have had an influence on the Norse Settlement of Greenland, but it took place too late to have played a part in causing the Scandinavian diaspora at the beginning of the Viking Age. Europe's early medieval population boom must have affected Scandinavia, but some areas of Scandinavia show little signs of increasing settlement between the Late Roman Iron Age and the Viking Age (ibid., 674). Forest clearance and settlement progression is characteristic of Norway during and after the Viking Age, but not during the centuries preceding it (ibid., 674). Hence, overpopulation is also difficult to include as one of the causes of the Viking Age. Overall, the most likely reason for the beginning of the Viking Age was the need of late eighth-century Scandinavian warriors to bolster their status in their own society through piratical raiding and through the practice of gift-giving using looted material (Sheehan 2012a).

***Brief background to Viking Age Ireland***

Viking raids on Ireland began in the final decade of the eighth century and occurred sporadically on coastal settlements during the first two decades of the ninth. Raids became more frequent in the 820's, and intensified further in the 830's. In 839, 840 and 841, the Vikings are recorded overwintering in Ireland for the first time, on Lough Neagh, and they became a more permanent presence with the establishment of military encampments. The term *longphort* first appeared in 841 in reference to naval encampments at Dublin and at Annagassan, Co. Louth (Griffiths 2010, 30; AU 841, CS 841). From becoming a more permanent presence, the Scandinavians began to develop into a dominant part of the political landscape of Ireland.

Scandinavian involvement in Ireland underwent a significant change in the 850's with the arrival of a new group of Vikings from *Laithlind* (this place-name has been suggested to refer to Norway, Orkney and Shetland, Dublin and the Norwegian provinces of Rogaland and Vestfold but, in each case, the evidence is inconclusive). The wars between Óláfr and Ívarr, the two most important figures among these newcomers, and both the Southern and Northern Uí Néill ensured that

Scandinavians became a dominant part of the political landscape of ninth-century Ireland. In 902 the Vikings were driven out of Dublin by the kings of Brega and Laigin (AU 902, CS 902), following which the Southern Uí Néill may have assumed the overlordship of Dublin (Purcell and Sheehan 2013, 45-6). The Viking hiatus came to an end in 917 with the return of Sigtryggr who, two years later, defeated the Northern Uí Néill king Niall Glúndubh and re-established Scandinavian control in Dublin (AU 917, AU 919, CS 919).

This was the first chapter in the struggles between the Scandinavians and the Irish for the control of Dublin that lasted throughout the tenth century. Throughout this century the Scandinavians became more assimilated and began to convert to Christianity. Óláfr Sigtryggsson, a late tenth-century ruler of Dublin and York, adopted the Irish name *Cúarán* (*Kvaran*) and was buried at the Columban monastery on Iona. Scandinavian power in Ireland began to decline after 1014 when Sigtryggr Silkenbeard, the Scandinavian King of Dublin, alongside Máel Mórdha, king of Laigin, unsuccessfully rebelled against the rule of Brían Bóraime (Duffy 2014, 167-238).

***The Ulaid***

The Ulaid were the main enemies of the Northern Uí Néill at the beginning of the early medieval period. They 'ruled an over-kingdom or "confederation of kingdoms" which dominated the north and its subject peoples' (Ó Corráin 1972, 14). As a result of their conflict with the Northern Uí Néill, the geographical extent of Ulaid was reduced to the eastern part of the 'ancient provincial 'fifth' of Ulster' (Ó Corráin 1972, 14; Ó Cróinín 2008, 212). This area is roughly equivalent in extent to the modern counties of Antrim and Down.

Scholarly analyses of the history and structure of Ulaid are often contradictory. According to Dobbs, for instance, Dál Fiatach and Dál nAraide were Ulaid's two supreme factions, and Cruithin was a sub-kingdom within Dál nAraide (1945, 66). According to Ó Corráin, on the other hand, there were three main kingdoms in this province-kingdom — Dál Fiatach, Cruithin and Dál Riata, with Dál nAraide and Uí Echach Chobo being separate sub-kingdoms of Cruithin (1972, 14). This confusion has been addressed by Ó Cróinín, who suggests that Cruithin was an earlier term used for a territorial unit that later became known as Dál nAraide (1995, 48; 2008, 213). This view is

followed in this thesis and Dál Fiatach and Dál nAraide are treated as the two principal sub-divisions of Ulaid during the Viking Age (Fig. 1).

Dál Fiatach and Dál nAraide each contained a number of sub-kingdoms, or *trícha cét*, ruled by a petty king. MacCotter has defined the *trícha cét* of the pre-Anglo Norman period as 'a spatial unit of royal tenure, taxation, local government and military levy' (2005, 22). Some of these *trícha cét* later became Anglo-Norman cantreds, but in their original pre-Norman form they were local kingdoms operating under superior kings to whom they owed allegiance. Within the context of Ulaid, these superior kings were drawn from the Dál Fiatach and Dál nAraide. MacCotter has devised a methodology of reconstructing the extent of *trícha céts* and cantreds which uses various sources including manorial extents, ruridecanal extents, information in the proceedings of colonial courts, topographical tracts, etc (2005, 26-38). Using this approach, he is satisfied that the colonial cantreds are the direct successors of the pre-Norman *trícha cét*. In his study MacCotter identifies the *trícha céts* of the two principal kingdoms in Ulaid, Dál Fiatach and Dál nAraide and suggests their boundaries. In fact, he notes that this particular task was achieved 'with comfort, given the relatively rich documentation surviving from the period, both secular and ecclesiastical' (2008, 229). While this work is important from a historical viewpoint, it is also of great importance in that it now allows the undertaking of analyses of the distributions of Scandinavian artefacts, settlements and place names within the lesser kingships across Ulaid. Using this approach, it will be possible in this thesis to identify which Ulaid sub-kingdoms present the greatest amount of evidence for a Scandinavian impact and interaction.

*Dál Fiatach*

During the Viking Age Dál Fiatach held the territory of modern Co. Down as well as the southern parts of modern Co. Antrim. Earlier this kingdom has dominated much of the modern province of Ulster, and it was included on Ptolemy's second-century map of Ireland (Byrne 2001, 50-51, 108). According to Ó Corráin, who refers to Dál Fiatach as the 'true Ulaid', its kingdom was centred on the present diocese of Down (1972, 14). Dobbs refers to the people known as 'Dál Fiatach or Ulaid', noting that this does not refer to the extent of modern Ulster (1945, 66). According to Ó Cróinín, 'in historical documents … the Ulaid are always identified as the population group whose ruling dynasty were the Dál Fiatach', and he has pointed out that the title *rí Ulaid* could mean both

'king of Dál Fiatach' or 'over-king of Ulster' (2008, 212). Dál Fiatach were the main rulers of Ulaid for most of its history.

Dobbs has noted that the main sources of the origins and history of Dál Fiatach comprise *Senchus Sil hIr*, some Lives of the Saints and the annals (1945, 66). The tenth-century *Book of Rights* refers to Dál Fiatach 'of the Race of Cú Roi from Munster'. Dobbs notes that the 'genealogies, in nearly every instance, assert the Munster origins of Dál Fiatach', and that 'Dál Fiatach stuck to the claim that they were of the same stock as the Erainn of Kerry, whose greatest hero was Cú Roi' (1945, 67).

The main royal and religious centre of the Dál Fiatach was Downpatrick (*Dún Lethglaise*) (Byrne 2001, 50), while the main ecclesiastical site its kings patronised was Bangor (*Bennchor*) (Buchanan and Wilson 1997, 1-2). An annalistic entry under 496 records 'the storming of Dún Lethglaise' (AU 496), and Ó Cróinín has suggested that this may testify to either the capturing of the site by the Dál Fiatach during their struggle for supremacy or an attack on the kingdom by an external enemy (1995, 49; 2008, 2014). The Dál Fiatach, however, appear to have remained dominant in the region throughout the early medieval period. The Battle of Fertas, which probably took place within the location of modern Belfast (Byrne 1951, 129), involved Dál Fiatach and the Cruithin (later the Dál nAraide), and is referred to in the Annals of Ulster as a battle 'between the Ulaid and the Cruithin' (AU 668). Though power in Ulaid changed back and forth between the two groups, the Dál Fiatach overcame their Dál nAraide rivals in the tenth century (Ó Corráin 1972, 14; Ó Cróinín 2008, 214).

MacCotter identifies the six Dál Fiatach *trícha céts* as Uí Blaithmeic, Dál Buinne, Uí Echach Arda, Clann Diarmata, Uí Echach Cobo and Leth Cathail (2008, 233-34). The first of these, Uí Blaithmeic (later the cantred of Blathewyc), was located in the area to the north and west of Strangford Lough (see Fig. 2). This *trícha cét* derives its name from Blathmac son of Áed Rón, an eighth-century king of Ulaid who was killed by the Uí Néill in 735 (AU 735; AFM 732; Dobbs, 1945, 76; MacCotter 2008, 233). While the names of no Uí Blaithmeic kings are recorded in the sources, it is listed as a kingdom in *Lebor na Cert* and as a polity in the Book of Lecan (McCotter 2008, 233). The *trícha cét* contains Moville, an episcopal see and a chief church of the Dál Fiatach,




**Figure 2.1: Map of Ulaid with its two principal sub-divisions, Dál Fiatach and Dál nAraide**

as well as the important ecclesiastical sites of Bangor and Nendrum (Fig. 4). In fact, Woolf has suggested that if Moville and Nendrum were not the chief episcopal sees of the Ulaid as a whole, then they must at least have dominated the region (2018, 91-99).

Dál Buinne (later the cantred of Dalboing) was centred on present day north-west county Down and south county Antrim (see Fig. 2). Like Uí Blaithmeic, it occurs as a kingdom in *Lebor na Cert* (MacCotter 2008, 234) and it was apparently the main line of Dál Fiatach in the ninth century. The territory included the royal site of Duneight, *Dún Eachdach*, and the *óenach* site of *Craeb Tulcha* (MacCotter 2008, 234). Excavations at the Anglo-Norman motte-and-bailey at Duneight revealed that this had 'resulted from the remodelling of a strongly defended native occupation site, a pre-Norman construction to which the term fort could fairly be applied' (Waterman 1963, 55). This 'fort' may well have been the Dál Buinne's royal centre. *Craeb Tulcha*, in Crew townland, is an *óenach* site at which inaugurations of the Ulaid, both Dál Fiatach and Dál nAraide, took place (Byrne 2005, 859). Part of the site was excavated in 2007, but no additional insights were revealed (MaCdonald and McIlreavy 2007; Fig. 3).

Uí Echach Arda (later the cantred of Arde) occupied most of the Ards Peninsula, in modern Co. Down, on the eastern side of Strangford Lough (see Fig. 2), separating the lough from the North Channel of the Irish Sea. It occurs as a kingdom in *Lebor na Cert* (MacCotter 2008, 233). An early Uí Echach Arda royal centre, possibly an inauguration site, known as *Dún Eathlaig*, has been identified by Dobbs as Dunevly, in the parish of Ardkeen (1945, 75). This is *Dún Eichmhílidh* (Eichmhíleadh's Dún), where the substantial remains of a ringfort (DOWO25:013) are extant on top of a high drumlin overlooking a large crannog (DOW025:028) in Ballyfinragh Lough. Dobbs also suggests that 'the great rath of Tara' was its chief stronghold (1945, 75); this is a large bivallate ringfort (DOW032:017; Fig. 5) on the summit of a hill on the eastern side of the peninsula. Although the names of none of its kings are recorded in the sources after 700, Uí Echach Arda are identified with two later regicides, one involving the king of Ulaid, in 950, and the other the king of Uí Blaithmeic, in 1034 (MacCotter 2008, 233; AU 950). The Ards Peninsula has a mild marine microclimate, with dry and fertile soils suitable for agriculture.

Clann Diarmata (later the cantred of Clandermod), located between Lough Neagh and Belfast Lough (see Fig. 2), in modern Co. Antrim, was the most northerly *trícha cét* in Dál Fiatach. Its kings descended from Dúnchad son of Eochaid mac Fiachna, a Dál Fíatach king who died in 810 (McCotter 2008, 235). MacCotter suggests that this lineage probably originated around 800 during an expansion of Dál Fiatach into Dál nAraide territory (2008, 235). A mound of unclear date, called Donald's Mound (ANT059:055), located on the highest point of Ballydonaghy townland, some four meters in height, was reportedly named from Diarmaid, son of Donnchadh, son of Eochaidh, son of Muireadhach, king of Dál Fiatach, who was slain in AD 838 (O'Laverty 1880, 454). It may, perhaps, have functioned as a Clann Diarmata inauguration site. The second element in the place name of this townland, *Baile Domnach*, indicates that it was the location of a very early ecclesiastical foundation and it should be noted in the current context that such *domnach* sites were frequently sited close to royal sites. On this basis, and on the evidence of Donald's Mound, Ballydonaghy may have been the royal centre of Clann Diarmata.

The *trícha cét* of Uí Echach Cobo (later the cantred of Oveh), located in south and west modern Co. Down (see Fig. 2), appears regularly in the annals between 553 and the twelfth century (MacCotter 2008, 235). It is recorded as holding the over-kingship of Ulaid three times, in 692, 825 and 898 (MacCotter 2008, 235). The terms *Ui Eathach Cobha* and *Ui Eachdach Uladh* are sometimes used interchangeably in the sources: the Annals of the Four Masters also use the term *Ui Eachdhach Cobha*, or simply *Cobha*, the Annals of Ulster use *Uí Eachach*, while the Annals of Tigernach use *Uí Eachach Ulad.* The royal site of Uí Echach Cobo was at Lough Brickland, where a bivallate ringfort on a ridge in Coolnacran townland (DOW033:019) overlooking a large crannog in the lake (DOW034:078). Warner has suggested that these two sites may together mark its location (1989, 25).

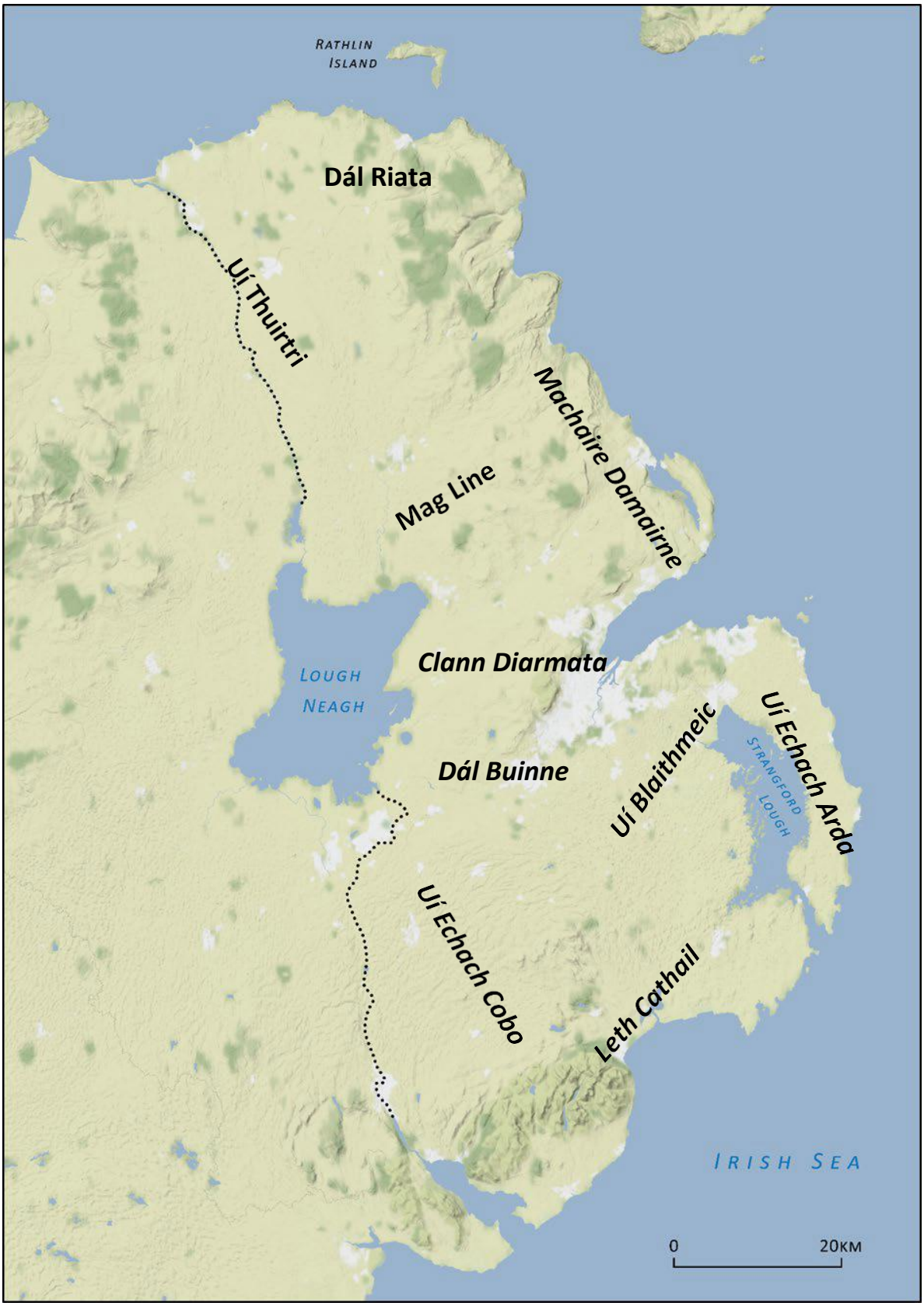



**Figure 2.2: Map of Ulaid showing its *trícha céts* (based on MacCotter 2008)**

The *trícha cét* of Leth Cathail (later the cantred of Lechayel) occupied much of the coastline of modern Co. Down (see Fig. 2). It was granted to Tommaltach mac Cathail of Cenél nÓengusso after he failed to secure the over-kingship of Ulaid (MacCotter 2008, 234). Six kings of this *trícha cét* are recorded in the annals, and it produced one king of Ulaid, Cathalán mac Indrechtaig (857-71) (MacCotter 2008, 234). The *trícha cét* contains *Dún Lethglaise*, Downpatrick, the main royal and religious entre of the Dál Fiatach. While it is not known where the royal site of the Leth Cathail was located, it may have been at Dundrum, *Dún Droma* (fort of the ridge), the location of an Anglo-Norman castle. Another name for this territory is *Maigh Inis*, the 'island plain' (O'Donovan 1847, 165), which reflects that, until the first sea barriers and drainage systems were constructed across the Quoile marshes during the mid-eighteenth century, Leth Cathail was almost entirely encircled by Dundrum Bay, Strangford Lough, and the Irish Sea. It is a fertile area, with good quality loam soils.



**Figure 2.3: Excavations underway in 2007 at an Ulaid *óenach* site. *Craeb Tulcha,* on Crew Hill, Co. Antrim.**



**Figure 2.4: Aerial view of the early ecclesiastical site at Nendrum, Co. Down, in the *trícha cét* of Uí Blaithmeic.**



**Figure 2.5: The large bivallate ringfort on the summit of a Tara Hill on the Ards Peninsula, possibly an Uí Echach Arda centre.**

*Dál nAraide* or *Cruithin*

The Cruithin, or Cruithni, later represented by the ruling dynasties of Dál nAraide, were more powerful in the earlier centuries of the early medieval period, sometimes referred to as the 'archaic' period (Ó Cróinín 2008, 212-213). Literary distinctions between the Cruithin and the Ulaid show the decline of the power of the former in the early medieval period. The *Táin Bó Cuailgne* distinguishes between them and the Ulaid (Ó Cróinín 2008, 213) and the annalistic entry for a battle in the Belfast area in 668 also shows this distinction (AU 688). The distinction made by scholars between the Cruithin and the Dál nAraide has been discussed above. Ó Cróinín has suggested that the name Cruithin was abandoned in favour of Dál nAraide in the seventh century because of its association with the Britons. Cruithin, or Cruithni, is the Irish equivalent of the Latin *Priteni*, which is also equivalent to the Welsh *Prydeni* (1995, 48). In Adomnán's *Vita Columbae* this grouping is always referred to as Cruithni or *Cruithni Populi* (Ó Cróinín 1995, 48).

The Dál nAraide were a significant threat to the Uí Néill in the early part of the early medieval period but were driven eastwards across the River Bann in the mid-sixth century. In *Vita Columbae* Adomnán records the defeat and death of the Uí Néill king Diarmaid mac Cerrboil at the hands of the Cruithin king Áed Dub mac Suibini. Adomnán, who was a relative of Diarmait, recorded him as a 'very bloody man and slayer of many' (Ó Cróinín 2008, 214). Diarmait's son, Colmán Mór, subsequently failed to avenge this killing (Ó Cróinín 1995, 49). In the tenth century, when the Dál nAraide were overcome by the Dál Fiatach, they came to recognize that the Dál Fiatach were the 'true Ulaid' but continued to refer to themselves as the 'true Ulaid of antiquity', possibly to cover their Pictish origins (Ó Cróinín 2008, 213).

The kings of Dál nAraide resided at Ráth Mór, Co. Antrim (Ó Cróinín 2008, 214). Reeves stated that this ringfort was the attested ruling seat of the Dál nAraide (1847, 278-81), while O'Laverty proposed that it 'was the royal residence of the kings of Dalaradia'(1884, 216); (Dalaradia here is a Latinised spelling of Dál Araidhe). The association between this site and the Dál nAraide is supported by a tenth-century story concerning Mongán mac Fiachnai, a seventh-century king of Dál nAraide which begins: *Bai Mongan hi Ráith Móir Maigi Line inna rígu* (Mongan was in Ráith Móir of Mag Line in his kingship) (Best and Bergin 1929, 334; Flanagan 1969, 99); Rathmore is

sometimes referred to as *Ráth Mór Maighe Line* (McKay 2012). The monument is a very large raised rath, with a souterrain (ANT050:016).

Cotter has identified the Dál nAraide *trícha céts* in the pre-Anglo-Norman period as Machaire Damairne/Latharna, Mag Line, Uí Thuirtri, An Tuaiscert and Dál Riata (2008, 229-35). This number corresponds with 'the five *trícha céts* of Dál nAraide' that are mentioned in the twelfth-century tale of Suibhne Geilt, which deals with Suibhne mac Colmain, king of the Dál nAraidi (Shaw 1998).

The first of these *trícha céts*, Machaire Damairne/Latharna (later the cantred of Cragfergus), occupied the coastal area north of Belfast Lough (see Fig. 2). It is mentioned in the mid-ninth century *Vita Tripartita* (MacCotter 2008, 230). Kings from this territory are referred to, alternatively, as of Latharna of Uí Derca Céin and of Síl Fingín of Uí Erca Céin. Síl Fingín held the overlordship of Dál nAraide at least twice, in 645 and 698 (ibid., 230). They appear to have been based near Semne in Latharna, with their base possibly being Carrickfergus; Latharna, meaning the 'descendants of Lathar', is preserved in present-day Larne, and Semne is Island Magee.

The *trícha cét* of Mag Line (later the cantred of Maulyn) was located between_Machaire Damairne/Latharna and Lough Neagh (see Fig. 2). It served as the main line of Dál nAraide kings from 682, and possibly from as early as 565 (ibid., 230). The Dál nAraide royal residence of Ráth Mór, noted above, was located in Mag Line.

The *trícha cét* of Uí Thuirtri (later the cantred of Twescard), extending from the northern shores of Lough Neagh and bounded by the River Bann on the west and the River Bush on the east (see Fig. 2), occupied the central area of Dál nAraide. Its name is an abbreviated form of Dál nAraide an Tuaiscert (ibid., 230). These were descendants of Fiachra Cáech, who died in 608. They branched off from the main line of Dál nAraide and held the over-kingship of Dál nAraide at least seven times between 646 and 792. On two of these occasions, they were over-kings of Ulaid (ibid., 231).

The *trícha cét* of Dál Riata (later the cantred of Dairede), which extended over north-east Co. Antrim (see Fig. 2), was certainly in existence as early as the fifth century when it expanded into Scotland (Bannerman 1974). Stretching across each side of the North Channel, it encompassed the western seaboard of Scotland and at its height in the sixth and seventh centuries, it encompassed a large territory of what is now Argyll. In Antrim the *trícha cét* included Rathlin Island (MacCotter 2008, 321) and its main royal centre was Dunservick (*Dún Sebuirge)* (Fig. 6). The demise of this kingdom resulted from the opposition of Dál nAraidi during the seventh/eighth century.

***Ulaid in the Viking Age: historical overview***

On the basis of contemporary annalistic accounts, the kingdom of Ulaid experienced the Viking impact quite early on in the Viking Age. In fact, the first known Viking raid on Ireland likely took place in Ulaid, as is recorded in the Annals of Ulster under the year 795. 'The burning of Rechru by the heathens' (AU 795) appears to refer to a raid on either Rathlin Island, off the coast of



**Figure 2.6: The main royal centre *trícha cét* of Dál Riata at Dunservick, Co. Antrim.**

Antrim, or Lambay Island, of the coast of Dublin (Griffiths 2010, 25; Purcell 2015, 45-6). Rathlin Island would appear to be the more likely of these due to its closer proximity to the raider's bases, presumably in the Scottish Isles, as well as the fact that several other sites off the north-western coast of Ireland were raided this year.

The Ulaid responded to the early ninth-century threat of the Vikings against its kingdom. In fact, the first recorded military encounter between the Scandinavians and the Irish involved the Ulaid. It took place in the year 811 when a 'slaughter of the heathens by the Ulaid' is reported (AU 811, CS 811). No details are on record about this event but it is worth considering that it may relate to a failed attempt at land-taking, as similar events are recorded on the west coast of Ireland around the same time, in Mayo in 812-13 (Purcell 2015, 49) and in Kerry in 812 (Sheehan 2020, 60-61). In each case the Vikings failed, but what is significant is that the Mayo and Kerry raids represent the first recorded Viking attacks on secular dynasties in Ireland. Perhaps the poorly recorded events in 811 also represented a similar approach by the Vikings in Ulaid.

Several annalistic reports testify to Viking activity in Dál Fiatach's area in Ulaid in the 820's. The Vikings made enemies of the Dál Fiatach in 823 when heathens invaded Bangor, in the *trícha cét* of Uí Blaithmeic (AU 823). This was the main ecclesiastical site of Dál Fiatach. Another raid, described as a plundering (*orggain*), took place on Bangor the following year, in which the heathens 'burned the oratories and scattered the relics of Comgall [the site's founder] from their shrine' (AU 824). The use of the different terms — *inuaserunt* and *orggain* — by the annalist may imply that the 823 raid was on a greater scale than the 824 one, even though the latter was clearly a devastating event.

During the following year, 825, three further events involving the Vikings and the Dál Fiatach are reported in the Annals of Ulster, some of which are also recorded in other annals. Firstly, Dún Lethglaise (Downpatrick), the main royal site of Dál Fiatach, in the trícha cét of Leth Cathail, was 'plundered by the heathens'. Secondly, Moville, a chief church of Dál Fiatach, in the *trícha cét* of Uí Blaithmeic, 'with its oratories, was burned by the heathens' (AU 825, CS 825, AFM 823). And, thirdly, 'the Ulaid inflicted a rout on the heathens in Mag Inis in which very many fell' (AU 825,

CS 825, AFM 823). Maigh Inis, where this rout took place, is an alternative name for the *trícha cét* of Leth Cathail (O'Donovan 1847, 165), along the southern coastline of Co. Down.

These five reports, covering the three years between 823-825, convey this period as a time of considerable conflict between the Vikings and the Dál Fiatach. Two consecutive raids on Bangor, the latter in which the relics of Comgall were desecrated, as well as raids on Downpatrick and Moville, indicate that the raiders must have caused considerable disruption and outrage in the kingdom, and the defeat of the Vikings in 825 may suggest a sufficient response to this activity. The fact that all of this Viking activity was within Dál Fiatach, and that there are no reported events for Dál nAraide at this time, may suggest that the Vikings had a deliberate strategy of primarily targeting the former kingdom. The fact that each of the raided sites were the key secular and ecclesiastical centres of Dál Fiatach suggests that the Vikings had become well informed about the power structures of Ulaid.

Some conflict is also recorded between the Scandinavians and Dál Araide in the 820s. In 828 a report states that 'a battle-rout was inflicted on the heathens by Lethlobar, son of Loingsech, king of Dál nAraide (AU 828), who is referred to in the Annals of the Four Masters as 'king of Ulaid') (AFM 826).

On this basis, it is clear that the effects of Viking raiding became a significant political factor in the kingdom of Ulaid from an early date. This continued into the 830's as the Scandinavian presence in Ireland became more prominent and raids were no longer confined to the coast. As Griffiths notes, 'events in the 830s point to Vikings becoming an increasingly long-term and numerous presence in Ireland' (2010, 27).In 833 'Loch Bricrenn was plundered to the detriment of Congalach, son of Echaid, and he was killed afterwards at the ships' (AU 833, AFM 832). Loch Bricrenn (Lough Brickland) was the centre of Uí Echach Cobo, in Dál Fiatach, and the extent of the Viking threat is conveyed here by the capturing of a royal figure of one of its lesser kingships. There is also a report that refers to the 'heathens' defeating the community of Armagh in battle (AU 831) and, in the following year, a reference to the plundering of Armagh 'three times in a month' (AU 832, CS 832 AFM 830). Although not in the province-kingdom of Ulaid, these events

in Armagh indicate that the Vikings were now in position to attack the most prominent political and religious players in the northern part of Ireland.

The establishment of *longphuirt* sees the Vikings become a more permanent presence in Ireland and reports of Vikings on Lough Neagh emphasise how this effected the north. In 839, the Vikings plundered a series of churches and kingdoms in the north (*tuatha & cella tuaisceirt Erenn*) from Lough Neagh (AU 839; CS 839; AFM 838). The following year, in the first report of Vikings overwintering in Ireland, 'Lugbad [in County Louth] was plundered by the heathens from Loch nEchach [Lough Neagh] and they led away captive bishops, priests and scholars, and put others to death' (AU 840; CS 840; AFM 839). These were followed by a report in 841 of 'the heathens still on Loch nEchach' (AU 841, CS 841). This indicates that when Scandinavians were first recorded overwintering in Ireland they chose the north as one of their locations for a base. The historical record appears to place an emphasis on these military encampments in the importance of Viking activity in Ulaid. The annalistic entries documenting such an encampment at Lough Neagh between 839 and 841 shows the beginning of this, as well as the beginning of a permanent Scandinavian presence in Ireland.

As well as becoming a permanent presence, the Scandinavian forces no longer consisted of diminutive raiding bands. In 842, two 'naval forces of the Norsemen' were reported, one of which was situated on 'Linn Sailech in Ulaid' (AU 842, AFM 841). According to McDermott, Linn Sailech was on the coastline of Dál Fiatach (McDermott, n.d., 3), though Fischer correctly suggests that it is to be identified as Lough Swilly, Co. Donegal**.** Reports for the same year indicate the presence of another such base, Cael Uisce (Narrow Water, Co. Down), from which Vikings attacked Castledermot, Co. Kildare, and, according to the Annals of the Four Masters, killed two bishops (AU 842, CS 842, AFM 842). The Lough Neagh, Linn Sailech and Cael Uisce *longphuirt*, and their possible locations, will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3. However, it is necessary to note here that two of them are clearly in Dál Fiatach, while the third example, Lough Neagh, unless it was located on the western side of the lake, is either in Dál Fiatach or Dál Araide. As is discussed in Chapter 3, Cormac Bourke has suggested the River Mane, Co. Antrim, hence, Dál nAiride as the likely location of the Lough Neagh *longphort*.

From the beginning of the 850's to the end of the ninth century, the Viking Age in Ulaid must be considered with regards to the wider political situation of Viking Age Ireland. In 849, Scandinavians came to Ireland on behalf of the 'king of the foreigners' (AU 849; CS 849; AFM 847). These newcomers attempted to exact obedience from the foreigners already on the island and, in doing so, 'they caused confusion in the whole country' (AU 849; CS 849; AFM 847). Conflict between the *Finn Gaill*, the 'fair' heathens or foreigners, and the *Dubh Gaill*, the 'dark' heathens or foreigners, is first reported in 851. Originally, scholars identified the *Finn Gaill* as the Norwegians and the *Dubh Gaill* as the Danes. However, the suggestion that is now favoured is that these distinctions reflect the tendency of early medieval Irish sources to refer to an older version of something as 'fair' and its newer counterpart as 'dark' (Downham 2007, 14; Dumville, 2004, 78-93). In 851, the *Dubh Gaill* succeeded in capturing Dublin from the *Finn Gaill*. An encounter between the two parties also took place at the *longphort* at Linn Duachaill, Annagassan, Co. Louth, in which a great number of the *Dubh Gaill* were slaughtered, probably indicating that the *Finn Gaill* maintained control over the *longphort* at Linn Duachaill after losing Dublin to their enemies. (AU 851; CS 851; AFM 849). The following year a military engagement between these opposing groups of Scandinavians is reported in Ulster, and on the border of Ulaid — 'the complement of eight-score ships of the fair-haired foreigners came to Snám Aignech [Carlingford Lough], to do battle with the dark foreigners; they fought for three days and three nights, but the dark foreigners got the upper hand and the others abandoned their ships to them … Stain took flight, and escaped and Ierne fell beheaded'(AU 852; CS 852; AFM 850). This indicates that when the dark foreigners, the 'new' Vikings, arrived in Ireland they established an encampment on Carlingford Lough, on the boundary zone between Dál Fiatach and the kingdom to the south. This heavy defeat of the fair foreigners would indicate that the Vikings present in the north afterwards were an entirely different group which may have caused the political landscape of the Scandinavians in the north to change considerably.

The following year 'Amlaíb [Óláfr], son of the king of Laithlind came to Ireland, and the foreigners of Ireland submitted to him, and he took tribute from the Irish' (AU 853; CS 853; AFM 851). On this basis, it may be assumed that all of the Scandinavians in Ireland, including those in the north, were now subject to the authority of this Óláfr. In the same year, 'Cathmal, son of Tomaltach, one of two kings of Ulaid, was killed by the Norsemen' (AU 853; CS 853), indicating that this new

group of Scandinavians in the north were not going to be any less disruptive than those they displaced. Óláfr was the central figure in regard to Viking activity in Ireland in the 850's and 860's. He was joined by another leader from Laithlind, Ívarr, referred to as 'the king of the Norsemen of all Ireland' in *Chronicum Scotorum* upon his death in 873 (AU 873, CS 873, AFM 871). These two figures were possibly brothers, but the evidence is disputable.

In the early part of their careers in Ireland, Ívarr and Óláfr forged an alliance with Áed, king of the Northern Uí Néill, against Mael Seachlainn, king of the Southern Uí Néill. However, this appears to have changed in the mid-860's, a change that significantly impacted the Scandinavians in the northern part of the country. A report in 866 records that 'Áed son of Niall plundered all the *longphuirt* of the foreigners i.e. in the territory of the north, both in the Cenél Eógain and Dál nAraide, and took away their heads, their flocks and their herds … a victory was gained over them at Loch Febail [Lough Foyle, Co. Derry] and twelve score heads taken thereby' (AU 866, CS 866, AFM 864). In 868 Áed won a similar battle against an alliance led by the Uí Néill of Southern Brega. It is reported that in this confrontation 'very many of the heathens were slaughtered and Fiachtna, son of Mael Dún, heir designate of the north…fell in the counter attack'. Mael Dún was a king of Dál Fiatach, and this annalistic entry indicates a possible alliance between the Dál Fiatach and the Norse.

The Vikings who attacked several Dál Fiatach royal/ecclesiastical sites in the 820's would have been the precursors of the Scandinavians referred to in the 850's as the *Finn Gaill* and their opposition, the contemporary *Dubh Gaill*, appear to have established themselves as the dominant Scandinavians in the country. On this basis, the Dál Fiatach would not have had to consider their previous enmity with the Scandinavians who had desecrated their most important sites during the 820s in cementing an alliance with these more recent arrivals. In 869 it is reported that 'Ard Macha was plundered by Amlaíb (Óláfr) and burned with its oratories' and 'ten hundred were carried off or killed, and great rapine also committed' (AU 869; CS 869; AFM 867). Armagh was the main religious site in the northern part of Ireland and was the royal burial place of the Northern Uí Néill, so this may reflect an attempt by Óláfr to gain revenge on Áed for the occurrences of the previous three years. Regardless, it can be said that in this period of conflict between the Scandinavians and the Northern Uí Néill, the northern part of the country must have been a regular battlefield.

Ívarr died in 873, however, and Óláfr appears to have been killed in Pictland, probably the following year (AU 873; CS 873; Downham 2007, 142), and this may have weakened alliances between the Dublin Vikings and those in the north.

In 871, Dunservick, Co. Antrim, was stormed by a coalition of Vikings and the Cenél nEogain, a branch of the Northern Uí Néill. Dunservick, or *Dún Sebuirge*, was the main royal centre of the Dál Riata before the demise of this kingdom resulting from the opposition of the Dál nAraidi during the seventh/eighth century. The 871 raid indicates that Dál nAraide was also threatened by the alliances of Scandinavians with other kingdoms, such as Northern Uí Néill.

The situation of the Scandinavians in Ulaid after this is conveyed by an entry in the Annals of Ulster for the year 877: 'a skirmish at Loch Cuan [Strangford Lough] between the fair heathens and the dark heathens in which Albann [Halfdan], king of the Dark Heathens fell' (AU 877, CS 877). This could conceivably indicate that the Vikings who initially attacked and eventually overwintered in Ireland in the mid-part of the ninth century had regained their foothold in the north. However, it seems more likely that this report is reflective of the suggestion mentioned above, and that the Scandinavians who were referred to as the 'dark heathens' in 851, were at this point, viewed as the 'fair heathens'.

If Halfdan was the king of the 'dark heathens' involved with Loch Cuan, these had come from the kingdom of Northumbria, in the north of England, a kingdom which he had previously claimed (ASC 876). It is possible that the 'fair heathens' mentioned here are still under the rule of the Scandinavian kingdom of Dublin. Given that the party they defeated was led by a king, they likely held the manpower of a kingdom and the absence in the annalistic entry of any mention of Irish participants must indicate that their numbers were exclusively Scandinavian. If this was the case, they were subject to the authority of Bárðr, a son of Ívarr, who ruled Dublin until his death in 881. However, it is also possible that the Strangford *Finn Gaill* did not have any association with Dublin and may have been connected to other Viking groups in Scotland or elsewhere. This report also highlights the importance of Strangford Lough as a Scandinavian military encampment in the Viking Age, given that separate Scandinavian kingdoms were fighting to control it.

Strangford Lough derives its name from the Old Norse *Ströngr Fjörðr* (Strong Fjord), indicating that the Norse must have been considerably prominent there. Because the entirety of Strangford Lough is situated in the kingdom of Dál Fiatach, this report also likely indicates the involvement of Scandinavians in the contemporary politics of this kingdom, by means fair or foul. In 879, 'Mael Coba son of Crunmael, superior of Ard Macha, and the lector i.e. Mochta, were taken prisoner by the foreigners' (AU 879, CS 879, AFM 876). This report, as presented in the Annals of the Four Masters, indicates that those Vikings present on Strangford Lough in the 870's intended to cause disruption in Northern Uí Néill, a rival kingdom of Ulaid. This would possibly have given the Dál Fiatach a reason to allow the Vikings of Strangford Lough to remain in their kingdom.

A significant entry in the Annals of Ulster for the year 913 reports that 'the heathens inflicted a battle-rout on the crew of a new fleet of Ulaid, on the coast of England and many fell, including Cumuscach, son of Mael Mocheirgi, son of the king of Leth Cathail' (AU 913). Leth Cathail was one of the sub-kingdoms of Dál Fiatach, located on the southern coastline of modern Co. Down. Because the battle took place off the coast of England, perhaps the 'heathens' mentioned here are distinct from the Scandinavians in Ulaid. However, given that the Dál Fiatach travelled to the English coast to do battle with the Vikings, it is unlikely that those Vikings were not of a certain level of significance in the broader political context of Ulaid. It has been mentioned above that the Leth Cathail were associated with both the Uí Echach Cobo and Airgialla. However, because Airgialla was independent of Ulaid, the Leth Cathail mentioned in this report must belong to or, at least, share connections with, the Uí Echach Cobo, a *trích cét* of Dál Fiatach. The fact that the battle took place off the coast of north-west England causes problems in trying to interpret the politics influencing the battle. Does it indicate that those Scandinavians present in Ulaid were aligned with those in England? This is quite possible, especially given that those among the warrior elite of Dublin who survived the defeat at the hands of Brega and Laigin relocated to north-west England (Griffiths 2010, 41).

The political landscape of Viking Age Ireland underwent a significant change in the second and third decades of the tenth century with the return of the Uí Ímar dynasty which had been expelled from Dublin in 902. In 921, a fleet of these Scandinavians was active in the north when one of their leaders, Guðfrið, invaded Armagh (AU 921; CS 921; AFM 919). Annalistic reports in the

920's convey the threat of Viking bases (possible *longphuirt*) at Carlingford and Strangford in Ulaid. In 923 Vikings from Carlingford Lough plundered Killeavy, Co. Armagh, violently killing a priest of Armagh (AU 923; CS 923; AFM 921). In 924 it is reported that 'foreigners went on Loch Cuan [Strangford Lough] and Mael Dún, son of Aed, heir designate of the province fell by them'.

In 926 it is reported that the foreigners on Strangford Lough attacked Dunservick, in Dál nAraide, in which 'many were captured or killed' (AU 926; CS 926; AFM 924). In the same year another host of Vikings were defeated by Muirchertach, son of Niall, at Snám Aignech (Carlingford) and two hundred of them are reported to have been beheaded (AU 926**).** However, the Scandinavians continued to cause disruption in Ulaid during the following years. In 928 an annalistic entry records that 'Ailche's son went on Lough nEchach [Lough Neagh] with a fleet of the foreigners, and he ravaged the islands of the lake and the territories bordering it' (AU 928). Downham identifies this Ailche with Þórir Helgasson, a Scandinavian leader of Limerick, or one of his kin (Downham, 2007, 39, 275).

Cooperative relationships that the Scandinavians had with the Dál Fiatach seem to have come to an end in the tenth century. In 942, the Vikings attacked Downpatrick, after which they were 'killed by the Irish on land' (AU 942; CS 942; AFM 940). Prior to this, the Scandinavians were removed from their bases in the north. In 943 'the Leth Cathail inflicted a rout on the foreigners of Loch Cuan, in which nearly all were destroyed' (AU 943), and in 945 'the foreigners of Loch nEchach [Lough Neagh] were killed by Domnall, son of Muirchertach, and by his kinsman, i.e. Flaithbertach, and their fleet was destroyed' (AU 945, CS 945, AFM 943). Based on the Annals of Ulster, this appears to have been the end of a permanent Viking military presence in Ulaid, even if it was not yet the end of Viking activity in the region. In 958, Tanaide son of Odar, a leading figure in the church of Bangor, was killed in a raid by the foreigners (AU 958; CS 958; AFM 956). In 970 the annals report that 'the King of Ulaid i.e. Ardgar son of Matudán, made an expedition with the foreigners and sacked Connaire [Connor, Co. Antrim], leaving a great many beheaded there' (AU 970, AFM 968) indicating that alliances between the Ulaid and the Vikings still took place. Another raid on Rathlin Island took place in 975, in which the abbot was killed (AU 975, AFM 973). There was further activity in 989 when Downpatrick, the main Dál Fiatach royal site,

‘was plundered by the foreigners and burned’ (AU 989, AFM 988). In 1002 Sithric Silkenbeard, king of Dublin, led two raids on Ich and Kilcleif, both in Dál Fiatach, indicating that the threat of Viking activity in Ulaid lasted into the new millennium (AT 1002, AFM 1001).

The historical evidence indicates that Viking activity caused significant disruption in the kingdom of Ulaid from the second decade of the ninth century onwards. Vikings attacked the kingdom of Dál Fiatach on a large scale during the years 823-825, and enmity between the Vikings and the Dál nAraide also emerged in this decade. According to the annals, Scandinavians over-wintered in Ireland for the first time in the north. The establishment of encampments at Lough Neagh, Strangford Lough and Carlingford Lough facilitated the extent of Viking raiding in Ulaid throughout the period. However, alliances between the Scandinavians and the Ulaid also appear to have taken place. Overall, the historical record indicates that interpretations of the Viking Age archaeology of Ulaid may vary considerably based on their context and date.

# CHAPTER THREE

## Ulaid and the Problem of Viking Bases and *Longphuirt*

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the evidence for *longphuirt* (singular: *longphort*) or any form of Scandinavian-established 'raiding bases' in the kingdom of Ulaid and to explore their significance. Throughout the ninth and early tenth centuries, annalistic evidence tells us that the occupation of these sites – such as those at Lough Neagh, Carlingford Lough and Strangford Lough – were often crucial to Viking activities in the north of Ireland. In this chapter previous research into the *longphort* in Viking Age Ireland, and their background, will be considered. A list of annalistic references to *longphuirt*, and likely *longphuirt*, in Ulaid will be given, even though the specific term *longphort* is only used to describe such sites in Ulaid on three occasions in the sources. Case studies on Strangford Lough, Lough Neagh and Carlingford Lough, the locations of its three most significant bases or *longphuirt*, and a number of others, will form the chapter's main body. The main problem of the *longphuirt* and other forms of Viking bases in Ulaid, namely that the exact locations of these sites cannot be readily identified archaeologically, will be discussed. The author, however, will suggest a number of locations that may repay further investigation.

Even though the historical sources focus almost exclusively on raiding in their coverage of ninth-century Viking activity in Ireland, it is possible that there were also peaceful contacts between the Scandinavians and the Irish. If so, this was almost certainly based on trading, including slave-trading. Coastal landing places and offshore islands provide the most likely potential locations for initial trading contact, and it is worth noting that there was already a background to these type of settings in both Scandinavia and Ireland. In Scandinavia, seasonal beach markets were commonplace from the eighth century onwards, while offshore trading locations were already a feature of Ireland from well before the arrival of the Vikings: Dalkey Island, Co. Dublin, for instance, was used as an importation and distribution base for high-status goods from the fifth century onwards (Doyle 1998), while Dunnyneill Island, in Ulaid's Strangford Lough, was both an importation and manufacturing centre during the sixth and seventh centuries (McCormick and Macdonald, 2003). At least two important examples of Viking-age beach markets have been identified in the Irish Sea region – those at Meols, on the River Dee, near Chester (Griffiths et al

2007), and Whithorn, at Galloway (Hill 1997) – though no definite examples have yet been identified in Ireland. However, transient beach markets by their nature tend to leave few archaeological traces, and Viking-age landing places are very difficult to identify given that ships could simply be hauled onshore.

Even if no definite examples of Viking-age beach markets have yet been identified archaeologically in Ireland there are some potential candidates, some of which are in Ulaid. The discovery of a small Viking cemetery at Church Bay, Rathlin Island, suggests that this may have been the location of some sort of settlement, perhaps a beach market. The single graves at a few coastal locations elsewhere, including Ballyholme, Co. Down, might be interpreted in the same way. Dalkey Island, based on historical references, seems to have functioned for a time as a Viking slave market, while the Old Norse origins of the name of the Copeland Islands, Co. Down – *Kaupmanneyjar* – which means 'merchant's islands', is highly suggestive of they having served as a trading base at some stage during the Viking Age.

It may be that beach markets are, in some respects, related to the concept of the *longphort* (Sheehan and Potterton 2020, 94). The *longphort* is often interpreted primarily as a raiding base, and this may be true to an extent, but archaeological investigations of the *longphort* at Woodstown shows that it was also a significant trading and manufacturing site. Investigations of similar types of sites in England, associated with the campaign of the 'Great Army' of 865-77, have shown that they combined both military and economic activity (Williams 2015). It is probable that *longphuirt*, or at least some of them, were more than just fortified military settlements, and it is interesting that the term itself has no explicit military connotations even if it is normally used in the annals within the context of raiding. This may suggest that those who coined the term understood that these sites had various functions, including political, economic and military ones. It is the case, however, that the appearance of the term coincides with the beginnings of a phase, during the late 830s and early 840s, in which Viking raiding would increase and intensify.

The new raiding bases were located along the main rivers, and even on some harbours and lakes, and the focus of the attacks was no longer confined to the coastal zones. For the first time the annals record the appearance of substantial fleets of Vikings and the occurrence of large-scale

territorial raiding, and they note that the raiders overwinter in their *longphuirt*. The first phase, in the 840s, involves the establishment of several *longphuirt* along the coastal and inland waterways, and by using the river systems and the main lakes the Vikings were now able to penetrate to the very heart of the country. In total the sources record the existence of around twenty-five *longphuirt* during the ninth century, and several more in the 920s and 930s, which were sometimes used in conflicts between the Scandinavians themselves. Further examples of *longphuirt*, not mentioned in the historical sources, have been revealed by archaeology. In some cases, the foundation dates of the bases are given in the sources, in others only their destruction dates are provided, and it is clear that some were of short- and some of long-term duration. A short-lived *longphort*, perhaps established simply as a winter base, is likely to be different in form to ones that endured and developed over decades to become permanent and enduring bases, such as Dublin.

The initial phase of *longphort* foundation, accompanied by large-scale raiding, began in the late 830s and was to last for about twenty years. The Irish kings, however, were very successful in controlling the threat, often defeating the Vikings in battle, and ninth-century Viking settlement seems to have been confined to a small number of coastal bases and their immediate hinterlands. But the repercussions of this period would extend long after the mid-ninth century, for the military and economic importance of some of these bases began to accord the Vikings a place among Ireland's prevailing elites. From the initial period of the *longphuirt* onwards the Vikings began to become increasingly integrated into the world of Irish politics. They frequently served as military allies for Irish kings, becoming embroiled in local power struggles and dynastic disputes and sometimes sealing their alliances by marriage. It was common for these bases to be established on the boundaries of kingdoms (Sheehan 2008, 286), and it seems likely that this strategy may have had the support of local rulers who hoped to benefit from trading opportunities as well as the availability of mercenaries and potential allies.

### *Longphurt* and *dún*

The term *longphort*, found in the vocabulary of the annals, is the most convenient general term to use to refer to Scandinavian bases in Ireland. However other terms are used, including *dún* (*dunadh*). Attempts to ascribe the difference, if any, between a *longphort* and a *dún*, remain inconclusive. In this chapter, the term *longphort* is preferred because in the ninth and early tenth

centuries, the period in which raiding bases were occupied and used in Ulaid, *longphort* is only used to describe Scandinavian encampments while *dún* is frequently applied to sites occupied by the Irish. However, because the term *longphort* is only used to describe three Viking encampments reported in Ulaid, both terms are outlined and compared here.

*Longphort*, according to Doherty, is a compound of two Latin loanwords: *long*, from Latin (*navis*)*longa*, 'ship', and *port*, from Latin *portus*, 'port', 'landing place' or 'shore' (1998, 324). On this basis, the author argues that the most suitable definition of *longphort* is 'an assemblage of Viking ships in port'. It has been suggested that, while *longphort* refers to a coastal or riverine encampment, *dún* refers to encampments made 'while the army was on the march in the interior' (ibid., 326).

The first reference to a Scandinavian *longphort* is made in 841 when the annals report: 'there was a *longphort* of the heathens at Linn Duachaill from which the peoples and churches of Tethba were plundered … there was a *longphort* at Duiblinn from which the Laigin and the Uí Néill were plundered, both states and churches, as far as Sliab Bladma' (AU 841, CS 841, AFM 840). The first report of a *dún* involving Scandinavians was made in 827: 'a dún of the Laigin was overwhelmed by the heathens, and Conall son of Cú Chongalt, king of Fortuatha, and countless others fell there' (AU 827). However, the first report of a *dún* occupied by Scandinavians was made in 845: 'there was a *dunadh* of the foreigners under Turgéis on Loch Rí, and they plundered Connacht and Mide, and burned Clonmacnoise with its oratories and Cluain Ferta Brénainn, and Tír dá Glas and Lothra and other monasteries' (AU 845, CS 845, AFM 843). Because *longphort*, in the ninth and early tenth century, was only used to refer to sites occupied by Scandinavians, while *dún* may be used to refer to sites at which Scandinavians were not present, *longphort* is the term used to refer to the locations discussed below.

***Previous archaeological research into longphuirt***

Based on references in the annals, the identification of some potential *longphort* sites have been claimed. The first identification of the *longphort* at Linn Duchaill (Annagassen), Co. Louth, arose from the work of the eighteenth-century antiquarian and historian Thomas Wright (1748, 4), while the Ordnance Survey scholar John O'Donovan suggested in 1838 that a site in Dunrally, Co. Laois,

was the *longphort Rothlaibh* referred to in the annals. Generally, however, only little attempt was made to identify these sites until about forty years ago when Irish archaeologists began to get involved in Viking Studies. Fanning, for instance, identified the enclosure at Ballaghkeeran Little, Co. Westmeath, as possibly representing the Lough Ree *longphort* that is mentioned in the annals in 845 and again in the 920-30's, and conducted a small trial-excavation there (Fanning, 1983, 221). At around this time Kelly carried out an excavation at Athlumney, Navan, Co. Meath (1983), though it was not then realised that this may have been on the site of a Viking fortification known as *Dún Dubcomhair* (Kelly 2015, 56). Kelly went on to identify several further potential *longphuirt*, including one at Athlunkard, Co. Limerick. This D-shaped enclosure, on the bank of the River Shannon, was identified as the site of a *longphort* because of its place name and various Viking-age finds, including an axe, a spearhead, silver finds and conical weights (Kelly and O'Donovan, 1998, 13-16). Other sites have also been identified as potential *longphuirt*, such as a large enclosure at Rathmore, Co. Kerry, which may be the *Dún Máinne* Viking fortification mentioned in the sources (Connolly and Coyne 2005, 172-73). In addition, an unrecorded Viking site, most likely a *longphort*, was discovered during motorway construction at Woodstown, Co. Waterford, and was partly excavated (Hurley and Russell 2014), and this adds to a series of excavations in Dublin that seem to relate to parts of the *longphort* there (Simpson 2005; 2010). Arising from these and other discoveries, both Sheehan (2008) and Kelly (2015) have published papers that summarise the archaeological evidence for *longphuirt* in Ireland.

Dublin and Woodstown serve as examples of *longphuirt* that, having lasted longer than a number of years, became more than just raiding bases and commercial centres and adopted domestic functions. At Woodstown, the ninth-century Scandinavian site is located on the River Suir. Here, a large D-shaped enclosure is surrounded by a bank and external ditch. Over five thousand artefacts, including hack-silver, lead pan-weights, a fragment of a Kufic coin, ringed pins, ship-roves, sword-fittings and whetstones, provide evidence for commercial activity at the site (Russell and Hurley, 2014). Post-holes, hearths and cobbled surfaces also indicate that domestic settlement took place at the site. Roves and clench-nails suggest that ships were docked there. A warrior burial, including a sword, axe, spearhead and conical shield boss, provides evidence for a military presence at the site, while

metalwork of a similar type found in Dublin and Norway indicates that the site probably still functioned as a raiding base (Harrison in Russell and Hurley, 2014, 90-102).

The most likely site of the Dublin *longphort* mentioned in 841 is at the confluence of the River Liffey with its tributary, the Poddle. Ó Floinn has suggested that a pre-existing ecclesiastical site may have been adopted for use as the site of the original *longphort*. Post-holes, refuse pits and hearths, indicate that domestic settlement may have taken place at an early stage during its Scandinavian occupation. Ship-rivets explain the annal's description of Dublin as a *longphort*. Five burials have been found on the southern rim of the pool (Simpson 2005, 37-48). Of all sites referred to in the annals as a *longphort*, Dublin clearly had the most significant impact on the history of Viking Age Ireland. However, of all the sites mentioned above, the likely site of the original Dublin *longphort* is the only example that does not yield definitive evidence for a D-shaped enclosure. Therefore, a D-shaped enclosure cannot be listed as a requirement for a site to be referred to as a *longphort*.

Based on the above, the main artefactual evidence archaeologists search for when discussing the *longphuirt* is material indicating both a military Viking presence and commercial activity involving Scandinavians. Evidence for domestic settlement, and the continued reference to sites in the annals without *longphort* being used to describe them, such as at Dublin and Woodstown, suggests that a site endured for a time long enough to become more than just a *longphort*.

***Annalistic accounts of Viking bases in Ulaid***

There are a significant number of annalistic references that mention *longphuirt*, Viking fleets or Viking bases in Ulaid. These are listed, chronologically, below:

839: 'A raiding party of the foreigners were on Loch nEchach [Lough Neagh] and from there they plundered the states and churches of the north of Ireland'. (AU 839, also recorded in CS 839, AFM 838).

840: 'Lugbad [in County Louth] was plundered by the heathens from Loch nEchach [Lough Neagh] and they led away captive bishops priests and scholars, and put others to death'. (AU 840,

also recorded in CS 840, AFM 839). The report in AFM states that the foreigners carried the churchmen of Lugbad to their *longphort*).

841: 'The heathens were still on Loch nEchach [Lough Neagh]'. (AU 841, also in CS 841)

842: 'A naval force of the Norsemen was on the Boyne at Linn Rois. There was also a naval force of the Norsemen at Linn Sailech in Ulaid'. (AU 842, also in AFM 841).

842: 'Dísert Diarmata was plundered by heathens from Chóel Uisce [Narrow Water, Carlingford Lough, Co. Down] (AU 842, also AFM 841)

852: 'The complement of eight score ships of the fair heathens came to Shnamh Aighnech [Carlingford Lough] to do battle with the dark heathens, they fought for three days and three nights, but the dark foreigners got the upper hand and the others abandoned their ships to them. Stain took flight, and escaped, and Iercne fell beheaded'. (AU 852, also CS 852, AFM 850)

866: 'Aed son of Niall plundered the *longphuirt* of the foreigners i.e. in the territory of the north, both in Cenél nEógain and Dál nAiridi and took away their heads, their flocks and their herds from camp by battle. A victory was gained over them at Loch Febail and twelve score heads taken thereby'. (AU 866, also CS 866, AFM 864)

877: 'A skirmish on Loch Cuan [Strangford Lough] between the fair heathens and the dark heathens, in which Albann (Hálfdan), king of the dark heathens fell'. (AU 877, also CS 877, AFM 874)

879: 'Mael Coba son of Crunmael, superior of Ard Macha and the lector were taken prisoner by the foreigners'. (AU 879, also CS 879, AFM 876). AFM reports that these foreigners were '*Ghallaibh Locha Cuan'*, i.e., from Strangford Lough.

900(?): 'The foreigners were on Loch Eathach [Lough Neagh] on the Calends of January, and they seized Etach Padraig'. (AFM 895)

923: 'Cell Shléibe [Killeevy, Co. Down] was plundered by the heathens from Snám Aignech [Carlingford Lough], and Duiblitir, priest of Ard Macha suffered a violent death at their hands'. (AU 923, also CS 923, AFM 921)

924: 'Foreigners went on Loch Cuan [Strangford Lough] and Mael Dún son of Aed, heir designate of the province, fell by them. A great new fleet of the foreigners foundered at Fertas Rudraige, and nine hundred or more were drowned'. (AU 924, also CS 924, AFM 922)

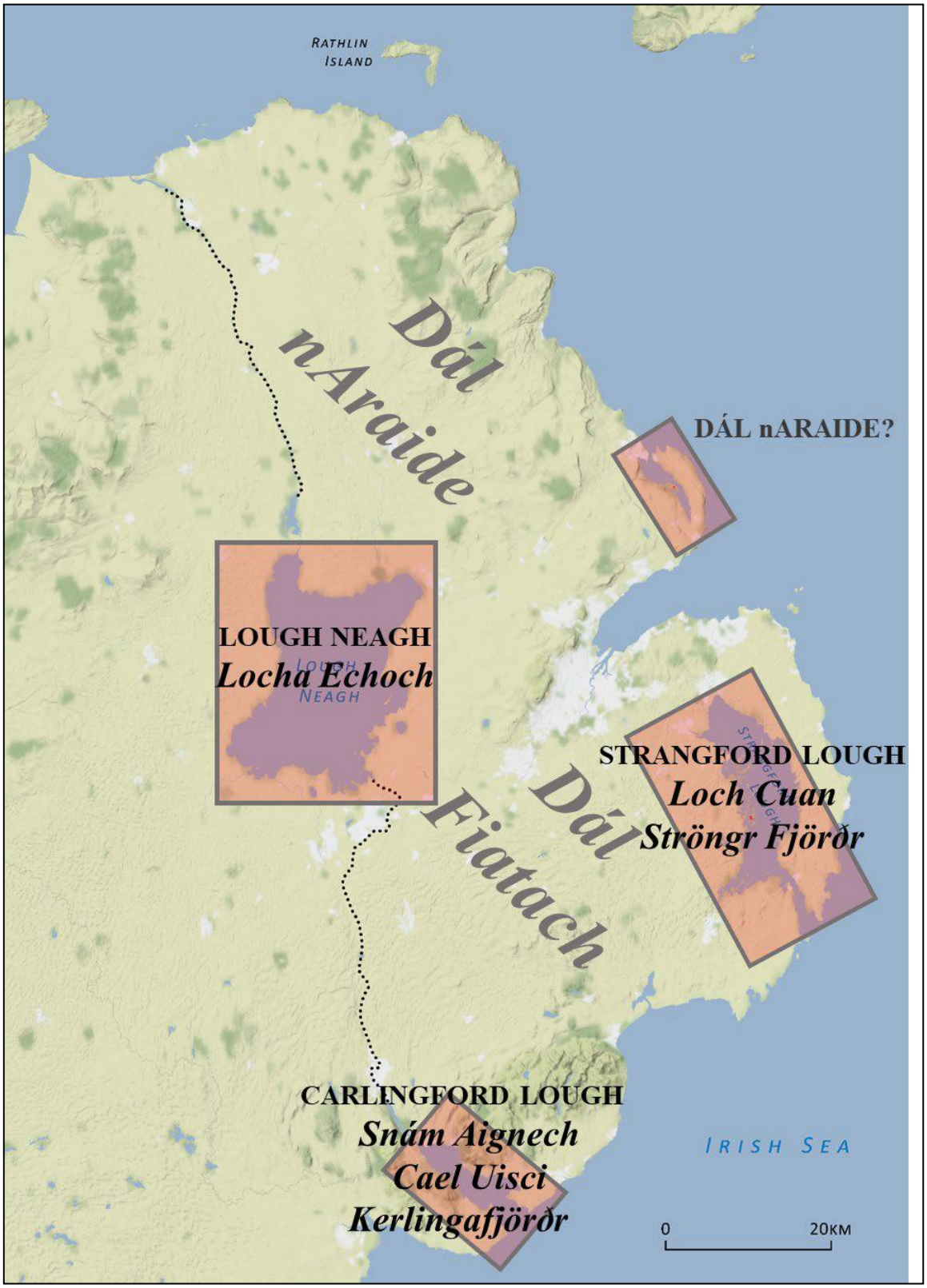



**Fig. 3.1: Map of Ulaid with its two principal sub-divisions, Dál Fiatach and Dál nAraide, showing the locations of Viking military bases.**

926: ‘The sacking of Dún Sobairche [Dunservick, Co. Antrim] by the foreigners of Loch Cuan [Strangford Lough], in which many men were killed or captured’. (AU 926, also CS 926, AFM 924)

926: ‘Muirchertach son of Niall inflicted a rout on the foreigners at Snám Aignech [Carlingford Lough], in which two hundred were beheaded’. (AU 926)

926: ‘The fleet of Loch Cuan [Strangford Lough], i.e. under Alpthann [Hálfdan] son of Gothfith [Guðfrið], landed at Linn Duachaill [Annagassan, County Louth] on the day before the nones of September’. (AU 926)

926: ‘Muirchertach son of Niall inflicted a rout at the bridge of Cluain na Cruimther on the fifth feria, the fifth of the Kalends of January, in which fell Alpthann [Hálfdan] son of Gothfrith [Guðfrið], with a great destruction of his army. Half of them were besieged for a week at Áth Cruithne, until Gothfrith, king of the foreigners, came from Áth Cliath to relieve them.’ (AU 926, also CS 926, AFM 924)

930: ‘Foreigners on Loch Echach [Lough Neagh] and their *longphort* was at Rubu Mena’. (AU 930, also CS 930, AFM 928) Both CS and AFM state that these foreigners were led by Torolb [Þórolfr].

933: ‘A rout was inflicted by Daaigh son of Niall with the foreigners of Loch nEchach [Lough Neagh] on the province of Ireland, in which twelve hundred or more were killed’. (CS 933, also AFM 931) AFM records ‘A battle was gained by Conaing, son of Niall, and the foreigners of Loch Eathach, over the province of Ulidia, wherein twelve hundred were slain’.

933: ‘Ard Macha was plundered by Guðfrið’s son from Strangford Lough’. (CS 933, also AFM 931) AFM records ‘Ard-Macha was plundered about the festival of St. Martin, by the son of Gofraigh [Guðfrið], i.e. Amhlaibh, with the foreigners of Loch Cuan [Strangford Lough] about him. Matadhan, son of Aedh, with the inhabitants of the province of Ulidia, and Amhlaibh, son of Gofraidh [Guðfrið], with the foreigners, spoiled and plundered the province of Ulster as far as Sliabh-Beatha to the west, and as far as Mucnamha to the east; but they were overtaken by Muircheartach, son of Niall, and a battle was fought between them, in which he defeated them; and they left with him two hundred heads cut off, besides prisoners and spoils.’

943: ‘The Leith Cathail inflicted a rout on the foreigners of Loch Cuan [Strangford Lough], in which nearly all were destroyed’. (AU 943)

945: ‘The foreigners of Loch Echoch [Lough Neagh] were killed by Domnall son of Muirchertach and by his kinsman, i.e. by Flaithbertach and their fleet was destroyed’. (AU 945, CS 945, AFM 943), CS identifies the king of the foreigners as Breisi.

### *Ulaid longphuirt and raiding bases*

It has been noted above that, even though there is a significant number of mentions of Scandinavian bases and naval forces in Ulaid, the specific term *longphort* is only used three times in the sources. In some cases, the existence of bases is implied, but not specified, and it may well be that a floating fleet of Scandinavians, rather than a land base, is what is being referred to in some cases. This may be the case, in particular, when there are references to Scandinavians from a particular location but with no explicit mention of a base, such as, for example, ‘heathens on’ Lough Neagh (AU 841), ‘heathens from Carlingford Lough’ (AU 923), or ‘the foreigners of Strangford Lough’ (AFM 931). The reference to ‘foreigners on Lough Neagh and their *longphort* was at Rubu Mena’ (AU 930), is clearly of a different order given that it specifies the existence of a land base. In total, the sources mention five locations of *longphuirt* or generally related phenomena in Ulaid, mapped in Figs. 3.1 and 2, and these are individually discussed below.

#### *Linn Sailech*

The only evidence for this potential *longphort* is contained in an 842 entry in the Annals of Ulster: ‘There was also a naval force of the Norsemen at Linn Sailech in Ulaid’. McErlean has suggested that Linn Sailech was somewhere on the coastline of Dál Fiatach (McErlean et al 2002, 79), though no place-name or historical evidence is provided to support this identification. Apart from the identification of Linn Sailech as being ‘in Ulaid’ in the Annals of Ulster there is no reason to support any suggestion that locates this place anywhere in the province-kingdom of Ulaid. In fact, the opposite seems to be the case, as it is generally understood that Linn Sailech Lough, Swilly (*Loch Súileach*), the sea inlet lying between the western side of the Inishowen Peninsula and the Fanad Peninsula, in Co. Donegal, in the province-kingdom of Northern Uí Néill. For this reason, the Linn Sailech Viking base of 842 is not further considered in this thesis.




**Fig. 3.2: Map of Ulaid and its *trícha céts* (based on MacCotter 2008), showing the locations of Viking military bases.**

*Dál nAiridi*

The historical evidence for this *longphort* is an 866 entry in the Annals of Ulster: 'Aed son of Niall plundered the *longphuirt* of the foreigners i.e. in the territory of the north, both in Cenél nEógain and Dál nAiridi and took away their heads, their flocks and their herds from camp by battle. A victory was gained over them at Loch Febail and twelve score heads taken thereby'. The battle at Loch Febail (Lough Foyle) clearly relates to the events in Cenél nEógain, in Co. Donegal.

This annalistic entry is very interesting because, through its mention of 'their flocks and herds', it specifies the concept of the *longphuirt* as a settlement with a hinterland and associated agricultural interests (Sheehan 2008, 283). The existence of supporting settlements around these two *longphuirt* indicates that they were well-established bases. The historical evidence indicates that there was an alliance from 860 onwards between 'Aed son of Niall', who is Áed Finnliath, king of Cenél nEógain, in the province-kingdom of Northern Uí Néill, and the Vikings of Dublin, led by Amlaíb and Ímar, and that the aim of this alliance was to oppose Máel Sechnaill, the high king (Purcell and Sheehan 2013, 42). It seems certain that the *longphuirt* in Cenél nEógain and Dál nAiridi were established by the Dublin-based Scandinavians as part of this alliance. However, following the death of Máel Sechnaill in 862 the high kingship passed to Áed Finnliath. It seems that he may no longer have needed Scandinavian support and that this resulted in his destruction of their northern *longphuirt* in 866. Ó Corráin suggested that Áed Finnliath was taking the littoral back from Viking control (1997, 90), while Purcell and Sheehan proposed that the Vikings had 'served their purpose for him while he was king-in-waiting, but by 866 he had no further need of them' (2013, 42).

The problem with the 866 entry in the Annals of Ulster is that it does not indicate where precisely 'in Cenél nEógain and Dál nAiridi' these *longphuirt* were located. The one of interest in the context of this thesis is the Dál nAiridi example, for it clearly was located in the province-kingdom of Ulaid. In theory it could have been located anywhere along the coastline of modern county Antrim, but there are long stretches of this which would not have been suitable because of cliffs and exposed shorelines. However, there is no good reason why it couldn't have been located in a place

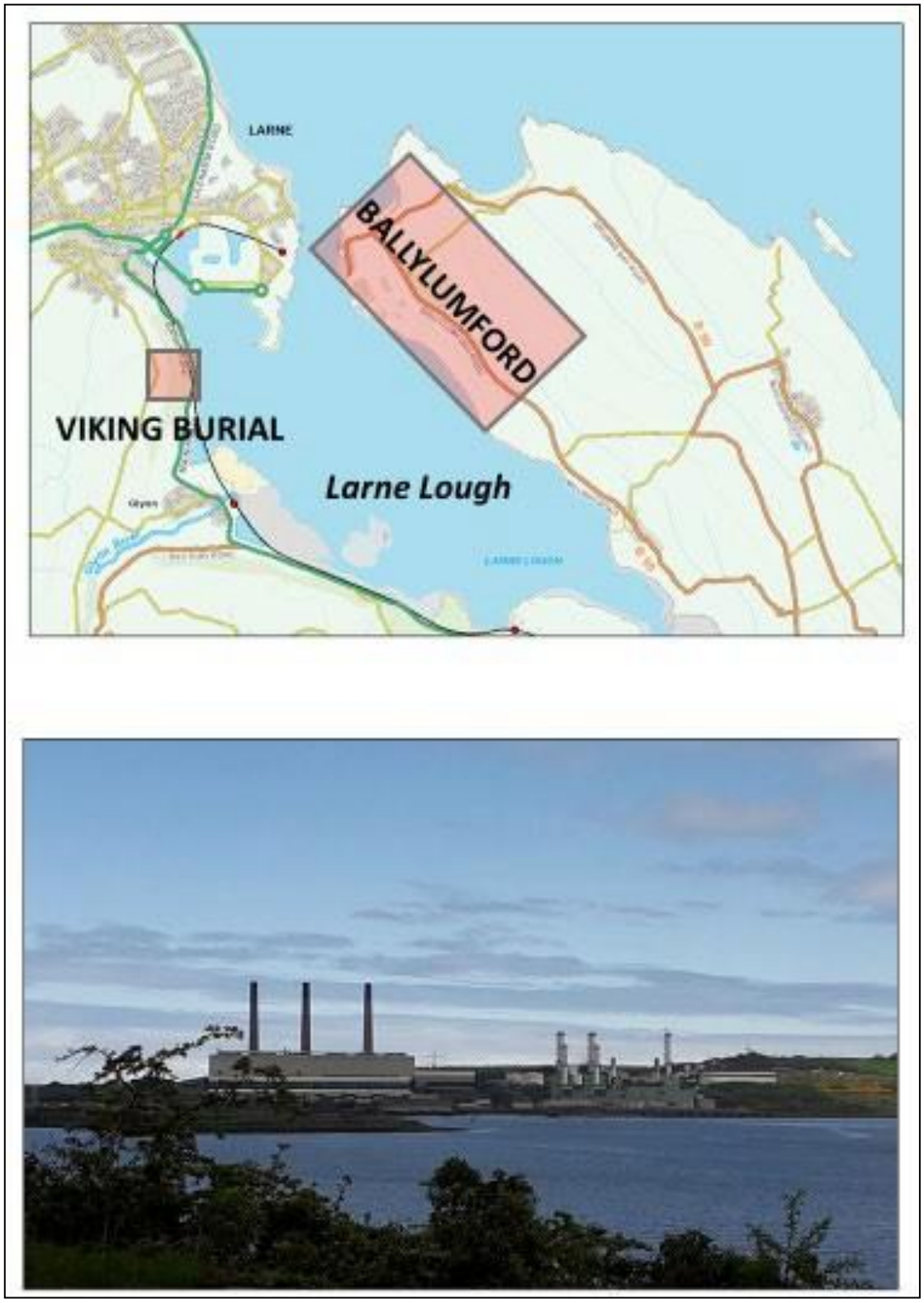



**Fig. 3.3: Above, map of Larne Lough, *Úlfreks-fjörðr*, showing the locations of the possible *longphort* at Ballylumford and of the Viking burial; below, the power station at Ballylumford viewed from the location of the Viking burial.**

like Rathlin Island, or in the harbours at Ballycastle or Carrickfergus, but there is no archaeological evidence that this was the case. On the other hand, there are some indications that the Dál nAiridi *longphort* of 866 may have been located in the area of Larne Lough.

Given the association of the Viking-Age Scandinavians with ships and sailing, it is not surprising that the names of several of Ireland's harbours bear, or previously bore, the Norse words *fjörð*. These include Larne Lough, *Úlfreks-fjörðr*, a location that is mentioned in Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla* (Mac Giolla Easpaig 2002, 473-74). But there is also archaeological evidence for Scandinavian activity in the harbour, in the form of a warrior burial (see Chapter 5). This is one of relatively few Viking burials from outside of the greater Dublin area and its location on the shoreline of Larne Lough is an important indicator of a Scandinavian presence there. More importantly, however, within the specific context of *longphuirt*, is the occurrence of a townland named Ballylumford at the entrance to the harbour at the tip of the Island Magee peninsula, directly across the harbour mouth from the location of the Viking burial (Fig. 3.3). This place name is the anglicised form of *Baile an Longphoirt*, 'the settlement of the *longphort*', and suggests that there may have been a Scandinavian base at this location.

Taking both the archaeological and place name evidence of Larne Lough into consideration, it seems possible that there was a Viking *longphort* in existence here. Larne Lough is located within the *trícha cét* of Machaire Damairne (see Chapter 2, fig. 2), and kings from this territory held the overlordship of Dál nAraide at least twice in the seventh century (MacCotter 2008, 230). The kingship appears to have been based on or near *Rinn Seimhne*, the peninsula now known as Island Magee (McKay 2007, 84). It appears, therefore, that the Ballylumford *longphort*, with its settled hinterland, was located at the political core of Machaire Damairne. Given that this type of evidence is not known to exist at any other location along the coastline of Dál nAiridi, it also seems quite possible that Ballylumford was the '*longphort* of the foreigners' that was plundered by Áed Finnliath in 866.

Unfortunately, Ballylumford is the location of Northern Ireland's largest power station and is not accessible for fieldwork. Clearly, however, if opportunities for archaeological investigations arise in the future these may prove to be worthwhile.

*Strangford Lough*

Strangford Lough, referred to in the annals as *Loch Cuan*, is located in Co. Down. The other two sites frequently reported as hosting Scandinavian bases, Carlingford Lough and Lough Neagh, share shorelines with counties outside Antrim and Down. On this basis, apart from those destroyed by Áed Finnliath in 866, Strangford Lough is the only recorded site of Viking bases that we can be certain is in Ulaid, and therefore, it is perhaps the most significant potential *longphort* in this study. The name 'Strangford' derives from the Old Norse *Ströngr Fjörðr*, 'Strong Fjord' (Mac Giolla Easpaig 2002, 470). The adoption of this name must indicate that Scandinavians were considerably prominent in the area.

In 877 a battle took place on Strangford Lough between two separate groups of Vikings whom the annals refer to as fair heathens and dark heathens. Halfdan, who fell in this skirmish, is named as the 'chief' of the dark foreigners. Hálfdan had established himself as the king of Northumbria two years previous to this (Downham 2007, 70). The fact that a king was fighting for control of this base must demonstrate the importance of Strangford Lough to the Vikings at this time. This also means that the victory of the party already established in the area must indicate the military strength of the Scandinavian presence on Strangford at this time. Two years later, Mael Coba, the lector of Armagh was taken prisoner by Vikings and the Annals of the Four Masters reports that these raiders came from Strangford Lough. The capture of the lector would have caused considerable disruption for the Northern Uí Néill, as Armagh was its principal church establishment. Nothing is known about the political background of the fair heathens mentioned in 877, and only the Annals of the Four Masters report that Mael Coba's captures came from Strangford Lough. Therefore, when trying to determine the contemporary political context of the Strangford Vikings, these reports are problematic as a body of historical evidence. However, the late 870's saw an attempt by a Scandinavian leader such as Hálfdan to control Strangford Lough, his subsequent defeat by the established force, and the capturing of the ecclesiastical leader of Armagh by a raiding party from Strangford. This demonstrates the importance of Strangford Lough as a base and the strength of its Scandinavian military force at this time.

The Vikings of Strangford Lough became prominent again in the early tenth century. In 924 they killed Mael Dúin, the son of Áed, who was 'heir designate of the province'. The fact that the 924

entry reports that the foreigners 'went on' Strangford Lough likely indicates that this was a new arrival and that the occupation seen in the 870's had since come to an end. The killing of a royal figure of the Dál Fiatach shows the disruption immediately caused by the arrival of Vikings on Strangford. It also indicates that these Scandinavians were hostile to the Dál Fiatach. In 926 the foreigners from Strangford Lough raided Dunservick, in Dál nAraide. In 933, a report of a raid on Armagh, states that the foreigners from Strangford Lough were led by Olaf Guthfrithsson, the Scandinavian king of Dublin. Therefore, the Vikings active on Strangford Lough in the early tenth century must have been allies of the Uí Ímar dynasty in Dublin. In 942, the Vikings of Strangford Lough were heavily defeated by the Leth Cathail, a *trícha cét* of Dál Fiatach. Overall, Vikings active on Strangford Lough in the early tenth century caused considerable disruption in Dál Fiatach and also attacked both the Dál nAiridi and the Northern Uí Néill.

Throughout the various annalistic references to Scandinavians on Strangford Lough the term *longphort* is never used. It may well be that there never was a land base there, and that the references to the Viking presence relate to floating fleets of Scandinavians. It is a very large sea inlet, covering 150 square kilometres, and is the largest in Britain or Ireland. It has at least seventy islands, and it has many bays, coves and headlands (Fig. 3.4). Given the size and nature of this environment, and the easy mobility available within it to fleets, it may be that there was never any need for the Vikings to establish a defended *longphort* there. The fact that Strangford Lough is enclosed by three *trícha cét* – Leth Cathail, Uí Blaithmeic and Uí Echach Arda – may also have been of advantage to the Scandinavians, as it is known from elsewhere in Ireland that their *longphuirt* were positioned on political boundaries in order to take advantage of the rivalries that existed between bordering territories (Kelly and Maas 1999, 140; Sheehan 2008, 286).

Given that the historical sources do not indicate where the Scandinavian base, or bases, were located in Strangford Lough, the archaeological evidence needs to be considered. Finds of Scandinavian character from the immediate landscape of Strangford Lough will be identified and considered. Thomas McErleann et al have previously published on this topic as part of an archaeological survey of Strangford Lough (2002). However, some finds have been made since



**Fig. 3.4: Arial view of portion of the western side of Strangford Lough, showing some of its many islands.**

this publication so the Scandinavian archaeology that may be associated with Strangford requires revision.

The only example of Scandinavian-type silver to have been found immediately within the context of Strangford Lough is from Walshetown, and this was discovered on the shore of the southern bank of Strangford Lough in 2015 (Sheehan 2016a). It is a near-complete example of a Hiberno-Scandinavian broad-band arm-ring and is datable to the late ninth/early tenth century. Note should also be made, however, of the Viking-age gold ingot from Killard Upper, discovered in 2019. This area is also the parish, Kilclief, where discoveries have been made of a fragment of a Kufic coin and a stone bearing a graffiti of a Scandinavian-style ship (McCormick and Kastholm 2017). These three finds are all from the western side of the mouth of Strangford Lough, where it opens into the Irish Sea, and while they are not directly from Strangford Lough, they are strongly connected with it. The hoard from Magheralagan (see Chapter 4), from about five kilometres from Downpatrick, the main royal site of Dál Fiatach, is clearly an indicator for some type of connection between the Scandinavians and Dál Fiatach. This connection may be commercial, or the hoard could represent a tribute payment, but in either case it seems likely on geographical grounds that it involved the Strangford Lough Vikings.

An example of Scoto-Scandinavian ring-money was discovered near an early medieval ecclesiastical enclosure at Inishargy, on the Ards Peninsula, on the eastern side of Strangford Lough. Although later in date than the Walshestown and Killard Upper finds, probably not earlier than c.950, it indicates that the Scandinavian impact on the immediate Strangford Lough region extended beyond the recorded events in the annalistic sources. Interestingly, the Inishargy place-name may have derived from the Old Irish *Inis Airge*, the second element of which was borrowed into Old Norse as *ærgi* in the northern Irish Sea area and as far up as the Faroe Islands (Fellows-Jensen 1980). The coin hoard from Scrabo Hill, discussed in Chapter 5, although it is too late in date to be connected to any *longphort* in the region, suggests that the Scandinavian connections with Strangford Lough may have endured into the late Viking Age.

Lawlor has claimed that an inscription found on a cross-inscribed slab at the monastic site of Nendrum, at the northern end of Strangford Lough, may indicate the burial of a Christianized



**Fig. 3.5: Dunnyneill Island, in lower Strangford Lough.**

Scandinavian (1925, 70-71). The inscription includes a small number of letters which he claimed were of Runic form, and this claim has been repeated a number of times by others (e.g. Edwards 1990, 191). However, this is unlikely. When examined by runologists the inscription is always dismissed. For instance Page described it as 'doubtfully runic and doubtfully Scandinavian' (1971, 183), while Barnes *et al* have pointed out that Lawlor's reading of the inscription is a typical example of identifying as runes 'any incised symbols made up of intersecting straight lines' (1997, 2). Clearly the Nendrum inscription must not be considered as evidence for the Scandinavian presence on Strangford Lough.

There have been two archaeological investigations carried out in Strangford Lough which sought to identify a land base related to its Viking presence. Both investigations seem to be connected with McErlean *et al's* suggestion that there was an island in the lough that was occupied by the Vikings (McErlean *et al* 2002, 79-82). This is based on an interpretation of a 924 entry in the Annals of Ulster: *Dún Lethglaise was plundered by the foreigners. God and Patrick avenged it on them, causing them to go overseas and taking their island* [insi] *from them so that their king stole*

*away and was killed by the Irish on land*. Given that it was Downpatrick that was plundered, McErlean *et al* assumed that the attackers came from Strangford Lough, which seems quite possible, and consequently that the island associated with them was somewhere in this sea inlet. They did point out that the island had not been identified (McErlean et al 2002, 82).

However, it does appear that the selection of the Dunnyneill Islands, in Strangford Lough, for archaeological investigations in 2002-03 was influenced by a search for the Viking island mentioned in the Annals of Ulster. The project was undertaken by Finbar McCormick and Philip Macdonald on behalf of the Centre for Archaeological Fieldwork, School of Archaeology and Palaeoecology, Queen's University Belfast (McCormick and Macdonald 2003; Fig. 3.5). The islands consist of a larger and a smaller one linked by a causeway at low tide, and they are strategically located so as to command both the narrows at the mouth of Strangford Lough and the entrance to the estuary of the Quoile River. The highest point of the larger island consists of a plateau surrounded by a bank-and-ditch that encloses an area approximately 30 metres in diameter, and presumably it was this feature that provided the place name element *dún* to the island. Evidence for four phases of activity was identified during the excavation and it indicated that these date to the early prehistoric period, the sixth to seventh centuries, the centuries either side of the first millennium, whilst the final phase probably dates to the Anglo-Norman period. The finds from the second phase included imported E-ware pottery, Anglo-Saxon and Mediterranean vessel glass, and evidence of metalworking. Phase 3 was represented by a soil horizon with no associated features and is consistent with a period of non-intensive exploitation of the island. It was proposed by the excavators that during the sixth and seventh centuries the site had a dual emporium-high status settlement function, controlled by the Dál Fiatach dynasty, and that it would only have been occupied when seaborne merchants visited Strangford Lough. Despite its suggestive place name evidence and its advantageous location no obvious evidence emerged for a Scandinavian link to the island.

It should be noted here that McErlean et al (2002, 79-82) assumed that the '*insi*' mentioned on the 924 entry in the Annals of Ulster was in reference to an island. However, the word also has the meaning of a river meadow, but it is interesting to note that only two of the six occurrences of 'Inis' in Co. Down listed by *Logainm* are actually islands, and that these are on or adjacent to

Strangford Lough. These are *Inis Mochaoi* (Mahee Island), on the lough, and *Inis Airge* (Inishargy), on the Ards Peninsula, on the eastern side of the lough.

Mahee Island is the largest island in the lough. It is situated close its western shore and contains the important early medieval monastic site of Nendrum, the founder of which, St. Mochaoi, gives his name to the island. Is it possible that *Inis Mochaoi* is the 'inis' referred to as a Viking base in the annals in 924? In this respect it is worth noting that there are annalistic records of a Viking presence at some monasteries. In the Annals of the Four Masters, for instance, it was recorded that the church sites at Louth, Dromiskin and Monsterboice, all in Co. Louth, were plundered in 868 by the king of Ailech, and that the raids were 'against the foreigners'. It has been suggested that these Vikings may have been Christian Scandinavian residents at these monastic settlements (Ó Floinn 1998, 164), while it has also been proposed that they represent Vikings who were billeted there in a political arrangement with the local rulers (Downham 2003–04, 240). It is also possible that Vikings used ecclesiastical sites they subdued as bases (Hall 2007, 87). Based on the place name evidence, which is admittedly not enough on its own, it seems that Mahee Island should be considered as a contender for the 924 Viking base on Strangford Lough. It should be pointed out, however, that no archaeological evidence for a Viking presence at Nendrum was revealed by Lawlor's excavations there in the early 1920s (Lawlor 1925), though it is generally accepted that these were not well conducted.

Inishargy is believed to have derived from *Inis Carraige* – 'the rocky island'. However, it also seems possible to be derived from *Inis Airge*, 'the island of the summer milking place' (Sheehan 2012a), the second element being the Old Irish word that was borrowed into Old Norse in the northern Irish Sea area and the Faroe Islands as *érgi* (see Fellows Jensen 1980). In either case, the location is depicted as an island surrounded by water on sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century cartographic sources (e.g. Dartmouth Map 25, National Maritime Museum), and the site was also described this way by Harris in the mid- eighteenth century (1744, 44). This 'island' is

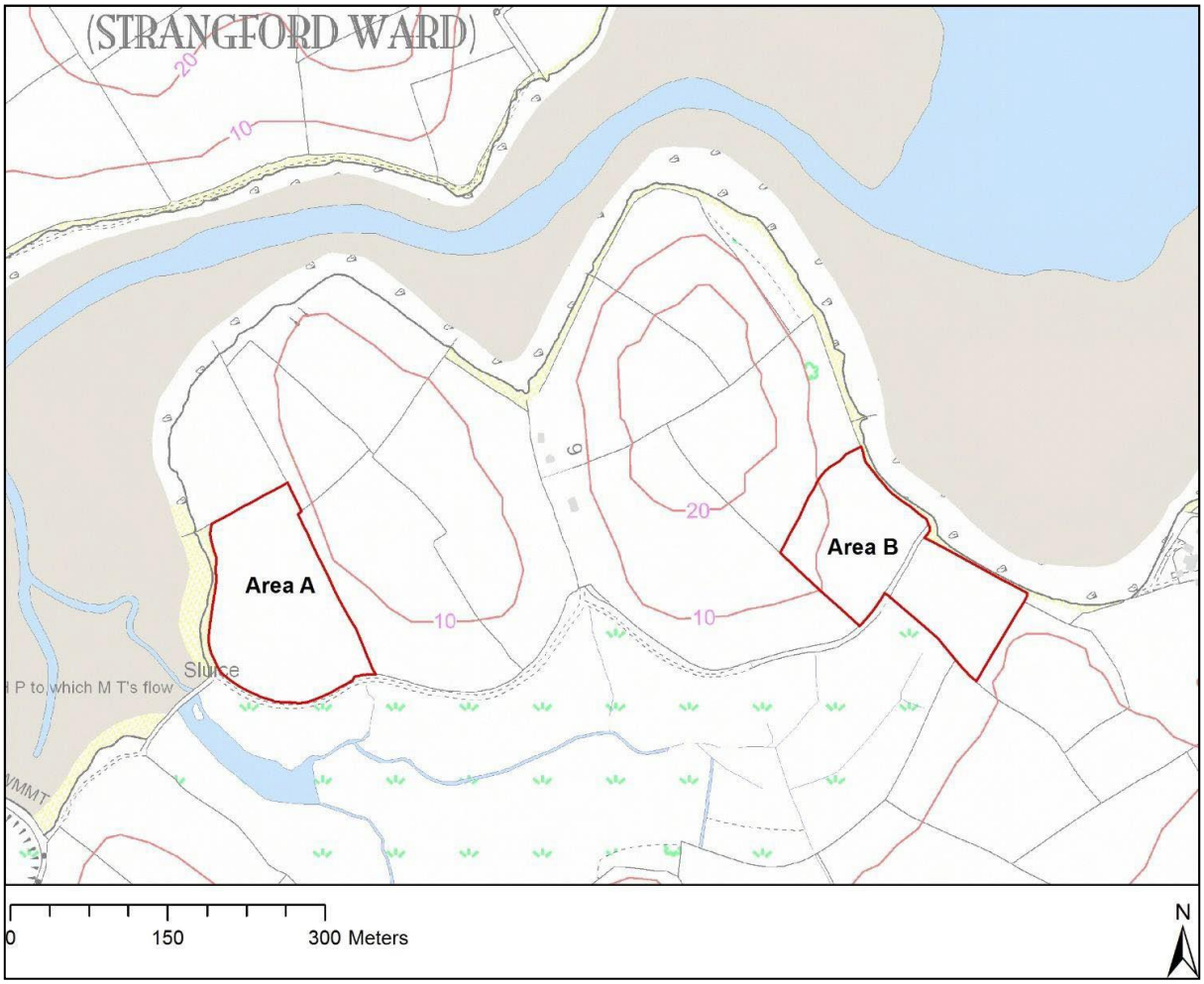



**Fig. 3.6: Map showing the location of the two areas surveyed by McDermott at Ballintogher, Quoile, Co. Down.**

accepted as being the hill in Inishargy townland, which remained largely surrounded by boggy ground until the nineteenth century. On the summit of the hill is a farmyard that is located within a large ditched enclosure, around 130 metres in diameter, which survives as an earthwork and a cropmark. Within the enclosure are the masonry remains of a medieval church, from which a thirteenth-century sandstone coffin lid has been recovered. A church of 'Inyscargi' is noted in the Taxation Lists of Pope Innocent, in 1213, and an earlier reference exists from 1204. The form of the ecclesiastical enclosure, however, suggests an early medieval origin for this site. The Inishargy silver arm-ring, discussed in Chapter 4, was found 130m downslope from this ecclesiastical enclosure. Based on the place name evidence and the discovery of a Viking-age silver arm-ring, it seems that Inishargy should also be considered as a contender for the 924 Viking base on

Strangford Lough. However, being an example of a Scoto-Scandinavian 'ring-money', the date of the arm-ring is at least a couple of decades too late to be connected with the base of 924.

A second area within Strangford Lough was also investigated by the Centre for Archaeological Fieldwork, School of Archaeology and Palaeoecology, Queen's University Belfast. The work was conducted by Siobhán McDermott. The survey area is located on the southern shores of Strangford Lough, in Ballintogher townland, at the mouth of the Quoile River estuary (Fig. 3.6). The reason this area was selected was because the place name Quoile comes from *An Caol*, meaning 'the narrow (water)': in 1549 the name of the river is recorded as 'Narrow Water' (Inq. 3 Ed. VI). There are several references to a Viking base in Ulaid at *Cael Uisce,* though it is generally accepted that this was in Carlingford Lough, not Strangford Lough. Nevertheless, the Quoile River study area was selected for investigation. Two separate areas were surveyed on a small headland situated at the mouth of the estuary, using evaluation resolution magnetic gradiometery and electrical resistance surveys. The two survey methods were applied together 'to try and identify the location of possible Viking period settlement and/or elite burials' (McDermott n.d., 5). In general the magnetic data was poor, but clusters of anomalies with archaeological potential were identified in each area. In Area A, a series of linear features may represent a cluster of rectangular structures, but the form of the possible houses does not conform to recorded Scandinavian architecture and appear to be more similar to modern vernacular settlement. In Area B, a group of high magnetic readings could be the geophysical signature of a dock and slipway of unknown date. (McDermott n.d., 5). In summary, no clear evidence for any form of Viking settlement emerged from these investigations.

On this basis, while historical sources provide considerable evidence for a Viking presence on Strangford Lough these do not clearly indicate whether there were any associated land-based settlements. The Scandinavian-type hoard from Magheralagan, as well as the various single-finds of gold and silver, provide archaeological evidence for a Scandinavian presence on the lough during the period of the later ninth and earlier tenth centuries, the same period that the historical sources indicate a Scandinavian connection with Strangford Lough. But none of this evidence indicates that there was a *longphort* or several different *longphuirt,* or other form of Scandinavian bases or settlements, there. However, it could be argued that the existence of bases is implied,




**Fig. 3.7: Map showing locations in and around Strangford Lough mentioned in this discussion.**

though it may well be that floating fleets of Scandinavians, rather than land bases, is what is being referred to. Two important archaeological investigations seeking to identify Scandinavian bases have taken place on Strangford Lough, on Dunnyneill Island and at Ballintogher, but neither has proven successful. It seems, however, that if a Scandinavian base is ever discovered on Strangford Lough, it will result from the sort of investigative approach adopted by these two projects. It is suggested that the ecclesiastical sites at Inishargy and Mahee Island might be worth considering for further investigation. When all of the finds and places that are either associated or potentially associated with the Strangford Lough Scandinavians are plotted on a map (Fig. 3.7), it is interesting to note that most are associated with its southern area. This may indicate that this is the key area for understanding the Scandinavian connections with Strangford Lough, and, if so, it suggests that it was the *trícha cét* of Leth Cathail that is central towards this understanding. This *trícha cét* contains *Dún Lethglaise*, Downpatrick, the main royal centre of the Dál Fiatach, and the juxtapositioning of it with the southern area of Strangford Lough might be an indication that the Scandinavian presence on the lough may, at least occasionally, have had the support of the local rulers who hoped to benefit from trading opportunities as well as the availability of mercenaries and potential allies.

*Lough Neagh*

Lough Neagh is a large freshwater lake, the largest lake by area in Britain and Ireland, with a surface area of 392 square kilometres. The lough's name derives from *Loch nEachach*, meaning ‘Eachaidh's lake’. It is about 32 km long and 14 km wide. Its main inflows are the Upper River Bann and River Blackwater, and its main outflow is the Lower River Bann, though it is fed by many tributaries including the rivers Main, Six Mile Water, Ballinderry and Moyola. It only contains a small number of islands, the most important of which are Coney Island, Derrywarragh Island, Oxford Island and Ram’s Island. Its extensive shoreline is shared by five modern counties, Antrim, Down, Armagh, Tyrone and Derry, of which only Antrim and Down are in the province-kingdom of Ulaid. On the Ulaid shoreline there are five *trícha cét*, Uí Thuirtri, Mag Line, Clann Diarmata, Dál Buinne and Uí Echach Cobo (Fig. 3.8).

Although there are several references in the annals to Scandinavian activities on Lough Neagh, there are only two explicit references to *longphuirt*. The first concerns a raid on the church site of Lugbad, in modern Co. Louth, from where 'they led away captive bishops priests and scholars and put others to death' (AU 840); the report in AFM states that the 'they made prisoners of many bishops and other wise and learned men, and carried them to their *longphort*' (AFM 839). The second reference (AU 930) records 'foreigners on Loch Echach and their *longphort* was at Ruib Mena'. All of the other references simply record the presence of the Scandinavians on Lough Neagh, without mentioning *longphuirt*, bases or fleets: 'raiding party of the foreigners … on Loch nEchach'(AU 839), 'the heathens from Loch nEchach' (AU 840), 'the heathens … on Loch nEchach' (AU 841), 'the foreigners of Loch Eathach (CS 933), etc. There may, of course, have been bases of some sort on the shoreline, or on the islands, or the Scandinavians may have operated from floating fleets, or it could have been any combination of these possibilities, but it is not possible to establish the facts from the historical references.

What is clear from the historical sources, however, is that the Scandinavians of Lough Neagh were often a significant threat to Ulaid and other province-kingdoms. Annalistic reports in the years 839, 840 and 841 indicate that the Viking presence at Lough Neagh, which seems to have involved a *longphort*, caused significant disruption across the north of Ireland. A report in AFM 895, for around 900, states that the foreigners on Lough Neagh had seized *Etach Padraig*. *Étach Pátraic*, presumably meaning 'Patrick's garment/cloth', must have been a relic or shrine of some importance as otherwise it wouldn't have been seized.

In 930 the Annals of Ulster record 'Foreigners on Lough Neagh and their *longphort* was at Ruib Mena'. Both *Chronicum Scotorum* and the Annals of the Four Masters identify a figure called Torolb (Þórólfr) as the leader of these Vikings (AU 930, CS 930 AFM 928). Cormac Bourke has identified Ruib Mena as the 'the point of the Main', thereby denoting the point where the River Main in Co. Antrim enters Lough Neagh (2010, 32). On this basis, he has suggested that the Lough Neagh *longphort* may be connected with the site of a mound in Shane's Castle Park, Co. Antrim that abuts this junction. If correct, this is the only identifiable location of a *longphort* in Ulaid (Fig. 3.9).




**Fig. 3.8: Map showing the *trícha cét* around Lough Neagh.**




**Fig. 3.9: Map showing the location of the Ruib Mena *longphort,* Lough Neagh.**

In 933 the Lough Neagh Vikings were defeated by Daaigh, son of Niall (CS 933, AFM 931). In 945, in the last report of a Scandinavian presence on Lough Neagh, the foreigners, who in *Chronicon Scotorum* were led by a figure called Bréisí, were defeated by Muirchertach, son of Niall and his kinsman Flaitherbach. The destruction of their fleet is also mentioned (AU 945, CS 945, AFM 943).

There is a small number of Scandinavian-style artefacts, and one important assemblage, from around the area of Lough Neagh, including on the rivers that flow in and out from it. Some of these finds may date to the same period of the Scandinavian occupation of the lough, which falls between *c*.840 and *c*.945, and relate to it. For instance, an oval brooch, discovered in 1881, is provenanced to 'the River Bann'. It may provide evidence of permanent Scandinavian settlement in the region. Normally these are found in women's burial contexts, and for this reason Harrison and Ó Floinn have suggested that there was a burial here (2014, 607-609), but this seems unlikely. There is also a sword from the River Bann, discovered 'between the counties Derry and Antrim' (Bøe, 1940, 84), and in the files of the National Museum of Ireland it is provenanced to 'Toome Bar, River Bann, Co. Antrim'. The form of its hilt, however, shows that it is of Late Viking Age date. These finds may relate to Scandinavian travel to or from the lough, but they could also, of course, relate simply to the occurrence of Viking-age material in various parts of Ireland.

At the other end of Lough Neagh there are two findspots of Viking-age silver. These are within a short distance of each other. The first is a complete, but folded broad-band arm-ring of late ninth/early tenth century date from Ballinderry (Sheehan 2019a). It was found close to a crannog and an early medieval church site. The crannog has produced leg-irons and chain mail, which may indicate that it was of high status. The contemporary political context of Ballinderry is the *trícha cét* of Dál mBuinne, the ninth-century base of the main line of Dál Fiatach, and it is possible that the arm-ring represents part of a tribute payment from the Lough Neagh Scandinavians to the Dál Fiatach. The second find of Viking-age silver comprises two pieces of hack-silver discovered at Poobles. Hack-silver is normally an indicator of economic or commercial activity, and it is a common find in *longphuirt* and their surrounding areas. The Poobles finds, occuring in the *trícha*

*cét* of Dál Buinne, contribute to the paradigm of a commercial relationship between the Scandinavians and the Dál Fiatach in the period. The *trícha cét* of Dál Buinne would have been a prominent force in the maintenance of these connections due to its location to the west of Strangford Lough and to the east of Lough Neagh, two havens frequently utilized by the Scandinavians throughout the ninth and tenth centuries. Overall, the nature of this find, Scandinavian objects specifically reduced to hack-silver for economic activity, discovered in the heart of a significant Dál Fiatach trícha cét, confirms that commercial connections were established by the two parties during the late ninth/early tenth century. The fact that the only finds of Viking-age silver in the immediate vicinity of Lough Neagh are from its south-eastern shoreline, in Dál Buinne, may indicate that a Scandinavian base or *longphort* was located here.

The Hiberno-Scandinavian metalwork amongst the assemblage of early medieval finds from the River Blackwater (Bourke 2010) provides significant evidence for the commercial activities of the Lough Neagh Vikings. The Blackwater flows through the modern counties of Tyrone and Armagh and enters Lough Neagh near Derrywarragh Island. Although not in the province-kingdom of Ulaid, the assemblage may well be connected with the Lough Neagh Scandinavians. The quantity of the material from the river demonstrates the scale of the Scandinavian presence on Lough Neagh. The Hiberno-Scandinavian material from the assemblage mainly consists of arm-rings, ingots and hack-silver, while gold finger rings and numerous lead weights were also discovered (ibid., 24). The arm-rings discovered were all of late ninth/early tenth century date. Two gold finger rings were discovered. One of these consists of a round-sectioned rod, paralleled by a ring from a tenth-century Viking boat burial from Ile-de-Groix in Brittany (which also yielded a mount that appears to be of insular origin). The other, a flat-sectioned band was paralleled by a ring with stamped decoration from the River Liffey at Islandbridge (ibid., 25). Lead weights set with pieces of insular metalwork of 'broadly eighth to ninth century type' discovered are comparable to others found at Kilmainham/Islandbridge, Coolure, Demesne, Co. Westmeath, Woodstown, Co. Waterford, and Kiloran Bay, Colonsay in the Hebrides (ibid., 25). This is an important indication of commercial activity on Lough Neagh. A balance pan, another item associated with trade, is of a type similar to Dublin finds. This balance pan also includes an unfinished beam, apparently of a type found at Coppergate, York. All of this evidence strongly suggests the presence of commercial activity in the vicinity.

In summary, reports in the annals highlight the importance of Scandinavian military encampments on Lough Neagh during the Viking Age. In the years 839 through 841, an encampment of the heathens on Lough Neagh caused considerable disruption across the north of Ireland and marks the first time Scandinavians overwintered in the north. In 930, a site on Lough Neagh became the last Viking encampment in Ulaid to be referred to by annalists as a *longphort*. The silver from Ballinderry and Poobles indicates that both tribute and commercial transactions likely took place between the Scandinavians on Lough Neagh and the kingdom of Dál Fiatach. The quantity of Hiberno-Scandinavian metalwork, as well as swords and axe-heads in the assemblage from the River Blackwater also testifies to the involvement of the Scandinavians in commercial activity on the Lough (Bourke, 2001 & 2010).

*Carlingford Lough*

Carlongford Lough is a glacial sea lough that is about ten kilometres in length. On its northern shore is the kingdom of Dál Fiatach, in Ulaid, while on its southern shore is the kingdom of Cúailge, in Airgialla. The place-name Carlingford derives from the Old Norse *Kerlingafjörðr*, 'ford of the hags' (Mac Giolla Espaig 2002, 472). This toponymal evidence, along with *Græna-ør* (Greenore), at the mouth of the lough, suggests a prominent Norse presence here during the Viking Age.

The annalistic evidence for a Viking encampment on Carlingford Lough (referred to in the Annals as *Snám Aignech*) is not of the same quantity as that relating to Strangford Lough and Lough Neagh. However, the evidence does suggest that a base at Carlingford Lough was of importance to Vikings in the mid-ninth century and again in the early tenth century. Potential bases were reported here in the years 841, 852, 923 and 926, though the specific term *longphort* is not used. In 831 there is a report of the heathens defeating the community of Armagh at Carlingford Lough but this does not make a particular association of these heathens with Carlingford Lough and, therefore, does not imply a *longphort* or any form of encampment.

As is the case with Strangford and Lough Neagh, there is no archaeological evidence to suggest the exact nature or location of the Carlingford Lough base. However, there is an annalistic reference in 841 to 'heathens from Cael Uisci' who plundered Tristledermot in Co.

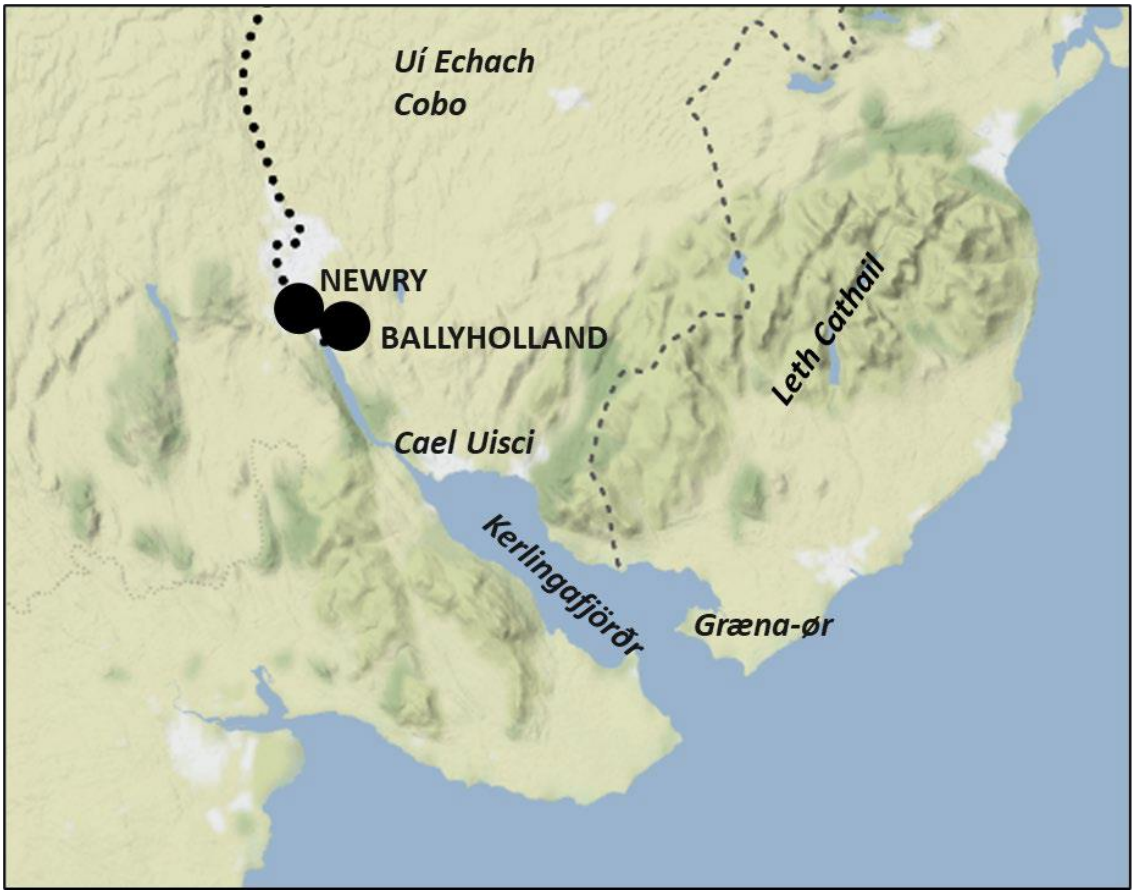



**Fig. 3.10: Map showing locations in and around Carlingford Lough mentioned in this discussion.**

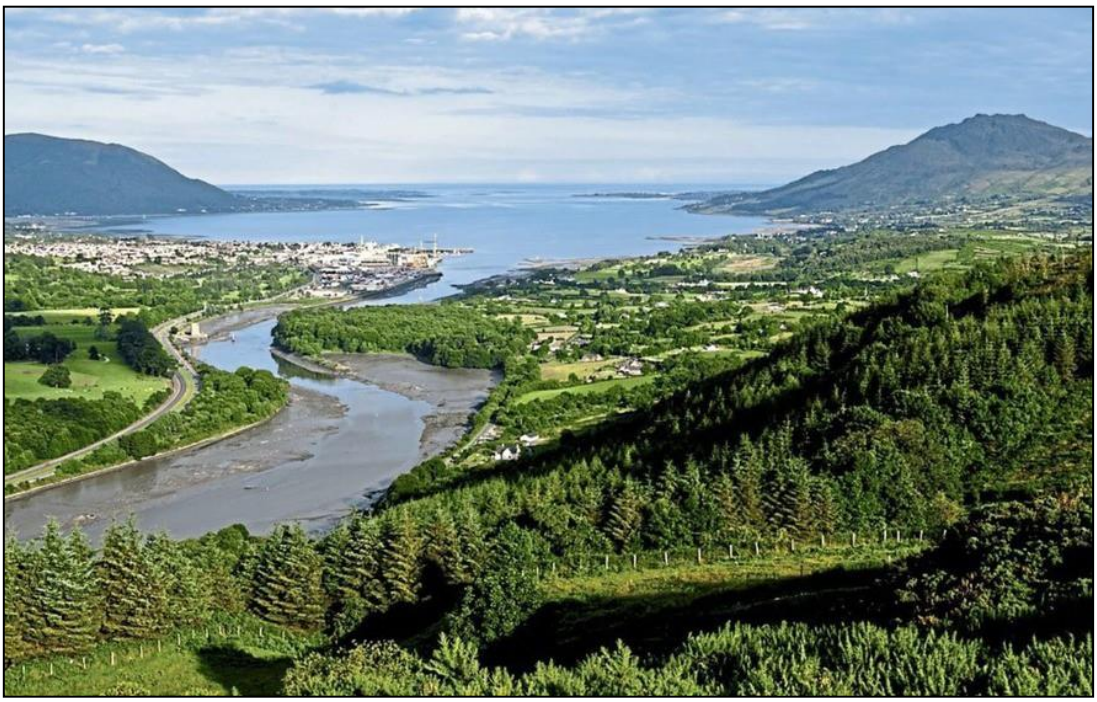


**Fig. 3.11: Carlingford Lough viewed from Newry River**

Meath. Cael Uisce may be identified as Narrow Water, on the northern bank of the narrowest part of Carlingford Lough, where the Newry River flows into the lough. The author suggests that this was the location of the 841 Viking encampment at Carlingford Lough (Fig. 3.10).

In 852 Carlingford Lough featured in the conflict between the two rival groups of Scandinavians in Ireland in the mid-ninth century. The 'dark heathens' were established at Carlingford when the 'fair heathens' travelled to fight them. The result was a defeat of the 'fair heathens' in which one of their leaders was beheaded (AU 852, CS 852, AFM 850). In 923, a report states that the heathens from Carlingford Lough plundered Killeevy (in Co. Antrim) and violently killed a priest of Armagh (AU 923, CS 923, AFM 921). In 926 the Annals report that the foreigners of Carlingford Lough were routed by Muirchertach son of Niall. The AU report that two hundred of these Vikings were beheaded while the CS and the AFM report that eight hundred of them were killed, including their leaders Halfdan and Aufer (AU 926, CS 926, AFM 924).

There is no recorded archaeological evidence for any of the Scandinavian bases that must have existed at Carlingford Lough. There are two finds, however, from the Newry district, which may suggest that the base was in the extreme inner end of the lough. The first of these finds is the ingot hoard, from Newry, discussed in Chapter 4. It may provide evidence for commercial activity involving the Carlingford Scandinavians with the Dál Fiatach *trícha cét* of Uí Echach Cobo. The second find is a fragment of a sword pommel discovered in a souterrain in Ballyholland Lower, near Newry, in 1983 (Bourke 2005). However, the discovery was not reported to the Ulster Museum until 2004. The pommel derives from a sword of Petersen Type L, which dates the artefact to the late ninth century, in keeping with the majority of Scandinavian archaeology from the region. The sword that the pommel originates from is of an Anglo–Saxon type, but perhaps the most plausible explanation as to how it ended up in Uí Echach Cobo is through Scandinavian activity. On this basis, the artefact may provide further evidence for activity involving Scandinavians on Strangford Lough in the period around the late ninth/early tenth century.

***Conclusion***

Historical sources certainly indicate the prominence of Viking bases, including *longphuirt*, in the province kingdom of Ulaid. Previous research into the *longphuirt* in Viking Age Ireland has shown that the main artefactual evidence archaeologists have searched for when trying to determine the location of a *longphort* consists of weapons and silver finds. A D-shaped enclosure is a common feature used to suggest a *longphort* site. However, a D-shaped enclosure cannot be listed as a requirement for a site to be referred to as a *longphort*.

In the ninth and early tenth century, the term *longphort* is only used to refer sites occupied by heathens or foreigners. *Dún*, on the other hand, is used to refer to locations occupied by Irish warriors. Therefore, *longphort* is the more appropriate term to use to refer to those Viking encampments in Ulaid. Based on the etymology of the term, the best definition to ascribe to *longphort* (in a late ninth/early tenth century context) is 'an assemblage of Viking ships in port'. When both the archaeological and historical evidence is combined, we can say, with certainty, that *longphuirt* were prominent in Ulaid.

On the basis of Scandinavian silver finds from Antrim and Down, the late ninth and early tenth century saw considerable commercial activity involving Scandinavians in the kingdom of Ulaid. It is because of the association of the finds from Walshetown with Strangford Lough and the association of the Ballinderry find with Lough Neagh, that *longphuirt* must have featured prominently in this. The importance of *longphuirt* to the Norse presence in Ulaid is also reinforced by the testimony of the annals which mention encampments of heathens and foreigners frequently in throughout the ninth and early tenth centuries.

Overall, the archaeological evidence does testify to the prominence of *longphuirt* in the kingdom of Ulaid. However, the problem of the *longphuirt* in Ulaid remains that the exact locations of these sites cannot be identified archaeologically. The use of LIDAR may allow this problem to be solved, and a number of suggestions have been made in this chapter where this technique might be most usefully used.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## Viking-Age Silver In Ulaid

The purpose of this chapter is to analyse and discuss the discoveries of non-numismatic silver and gold of Scandinavian character deposited in the Viking Age within the early medieval province-kingdom of Ulaid. Silver is the most common type of Viking Age find from this region and the finds include both single-finds and hoards. Together, the modern counties of Antrim and Down have yielded a total of five silver hoards and nine single-finds of precious metals (seven of silver and two of gold). Most of the latter finds have resulted from the activities of metal-detectorists in the Down/South Antrim region over recent years, especially since 2010). The most significant observations made by an analysis of this silver is that most of the material is datable to the period of the late ninth/early tenth century and that it forms concentrations within particular kingdoms and sub-kingdoms. The main objective of this chapter, therefore, is to identify these trends and to discuss what these may mean socially and politically. The main body of the chapter is occupied by two sections that outline the evidence for the hoards and the single-finds. The parallels, date and contemporary political context of each discovery is discussed, and the overall significance is discussed in the conclusion.

### *Ireland and Viking Age Silver*

Silver was a principal economic exchange medium throughout the Viking world, though it has recently been postulated that various forms of commodity monies were also of significance as means of exchange (Skre 2011). In Viking-age Ireland it was generally used in non-numismatic form in a metal-weight economic system, though coin usage did progress and culminate in minting by the end of the tenth century. Ingots and ornaments of various forms, chiefly rings, served as a form of bullion currency within which imported coins were generally valued by weight and both ingots and ornaments were occasionally reduced to ‘hack-silver’ — pieces of silver that are deliberately cut and broken to be used as smaller means of payment. Given the nature and duration of Scandinavian settlement and activity in Ireland it is no surprise that a large amount of Viking-age silver has been found here. In fact, no less than around 130 silver hoards of ninth- and tenth-century date are now on record (Blackburn and Pagan 1986; Kenny 1987; Sheehan 1998), representing a concentration of finds which is unequalled outside of Scandinavia during this

period. Just over half of these are 'coinless' hoards, finds composed exclusively of non-numismatic silver, while the remainder comprises either 'mixed' hoards, finds in which coins occur alongside non-numismatic material, or coin hoards. The bullion values of the hoards vary significantly, with many of the coin hoards appearing to be rather small finds and with the coinless examples tending to be significantly heavier. Consequently, it is the coinless and mixed types of hoards, with their non-numismatic material, that account for the great bulk of the considerable amount of silver wealth that was present in Ireland during the ninth and tenth centuries.

In Ireland it is evident that there are sometimes correlations between individual hoards, and occasionally groupings of hoards, with particular locations that are associated with the dominant dynasties of the Irish kingdoms (Purcell and Sheehan 2013, 37-41). It is also clear, from both general distributional considerations and from the tendency for many of the finds to derive from Irish sites, such as royal centres, ecclesiastical foundations, ringforts and crannógs, that a great many Viking-age hoards ultimately represent Irish, rather than Scandinavian, wealth (Kenny 1987, 511-19, Sheehan 1998, 173-76). Reflection on how this silver wealth was acquired usually focuses on the economic relationships that must have existed between the Irish and the Scandinavians. It has been suggested, for instance, that Viking-Age Dublin exchanged silver 'not only for the commodities required to sustain daily life – to build houses and boats, to eat, drink and dress – but also for trade goods, including slaves' (Graham-Campbell 1998, 106). While this view is undoubtedly correct to a degree, it does not take account of the importance of other potential mechanisms for silver exchange, such as the formation of political alliances, the practice of gift exchange, the conventions of ransoming and, perhaps most importantly, the exercise of tribute. Some of the finds, such as ornament hoards, appear to be socially motivated; others may have been more economically inspired, such as hacksilver hoards representing the use of silver as currency, while other finds appear more likely to signify tribute, such as large bullion hoards (Sheehan 2004, 177-88).

### *Ulaid and Viking Age Silver*

As has been noted above, the over-kingdom of Ulaid has yielded a total of five Viking-age silver hoards and nine single-finds of precious metals. It should be observed at the outset that this is not an impressive total when compared to other areas of Ireland. Is should be noted, for instance, that

no less than forty-nine silver hoards are on record from the province-kingdom of Southern Uí Néill, the immediate political context of Scandinavian Dublin, and that these finds include some of the largest hoards from Ireland (Purcell and Sheehan 2013, 37). It is also worth noting that Northern Uí Néill, the province-kingdom adjacent to Ulaid, has seventeen recorded silver hoards (Purcell and Sheehan 2013, 40-41), while the province-kingdom of Mumu (Munster) has twenty- four silver hoards on record (Sheehan 2014, 212-13). Seen in this light, it is clear that Ulaid was not a silver-rich province kingdom in the Viking Age by the overall standards of Ireland. On the other hand, it does compare favourably with nearby Viking Age Scotland, which has a total of around twenty-five silver hoards.

Most of the Viking Age hoards of Ulaid were discovered in the nineteenth century. As a result, the majority of the artefacts they contained are lost and known only through antiquarian and museum records. These hoards are: Magheralagan, Co. Down, discovered in 1835, Newry, Co. Down, discovered before 1840, Cave Hill, Ballyaghagan, County Antrim, discovered in 1845, near Garron Point, County Antrim, discovered before 1883, and the unlocalised hoard from Co. Antrim, acquired in 1990. All of these hoards are datable to the period around the late ninth/early tenth century. Interestingly, three of the hoards that may be localised within a county, Magheralagan, Newry and Ballyaghagan, all derive from the kingdom of Dál Fiatach. The one other that may be localised, from near Garron Point, derives from the kingdom of Dál nAiride.

The majority of the single-finds were discovered in recent years, largely because of metal-detecting. These include an ingot from White Park Bay, Co. Antrim, an arm-ring from Ballinderry, Co. Antrim, a finger-ring from Groomsport, Co. Down, a silver arm-ring from Walshetown, Co. Down, two fragments of hack-silver from Poobles, Co. Antrim, a silver arm-ring fragment from Ballylesson, Co. Down, a piece of 'Scotto-Scandinavian ring-money' from Inishargy, Co. Down, a fragment of hack-gold from Brickland, Co. Down, and a gold ingot from Killard Upper, Co. Down. John Sheehan has recorded these in a series of unpublished coroner's court reports (Sheehan 2012a, 2012b, 2013, 2016, 2018a, 2018b, 2019a). The finds from Groomsport, Walshetown, Ballylesson, Poobles and Ballinderry constitute the most significant pattern amongst the finds as these objects are all datable to the late ninth/early tenth century and share the common political context of the kingdom of Dál Fiatach. Furthermore, the finds from Groomsport and

Walshetown were both discovered close to Strangford Lough, while the arm-ring from Ballinderry was found near Lough Neagh, both historically attested Viking bases in the ninth and tenth centuries. The Viking Age silver hoards and single-finds of precious metals recorded in the counties of Antrim and Down lead us to the same paradigm. Considerable activity involving interaction of some kind with the Scandinavians took place in the over-kingdom of Ulaid during the Viking Age, particularly in the period of the late ninth and early tenth centuries, and the dynasty of Dál Fiatach featured significantly in this, as is illustrated by the distribution of the silver and gold finds, whether hoards or single-finds (see Fig. 4.1). This paradigm will form the core focus of analysis within the chapter.

***Hoards***

*Magheralagan, Co. Down*

All of the components of this hoard are now lost. The objects that most is known about are a perforated Kufic coin and a Hiberno-Scandinavian broad-band arm-ring. It is known that the hoard also contained several other items, for which the sources are less informative. Nicholas Lowick, from the Department of Coins and Medals in the British Museum, identified the Kufic coin as an Abbasid dirheim of al-Mahdi (A.H. 158-69/A.D. 775-85) that was minted at Madinat al-Salam (Baghdad) in 162/778-9 (Briggs & Graham-Campbell 1976, 21). The coin's perforation suggests that it was used as a pendant. The earliest evidence for this dirham is a letter written by Thomas Benn, of Belfast, to the Cork numismatist John Lindsay, dated 18th June 1845. Benn recounts his inspection of the collection of James Martin, of Downpatrick, a day previous to writing this letter. Benn informs Lindsay of a perforated Kufic coin which, according to Martin, was discovered 'some years ago at a place called Magheralagan about three miles west of Downpatrick along with some others of the same kind (but in a very mutilated and decayed condition)' (Briggs and Graham-Campbell 1976, 21).

Further evidence is provided for these dirhams in two letters from Sainthill to Dr Aquilla Smith, the Dublin numismatist. These letters are preserved in the archives of the National Museum of Denmark, Copenhagen among other communication between Irish and Danish antiquarians. In a postscript to the first of these, dated 5th December 1846, Sainthill directs Smith to inform Jens

Jacob Worsaae (a Danish antiquarian resident in Dublin at the time) that he was negotiating the acquisition of a Kufic coin from the north of Ireland that he was endeavouring to get through Mr Lindsay. Here the coin is incorrectly referred to as a 'Dirheim of Al Mahdi…coined at Baghdad AH 168 A.D. 784' (Briggs & Graham-Campbell 1976, 21). The second of these letters, dated 7th January 1847, provides a clear connection between this coin and the dirham from Magheralagan. Sainthill informs Smith that he was 'in a treaty for a dirham of one of the early Khalifs, of the race of Al Abbas, which was found about twelve years since (1835) at Magheralagan … with another similar coin and a great many fragments cut into halves and quarters'. On the basis of these sources, there were two complete Kufic coins discovered at Magheralagan, the perforated one in far better condition than its counterpart, along with several others that had been fragmented into hack-silver.

The only artefact from the hoard that can be identified in complete detail, due to drawings preserved in the records of the Royal Irish Acadamy and the National Museum of Ireland, is a silver penannular arm-ring of broad-band type, with punched ornament. Briggs and Graham-Campbell describe its ornamentation as 'a well-known pattern on Scandinavian Viking Age silver' and note that its 'form and ornament' establish it as belonging to the 'Hiberno-Viking arm-ring type of *c*.850-950' (Briggs & Graham-Campbell 1976, 21). The RIA's *Windele Ms* documents the records of the Cork antiquarian John Windele from the years 1817 to 1863. These contain a drawing of an arm-ring, from oblique side-view captioned 'Found at Downpatrick in 1835, in the cabinet of James Carruthers Esq. Cregagh, Co. Down'. Briggs and Graham-Campbell note that this is identifiable as the 'one ring perfect' described in Sainthill's 1847 letter (Briggs & Graham-Campbell 1976, 21).

A drawing by Rose A.P. Carruthers, the daughter of James Carruthers, of both the front and rear views of this ring is contained in a bound scrapbook in the NMI, entitled *Irish Antiquities*. It is captioned 'original size. Silver Armlet. Found at Downpatrick, 1835. In the possession of J. Carruthers, Belfast'. Carruthers appears to have exhibited this arm-ring twice. In the catalogue of the Great Industrial Exhibition, held in Dublin in 1853, Carruthers is noted as having exhibited a 'Silver armlet, weight 3 oz. 15 dwt.'. Sheehan observes that this was probably the same artefact

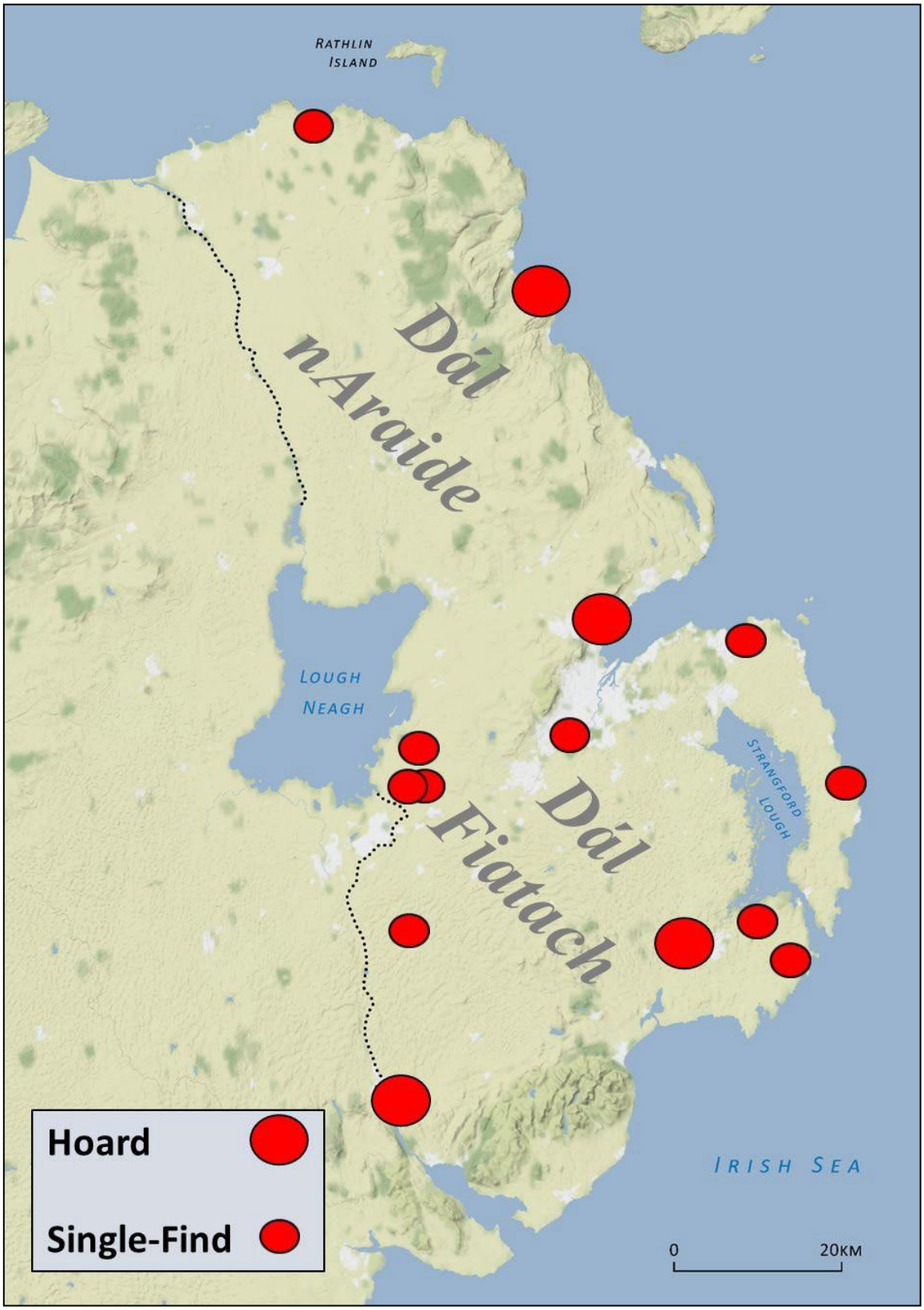



**Fig. 4.1: Map of Ulaid with its two principal sub-divisions, Dál Fiatach and Dál nAraide, showing the locations of Viking-age hoards and single-finds.**

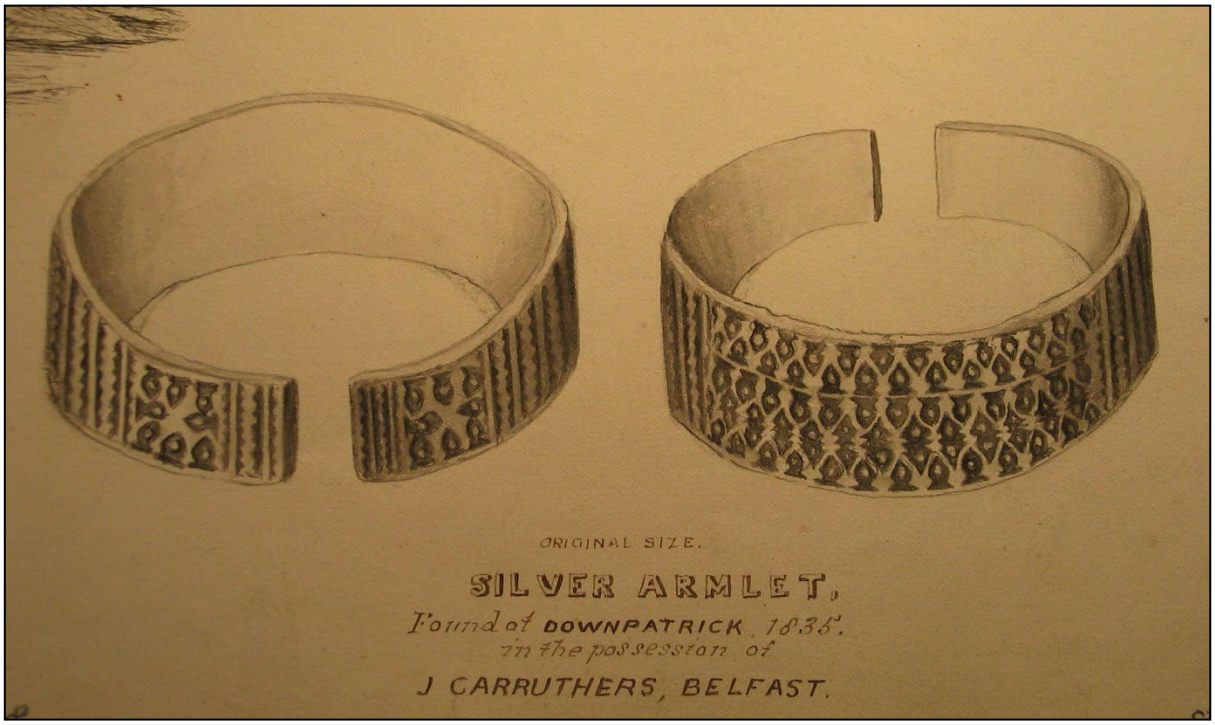



**Fig. 4.2: Broad-band arm-ring from the Magheralagan hoard illustrated in Carruther's scrapbook, *Irish Antiquities*.**

exhibited by Carruthers a year earlier at the Belfast Meeting of the British Association for the advancement of Science where it was described as a 'massive silver armlet, richly ornamented' (pers. comm.).

The Magheralagan hoard clearly contained far more silver objects than just the arm-ring and the coinage already accounted for. However, the antiquarian accounts are problematic when attempting to determine what the remainder of the hoard's components were, and whether some of it was in complete or fragmentary form. In Benn's letter to Lindsay written on the 18th June 1845, after informing Lindsay of the coinage, he mentions that there were 'also some silver rings of very rude workmanship and also some ingots of silver'. In Sainthill's 7th January letter to Smith, after mentioning the coin fragments, he mentions 'a great quantity of fragments of silver rings and one ring perfect' (Briggs & Graham-Campbell 2017, 20). There are two problems caused by the contradictions in these reports. Benn appears to describe several complete rings, while Sainthill claims that the hoard contains only one that is not fragmentary in form. Briggs and Graham-Campbell have suggested that Benn's ingots of silver may be identified with Sainthill's 'great quantity of fragments of silver rings' (Briggs & Graham-Campbell 1976, 21). Sheehan has

mentioned that Benn's ingots of silver are not mentioned in any other account of the hoard (pers. comm.), therefore, it is more likely that fragments of rings are being described here.

In the catalogue of Dublin's Great Industrial Exhibition in 1853, Carruther's 'armlet' is noted as having been 'found together with seven others and two silver forks'. Sheehan suggests that these 'seven others' may be associated with Benn's 'silver rings of very rude workmanship', and that the 'two silver forks' may be 'hack-silver fragments of a twisted or plaited neck- or arm- ring' (pers. comm.). The same is said of an 'instrument of silver, form of spatula, with spiral ends from the county of Down'. On this basis, it can be said that the contents of the hoard, apart from the complete and fragmentary dirhams and the broad-band arm-ring illustrated in Windele and Carruther's drawings, included fragments of silver arm-rings and possibly complete arm-rings and/or ingot fragments.

The deposition of the Magheralagan hoard is ascribed a date of *c*.910 (Blackburn and Pagan, 1986, 295; Sheehan 1998, 49-63) which is consistent with the majority of the Viking Age silver from Ulaid. Before the main line of Dál Fiatach moved to Dál Buinne, sometime before 850, the royal centre of Dál Fiatach was Downpatrick (MacCotter, 2008 234), only four kilometres from Magheralagan. Following this Downpatrick was the royal centre of Leth Cathail, another branch of Dál Fiatach (ibid. 234). All of the antiquarian sources provenance the hoard to either Magheralagan, 'Downpatrick' or 'near Downpatrick'. Based on the proximity of the hoard's find spot to Downpatrick, the most reasonable interpretation that can be made is that the hoard represents tribute payment, or some form of diplomatic exchange, from the Scandinavians to the Dál Fiatach sub-kingdom of Leth Cathail.

*Newry, Co. Down*

Three ingots of silver (henceforth referred to by their NMI catalogue numbers, W1, W3 and W4), in the form of oblong bars, are believed to comprise, or derive from, a hoard on the basis of a common provenance to County Down and two of them having been acquired by the same collector. The hoard is provenanced to Newry, the recorded find-location of W3 (Sheehan 1998, 199).



**Fig. 4.3: Two of the ingots from the Newry hoard (NMI W1 and W3)**

Evidence for the find is exclusive to the records of the National Museum. The three ingots are documented in William Wilde's silver catalogue of material in the Royal Irish Academy. This catalogue was left unfinished following Wilde's death in 1876, and its publication was completed by Armstrong. Wilde's catalogue describes W1 as 'found in the County Down' and W4 as 'procured from the County Down' but ascribes no provenance to W3. However, in the Royal Irish Academy's *Museum Register of Antiquities 1846-1853* W3 is noted as being from 'Newry, County Down' and this ascribes a locality to the hoard. Wilde ascribes W4 to the 'Dawson Collection', and in the RIA's *Museum Register…*, writing on W3 is interpreted as '152 D.C.'. This 'D.C.' is identified with 'Dawson Collection'. The Very Rev. Henry Richard Dawson died in 1840 after which the RIA acquired his collection.

Briggs and Graham-Campbell (1976, 23) have suggested that these ingots may derive from the Magheralagan hoard, but this is unlikely for a number of reasons. Thomas Benn is the only commentator who includes ingots among the objects from Magheralgan and it has been established that Benn's ingots most likely refer to Sainthill's 'fragments of silver rings'. The finds from Magheralagan are referred to as, either, 'from Downpatrick' or 'near Downpatrick' as Magheralagan is located three miles from Downpatrick. These ingots are all provenanced to either County Down or specifically to Newry. Dawson isn't known to have collected any of the objects from Magheralagan and none are known to have independently ended up in the collections of the Royal Irish Academy (ibid. 8). A suggestion made by Sheehan that provides further evidence that these ingots derive from the same hoard is that, because of a difference in weight that amounts to less than 1.5gm, W1 and W3 may have been made together (pers. comm). Ingots are not usually closely datable; however, the date ascribed to this hoard is determined by the unusual raised cruciform motif that occurs on the upper face of W3. This motif finds parallel in a series of cross-marked ingots in the Cuerdale hoard, deposited in c.905-910 (Sheehan 2019b, 117-18). On this basis, the Newry hoard is ascribed a late ninth/early tenth century date. This dates the hoard in consistency with the majority of the finds discussed here, in which case, it may provide further evidence for connections between the Scandinavians and the Dál Fiatach during this period. Newry is located on the edge of the sub- kingdom of Uí Echach Cobo, in Dál Fiatach, where it bounds the sub-kingdom of Ind Airthir, in the kingdom of Airgialla. Furthermore, it is located close to the innermost reaches of Carlingford Lough, *Kelingafjorðr*, the site of a significant Viking encampment in the mid-ninth and early tenth centuries (see Chapter 3).

*Ballyaghagan, Co. Antrim*

This hoard consists of four items of silver that are believed to constitute, or derive from, a hoard on the basis that they are all provenanced to Cave Hill, Co. Antrim. These objects comprise a silver arm-ring fragment, a silver penannular arm-ring fragment, a silver 'armlet' and a silver ingot (Briggs 1983; Sheehan, pers. comm.); all of these, except one, are assumed lost. The extant object is an arm-ring, acquired by the Royal Irish Academy in 1876, and survives in near complete form. It is referred to here as a fragment as both terminals have been severed.

The earliest records of this hoard are from the Belfast Exhibition of 1852 where all of these finds, except for the surviving arm-ring fragment, were mentioned. The Belfast collector James Carruthers exhibited the penannular arm-ring fragment, which the exhibition catalogue described as having been 'found together with an ingot of silver in McAirt's fort, Cave Hill, County Antrim'. No other record of this ingot is known. Matthew J. Anketell of Anketall Grove, County Monaghan exhibited an 'armlet' at this exhibition, which was described in the *Belfast Newsletter* (13/9/1852) as a 'massive silver armlet…found in McAirt's Fort, Cave Hill'. As no other record of this 'armlet' is known it is assumed lost.

The penannular arm-ring fragment was included in the sale of the Carruthers Collection in 1856. In the sale catalogue it is referred to as a 'portion of a silver armlet…found at Cave Hill, County Antrim'. It was purchased by 'Eastwood', who Sheehan identifies as the London antiques dealer George Eastwood (pers. comm.), and it is not noted in any further sources. Briggs identifies this with a fragment that the Windele papers record as 'found near Belfast, 1845', where it is sub-captioned, along with an item of prehistoric gold, as 'both in the cabinet of Jas. Carruthers Esq. Glen Cregagh, County Down'.

The Hiberno-Scandinavian broad-band arm-ring that survives, before being acquired by the RIA in 1876, formed part of the collection of Rev. Alexander Colville Welsh from Dromore, Co. Down. It has been identified by Briggs as a component of this hoard. Welsh had ascribed a provenance of 'Corn Hill, near Belfast', which Briggs has noted, is likely a mistranscription of Cave Hill (1983, 153). Sheehan has noted that, despite Lawlor's suggestion that McAirt's fort was reconstructed and occupied by the Anglo-Normans, sherds of souterrain ware discovered at the base of the cliff suggest that the artificially constructed caves beneath the cliff were probably occupied during the early medieval period (pers. comm.).

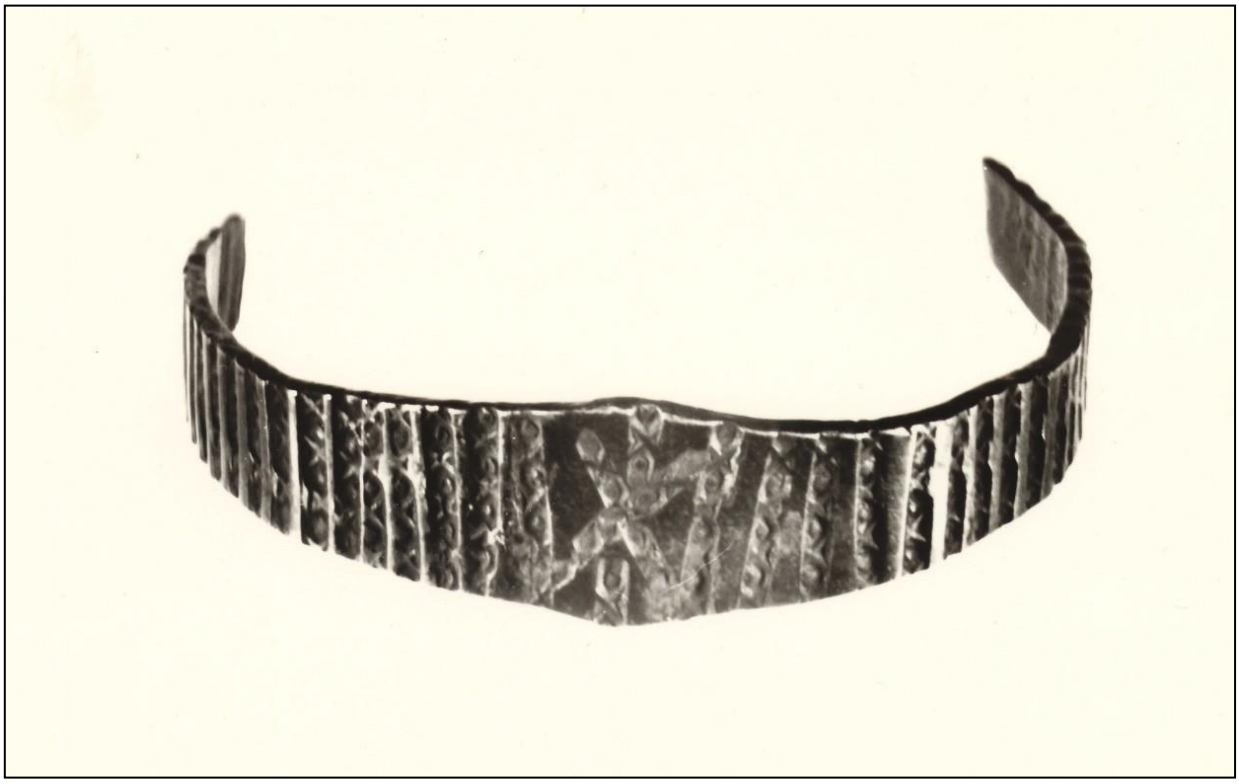


**Fig. 4.4: Broad-band arm-ring from the Ballyaghagan (Cave Hill) hoard (NMI 1876.24).**



**Fig. 4.5: View of McAirt's Fort, Cave Hill, Co. Antrim, the find-spot of the Ballyaghagan hoard.**

The type of arm-rings represented in the hoard ascribe a late ninth/early tenth century date to the hoard, in consistency with most of the Viking Age silver from Ulaid. McKay suggests that McAirt's fort, formerly known as Dún Matudáin, was the stronghold of the ninth-century king Matudán, king of Ulaid (McKay, 2000, 50-51). On this basis, the Cave Hill hoard provides a further indication of the connections established between the Norse and the Dál Fiatach in the period around the late ninth/early tenth century.

*Nr. Garron Point, Co. Antrim*

This hoard found close to Garron Point, near Cushendall, Co. Antrim, is now lost. It is known through the writings of O'Laverty, the records of both the British Museum and the Municipal Museum, Belfast and also from a photograph on file in the department of Prehistory and Europe at the British Museum. Its components include two silver annular arm-rings and a silver pin, attached to a chain by a ring. Both of the arm-rings are of annular single-rod arm-ring type and, given their similar appearance in Grey's photograph and their near identical size, it seems likely that both were made together. The third artefact consists of a pin with a perforated head, within which hangs a loose terminal ring, through which an elongated chain has been looped. This ringed pin and chain is comparable to a silver pin and chain from the burial of a Viking Age woman discovered at Ballinaby on the Island of Islay in the Inner Hebrides.

The earliest record of this hoard is in the writings of O'Laverty, in which the following is said: 'at a meeting in the Belfast Museum, November 13th, 1883, Mr. Gray exhibited a curious chain, a large pin and some armlets of fine silver, found in a fissure of rock near Garron Point' (1887, 564). Sheehan identifies Mr. Gray as the Cork-born William Gray, district officer for the Board of Works in Belfast from 1862 who involved himself in antiquarian matters of the north-east (pers. comm.). In 1905 Gray brought the hoard to the British Museum where it was photographed with a caption: 'Silver: found in a cleft of rock near Garron Point, Co. Antrim, belonging to Sir Hugh Smyley, Larne'. The hoard was exhibited on temporary loan at the Municipal Museum, Belfast, in 1907, in which its components were described as 'an elaborately wrought chain with slip rings, or beads, and pin, of superior workmanship, a pair of bracelets of small size and distinctive ornament'. This was the last record of the hoard and its current whereabouts are unknown. As is the case for Ballyaghagan, the arm-rings of the hoard are of a type that ascribe it to the late ninth/early tenth century. The contemporary political context of the hoard is the Dál nAraide *trícha cét* of Uí

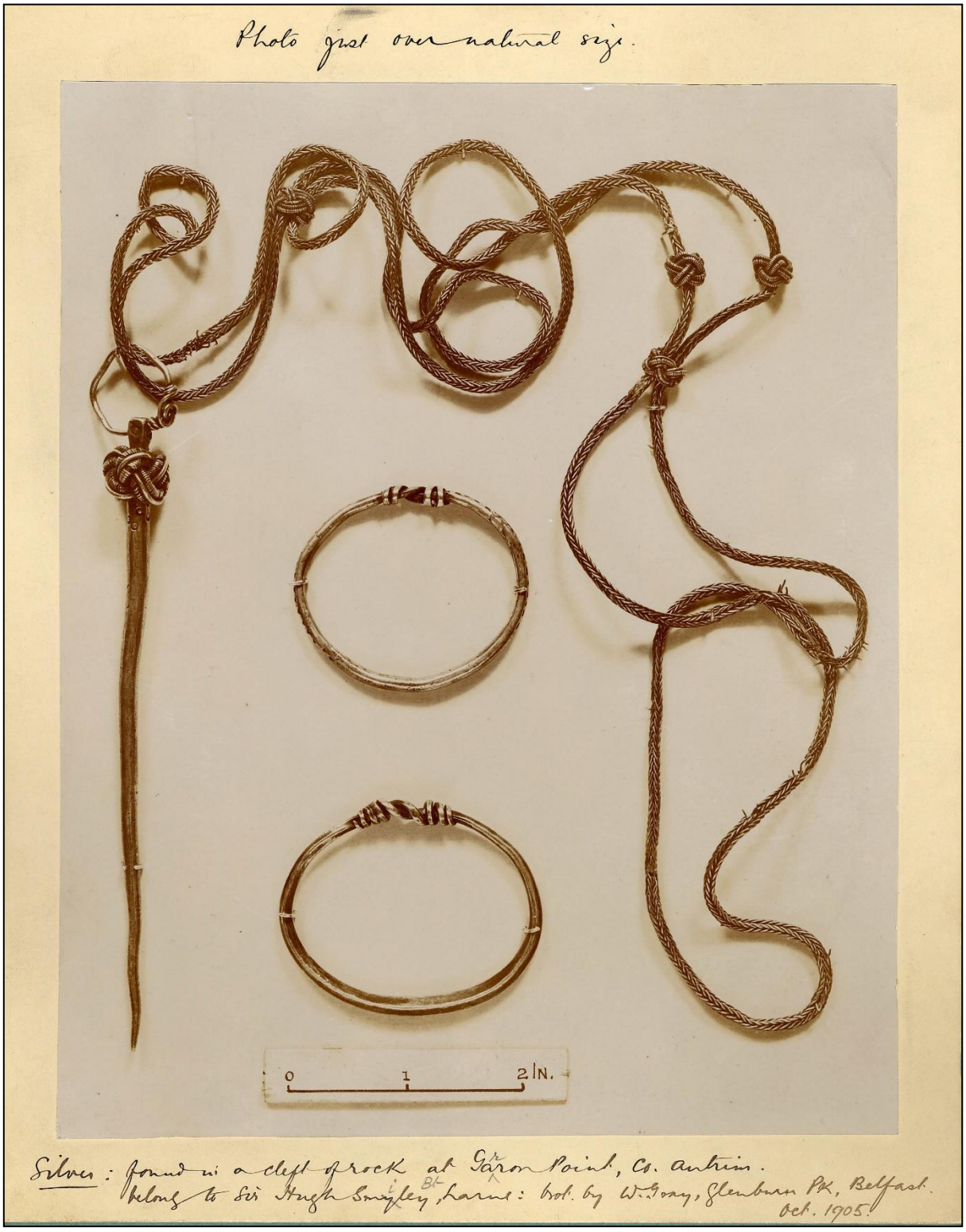



**Fig. 4.6: Photograph of the Garron Point hoard, preserved in the British Museum**



**Fig. 4.7: The 'Co. Antrim' hoard (Ulster Museum)**

Thuirtri. However, the discovery of the artefacts in the vicinity of a maritime cliff may also suggest that they represent silver lost by Scandinavians.

*'Co. Antrim'*

This hoard, with an unlocalised provenance to Co. Antrim, was found sometime in the 1980s. There are no known records of its find circumstances. It consists of four silver arm-ring fragments, two silver ingot fragments and an Anglo-Saxon coin. The London dealer who acquired the hoard provenanced it to Co. Antrim but did not ascribe it a locality. The vendor sold the hoard in New York to a collector from whom the Ulster Museum acquired it in 1990. The arm-ring fragments, three of Hiberno-Scandinavian broad-band type and one of Hiberno-Scandinavian coiled type, indicate a late ninth/early tenth century date for the hoard. However, the coin allows for more precise dating. It is a coin of Saint Edmund, with a Norwich mint signature, which, accordingly, indicates an earliest possible deposition date of *c.*905 for the hoard. Graham-Campbell has pointed

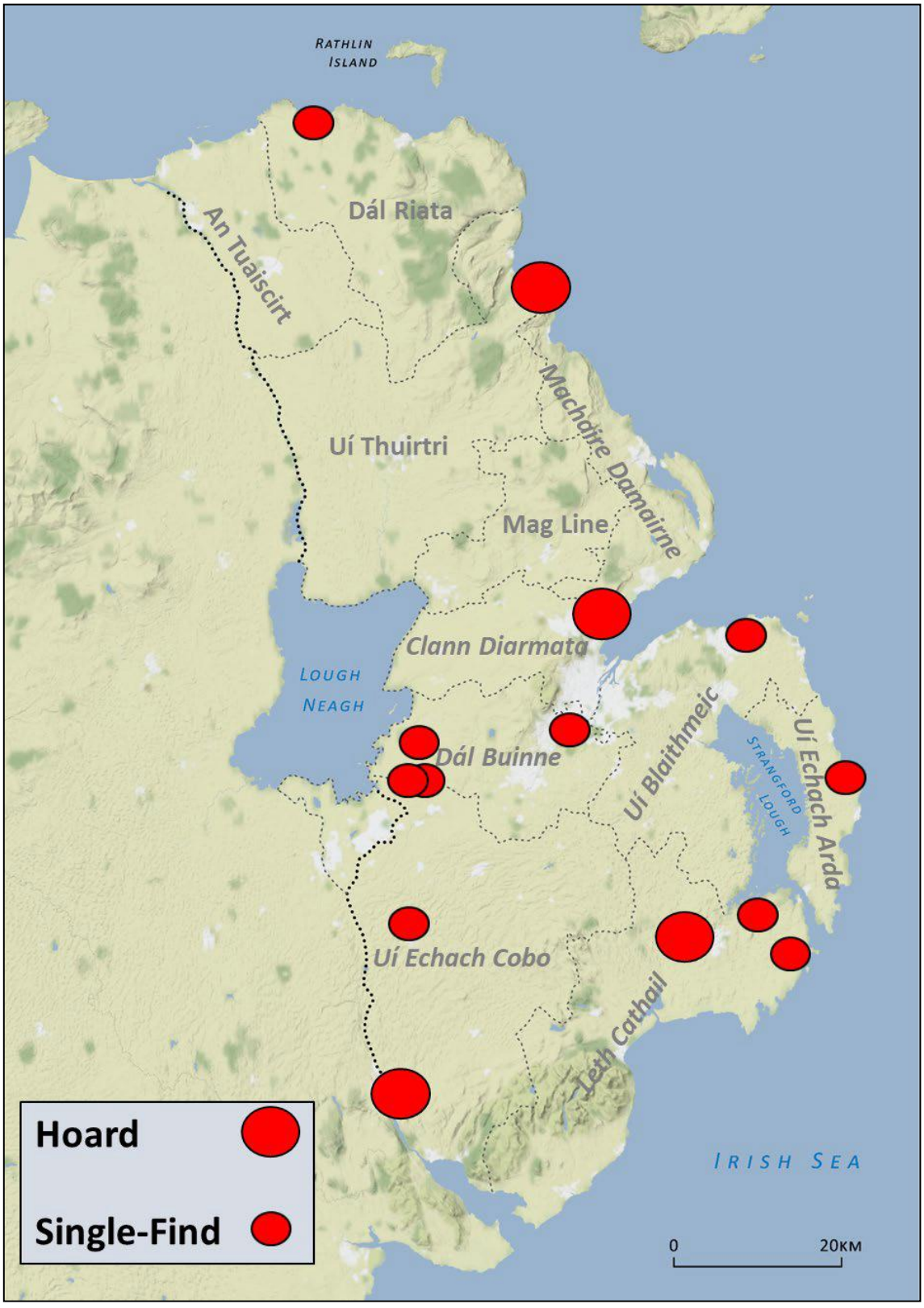



**Fig. 4.8: Map of Ulaid and its *trícha céts* (based on MacCotter 2008), showing the locations of Viking-age hoards and single-finds.**

out that the coin's good condition would indicate a deposition date of *c*.910 (1993, 80). This places it firmly in the date range of the majority of the remainder of the hoards and single-finds from Ulaid. The unknown locality of the hoard means its specific political context cannot be determined. However, on the basis that it was discovered somewhere in Co. Antrim, which, with the exception of part of Dál Buinne, was largely made up of sub-kingdoms affiliated to Dál nAraide, it may suggest a connection between the Scandinavians and this kingdom.

***Single-Finds***

*Groomsport, Co. Down*

This unique artefact was discovered in July 2017 during metal-detecting activities in a field at Groomsport, Co. Down (Sheehan 2018b, 1). It is one of fifteen Viking-age finger rings on record from Ireland and the only known example of a coiled-rod finger-ring.

In order to date the artefact, Sheehan compares the Groomsport finger-ring to arm-rings with spiral knot terminals and 'coiled-rod arm-rings', the two artefact types of which it appears to be a hybrid. Arm-rings with spiral knot terminals are rare in Britain and Ireland. An example is on record from the Cuerdale hoard which was deposited in AD 905-10 suggesting that this type of arm-ring was in production by the end of the ninth century. On the basis of their occurrence in coin-dated hoards, a ninth century Scandinavian origin is suggested, but they may not have come into widespread use before the mid-tenth century. The ring from Groomsport is comparable to the coiled-rod arm-ring type due to the double-aspect of its hoop. A minimum of twenty-six coiled-rod arm-rings are known, nineteen of which are of Irish provenance (Sheehan 1992, 41). Three coin-dated hoards are known to contain coiled-rod arm-rings. These include the Cuerdale hoard, dated to *c*.905-10 and two Irish hoards, from Dysart Island, Co. Westmeath, and the unlocalised hoard from Antrim (see above), both of which are ascribed a date of *c*. 910. On this basis, coiled-rod arm-rings must have been familiar among Hiberno-Scandinavians during the first decade of the tenth century. This suggests a late ninth century origin for their manufacture. When concluding the matter of the date of the Groomsport ring, Sheehan points out that its date lies within the ninth and tenth centuries but that it most likely dates to the early tenth century. Like the majority of non-numismatic



**Fig. 4.9: The finger-ring from Groomsport (Ulster Museum)**

Scandinavian silver from Ulaid, the Groomsport finger-ring may be ascribed a late ninth/tenth century date. However, the 'double aspect' of the hoop of the ring, as Sheehan has pointed out, suggests that it originates from the same Hiberno-Scandinavian silver-working tradition that produced coiled-rod arm-rings. Therefore, on the basis of the appearance of coiled-rod arm-rings in coin-dated hoards, the deposition date ascribed to the Groomsport finger-ring here is *c*.910.

The 'contemporary political context for Groomsport is the *trícha cét* of *Uí Blaithmere*, a sub-kingdom within the kingdom of Dal Fiatach' (Sheehan 2018b). This suggests that the Groomsport finger-ring represents some sort of connection between the Scandinavians present in Ulaid and the Uí Blaithmeic line of Dal Fiatach. The primary religious foundation of the Dál Fiatach, Bangor, is located about five kilometres from Groomsport. If the discovery of the finger-ring near to Bangor is more than coincidence, this may testify to the developing role of churches as economic centers. Sheehan notes that the immediate location of the Groomsport find is the Dál Fiatach landscape of Strangford Lough, where there was a historically attested Viking base throughout the ninth and tenth centuries. The Groomsport ring can be regarded as a piece of a larger body of archaeological

material, all of which suggests that some form of relationship was established between the Scandinavians and the line of the Dál Fiatach.

The Groomsport finger-ring, being an isolated single find, likely represents a stray loss. The location of Groomsport close to both Ballyholme, from where a Viking Age burial is recorded, and Bangor, with its important monastery, raises the question as to whether the owner of the ring was Scandinavian or Irish. It has been mentioned that if the ring were associated with the ecclesiastical settlement of Bangor that it may testify to the developing role of churches as centres of economic activity. However, Ballyholme, which is nearer to Groomsport than Bangor, is the known site of a female Scandinavian burial. As discussed in Chapter 5, the location of a woman's burial in this region of some importance as it is likely to represent permanent settlement. Indeed, it has been suggested that Ballyholme may be the site of more undisturbed burials (McErleann et al 2002, 85). If this were the case, the Groomport finger-ring may have belonged to a Scandinavian settled in the area. This is a question that can only be brought closer to an answer upon further excavation. However, even if the owner of the ring were Scandinavian, a settlement would more than likely have existed only in agreement with local authorities. On this basis the Groomport finger-ring is categorized within the body of archaeology providing evidence for the connections established between the Norse and the Dál Fiatach.

*Walshestown, Co. Down*

This artefact was discovered on the southern shore of Strangford Lough in March 2015 by metal detecting in a field. It is to be identified as a Hiberno-Scandinavian broad-band arm-ring, now in two pieces (Sheehan 2016a).

The Hiberno-Scandinavian broad-band arm-ring is the most common product of Ireland's Hiberno-Scandinavian silver-working tradition, where about 160 examples have been discovered. They were mainly produced during the fifty-year period of *c*.880-930. Unusually, the Walshestown arm-ring is plain, lacking any stamped decoration. There are no incidences of plain broad-band arm-rings appearing in coin-dated hoards in Ireland, but there have been a substantial number discovered in the Cuerdale hoard, deposited *c*.905-10, on which basis it appears they were already




**Fig. 4.10: The arm-ring from Walshestown (Ulster Museum)**

familiar in Ireland by the close of the ninth century (Sheehan 2014, 201).

The *trícha cét* of Leth Cathall, in the kingdom of Dál Fiatach, forms the contemporary political context of the Walshetown find. Walshetown is located north-east of Downpatrick, the main Dál Fiatach royal site, and the exact location of the find is in a field which slopes gently downwards towards the shoreline of Strangford Lough. Of all the Viking-age archaeology associated with Strangford Lough (see Chapter 3), this is the only Scandinavian artefact discovered on the lough itself.

As a single find this artefact may represent a stray loss. However, its discovery on the shore of Strangford Lough makes this less certain than it is for other isolated finds. The artefact was discovered with the use of a metal detector which makes it unlikely that there are more metal artefacts deposited in its immediate vicinity. A plain arm-ring is unlikely to have been used as anything other than bullion and, therefore, commercial activity must be represented by this find. However, because of the frequent use of Strangford Lough as a military encampment by the

Vikings, the discovery of a Hiberno-Scandinavian artefact in this location may suggest that such a base was, at some point, situated in the southern part of the lough. Walshetown would have been a strategic location in the important area north-east of Downpatrick, though more relevant finds would be required to make this suggestion anything more than speculation. However, it must be noted that, while attempts have been made in the past to connect finds to Strangford Lough, such as the Ballyholme burial and the Magheralagan hoard (McErleann 2003), this arm-ring is the only Viking-age artefact on record discovered on Strangford Lough, not just in its general region.

*Poobles, Co. Antrim*

This find comprises two pieces of hack-silver discovered within five days of each other in September 2012 during metal-detecting in a field in Poobles, Co. Antrim. The first of these is a fragment of an ingot, while the other is a fragment of a Hiberno-Scandinavian broad-band arm-ring. Sheehan has suggested that these may be the remnants of a dispersed hoard (2013). However, as no other silver has been discovered in their vicinity they are listed here among the isolated finds. Ingots are not closely datable but all coin-dated hoards containing ingots from Ireland are of tenth century date. Sheehan points out that ingots must have been in circulation since the middle of the ninth century (2014, 196-97), and on that basis this piece of ingot-derived hack-silver could, therefore, date to any point between the mid-ninth and late tenth centuries. However, the arm-ring fragment from Poobles allows more precise dating. The finds were apparently discovered within 5 to 10 metres of each other and, therefore, are more than likely associated with one another. On this basis, the presence of a Hiberno-Scandinavian broad-band arm-ring fragment dates both finds to from *c*.880 to *c*.930. This places the finds from Poobles in a similar timeframe to most of the Scandinavian material from the Dál Fiatach landscape.

The hack-silver items from Poobles occur in the *trícha cét* of Dál Buinne, within the kingdom of Dál Fiatach. Dal Buinne, in the ninth century, served as the base for the main line of Dál Fiatach, and the *trícha cét* contains the royal *dún*, Duneight, and the *óenach* site of Cráeb Túlcha. Neither of these locations is particularly close to the find location of the Poobles hack-silver, but it remains possible that the artefacts derive from a hoard that was in the ownership of the Dál Buinne.

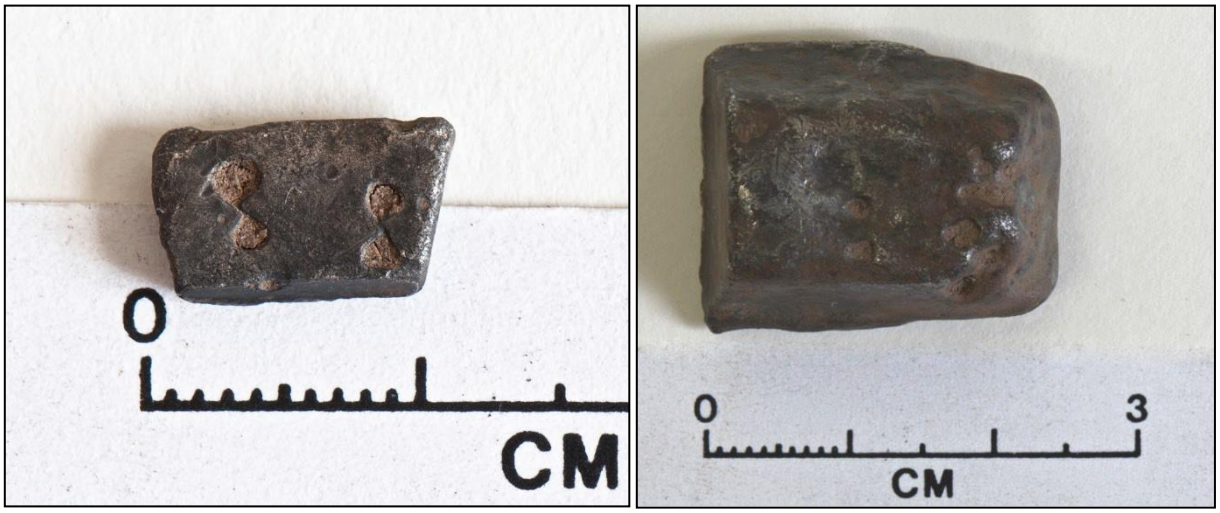



**Fig. 4.11: Hack-silver from Poobles, Co. Antrim (Ulster Museum)**

These two finds, of late ninth/early tenth century date, definitely contribute to the paradigm of a significant commercial relationship established between the Scandinavians and the Dál Fiatach in the period. The *tícha cét* of Dál Buinne would have been a prominent force in the maintenance of these connections due to its location to the west of Strangford Lough and to the east of Lough Neagh, two havens frequently utilized by the Scandinavians throughout the ninth and tenth centuries. Also, a contribution to the image of commercial activity is the nature of the artefacts themselves. Hack-silver is unlikely to have been used for any reason other than to facilitate economic transactions. Furthermore, due to the location of the find, the final owner(s) of the ingot and the arm-ring were far more likely to have been Irish than Scandinavian, on which basis, commercial activity would have to have taken place. Overall, the nature of this find, Scandinavian objects specifically reduced to hack-silver for economic activity, discovered in the heart of a significant Dál Fiatach *trícha cét*, confirms that commercial connections were established by the two parties during the late ninth/early tenth century.

*Ballylesson. Co. Down*

This object has been identified as a fragment of a Hiberno-Scandinavian broad-band arm-ring (Sheehan, 2018a). It was discovered in October 2016 during metal-detecting in a field in the townland of Ballylesson, Co. Down.




**Fig. 4.12: Hack-silver from Ballylesson, Co. Down (Ulster Museum)**

There are no traces of stamped ornamentation on the fragment and it has therefore been identified as a fragment of a plain Hiberno-Scandinavian broad-band arm-ring. Therefore, the ring from which this hack-silver fragment was cut must have been manufactured during the fifty-year period of *c*.880-*c*.930 (Sheehan 2014, 202). It has been mentioned there are no plain broad-band arm-rings on record from coin-dated hoards from Ireland. However, there appearance in the Cuerdale hoard, which was deposited *c*.905-10, suggests that they were already familiar in Ireland by the end of the ninth century.

Ballylesson forms part of the civil parish of Drumbo, which, like Poobles, forms part of the *trícha cét* territorial unit of Dál Buinne which, centred on north-east Down and south Antrim, was the main base of the Dál Fiatach in the ninth century. On this basis, the Ballylesson hack-silver fragment and the fragments of hack-silver from Poobles may signify political connections between the Scandinavians and this particular Dál Fiatach *trícha cét*.

A late ninth/early tenth century date is ascribed to the object because it represents a fragment of a Hiberno-Scandinavian broad-band arm-ring. On this basis it does fall within the same date range as the material discussed thus far. The location of the find in a significant Dál Fiatach *trícha cét* classifies it within the same body of archaeological material testifying to Scandinavian/Dál Fiatach

relations during the period. The absence of any other archaeology in the immediate vicinity suggests that the find represents a stray loss. However, 'Farrell's Fort', an early medieval ringfort located 0.75km south of the find spot, may provide further political context for the fragment.

*Ballinderry, Co. Antrim*

This artefact has been identified as a Hiberno-Scandinavian broad-band arm-ring that has been folded and flattened by hammering. It was discovered in 2019 during metal-detecting activity in the townland of Ballinderry, near Aghalee, Co. Antrim, close to the eastern side of Lough Neagh (Sheehan 2019a).

The arm-ring is of broad-band type and is, therefore, datable to the late ninth/early tenth century. It is ornamented by bar-stampings, as are most broad-band arm-rings. Obliquely disposed rows of chevrons pointing towards the terminal areas, each featuring stamped diagonal crosses, are the most prominent decorative feature of the Ballinderry find. These are created with the use of a bar-stamp with serrated edges. This type of ornamentation is a common feature on the broad-band arm-ring type, and two other broad-band arm-rings from the north of Ireland bear this form of ornamentation. These include a hack-silver fragment from the unlocalized hoard from Co. Antrim (see above) and an incomplete arm-ring from a hoard from Carowmore, Glentogher, Co. Donegal (Ó Ríordáin 1935).

The folding and flattening of arm-rings is an activity associated with hoarding. It may have been undertaken for ease of packing as appears to have been the case in the hoards from Huxley and the Vale of York, or, alternatively, they may have been folded in different ways in order to render them identifiable by their respective owners. It has been suggested that this was the case at Galloway where arm-rings are folded in four different ways (Sheehan, 2019a, 5-6).

Like the finds from Poobles and Ballylesson, the Ballinderry find derives from the territory of the Dál Fiatach *trícha cét* of Dál Buinne. On this basis, it may be assumed that the arm-ring represents connections between the Scandinavians and this particular political group in the north-east Down/south Antrim region.



**Fig. 4.13: Broad-band arm-ring from Ballinderry, Co. Down (Ulster Museum)**

The Ballinderry arm-ring was discovered on the south-eastern shoreline of Lough Neagh on the bank of one of its tributaries Portmore Lough. Historical sources indicate that Lough Neagh was an important Viking encampment throughout the ninth and tenth centuries. In the years 839, 840 and 841 it was one of the earliest locations at which Scandinavians overwintered in Ireland.

The Ballinderry find, being a Hiberno-Scandinavian broad-band arm-ring, is datable to c.880-c.930. This places it in the body of archaeology emphasizing the connections between the Scandinavians and the Dál Fiatach in the late ninth and early tenth centuries. The ornamentation on the arm-ring suggests that, unless it was folded and flattened upon its manufacture, it could potentially have been used for display purposes before being folded and flattened. However, because the broad-band arm-ring appears to have come into use originally for economic purposes, this possibility remains slight. The evidence of the hoards from Huxley, Galloway and the Vale of York indicates that the folding and flattening of arm-rings was an activity associated with hoarding. This means that the Ballinderry arm-ring may have been a component of a hoard at some stage during its existence. However, the absence of any contemporary archaeology in its immediate vicinity suggests that the find represents a stray loss. However, the folding and flattening of the

arm-ring does indicate that it was intended for commercial activity at the time of its deposition. Based on the presence of the Ballinderry arm-ring in the contemporary territory of Dál Buinne, as well as that of the finds from Poobles and Ballylesson, it may be assumed that the Scandinavians formed some sort of connections to this particular *trícha cét*. Of particular significance is the arm-rings proximity to Lough Neagh. It has been mentioned that Lough Neagh was one of the first locations at which Scandinavians are known to have overwintered in Ireland. Lough Neagh also played a significant role in the surge of Viking activity in the north in the early decades of the tenth century (see Chapter 3).

*Brickland, Co. Down*

This artefact has been identified as a fragment of a gold ingot. It was found in a field in the townland of Lough Brickland, Co. Down, during metal-detecting activity (Sheehan 2012b).

The ingot took the form of an oblong bar of sub-rectangular section. Both faces of the fragment are rippled from transverse hammering creating parallel ridges. The terminal of the fragment is of rounded form. The Brickland hack-gold has been dated to the mid-ninth and tenth centuries on the basis of finds from Britain and Ireland that (a) represent hack-gold derived from ingots rather than ornaments and (b) feature the same transverse hammering as the object from Brickland (Sheehan 2012b). The Brickland hack-gold is not as closely datable as the remainder of the Scandinavian silver single-finds in Ulaid, largely due to the scarcity of Viking-age gold in comparison to silver. There are three examples of ingot-derived hack-gold on record from a crannóg at Moynagh Lough, Co. Meath, as well as a single-find from Dublin. From Britain there are a few finds of gold ingots or hack-gold, including examples from the 'Great Army' winter-camp at Torksey, Lincolnshire, dating to 872/3. Transverse hammering is a common feature on Viking-age silver ingots, including examples in the Cuerdale hoard (c.910). On the basis of these parallels, the Brickland hack-gold is ascribed the broad date of c.850 – c.1000.

The contemporary political context of the Brickland find is the *trícha cét* of Uí Echach Cobo, a sub-kingdom of Dál Fiatach. Warner has suggested that a crannóg on the eastern side of Lough Brickland may have been its royal site (1994, 61). The Uí Echach Cobo held the over-kingship of Ulaid twice during the ninth century from 825 and 898 AD.




**Fig. 4.14: Hack-gold ingot from Lough Brickland, Co. Down (Ulster Museum)**

On the basis the evidence discussed above, the Brickland hack-gold could date to any point between *c.*850 and *c.*1000 AD. Therefore, it can only be confirmed broadly contemporary to the majority of the material from Ulaid (c.880-c.930 AD). However, the most reasonable interpretation of the hack-gold based on this report, would be that it testifies to some type of relations between the Scandinavians and the Uí Echach Cobo.

*Inishargy, Co. Down*

This arm-ring is an example of Scotto-Scandinavian 'ring-money'. It was discovered during the clearance of stones from a ploughed field on the slope of a hill in the townland of Inishargy, Co. Down (Sheehan 2012a). The contemporary political context of the find is the *trícha cét* of Uí Echach Arda, a sub-kingdom of Dál Fiatach.

'Ring-money' is a term generally understood to refer to a particular type of silver ring found in Scotland's Viking Age hoards. Ring-money is described as a 'distinctive type of silver ring

manufactured in Scandinavian Scotland during the period between the mid-tenth and the mid-eleventh century' (Sheehan 2016b, 271). The origins of ring-money are seen in a group of early tenth-century hoards from Ireland and northern England. Rod arm-rings from these hoards form the prototype of 'developed' ring money, which is characteristic of Scandinavian Scotland in the later Viking Age (Graham-Campbell and Sheehan, 2007). The Inishargy ring is an example of this developed ring-money. Coin-dated hoards in which they appear date this arm-ring type to the period between the mid-tenth and mid-eleventh century. There have been relatively few discoveries of Scotto-Scandinavian ring-money in Ireland. The type appears in only five hoards, two of which are coin-dated.

The ring-money was discovered 130 metres downslope from the early medieval ecclesiastical enclosure at Inishargy. Inishargy, notably, is located close to Strangford Lough. The place-name may have derived from *Inis Carraige*, 'the rocky island', or, alternatively, it may have derived from the Old Irish *Inis Airge*, 'the land of the summer milking place'. If the latter were the case, the second element of the name was borrowed into Old Norse in the northern Irish Sea and as far up as the Faroe Islands as *ærgi* (Fellows-Jensen 1980).




**Fig. 4.14: Arm-ring from Inishargy, Co. Down (Ulster Museum)**

In his report on the arm-ring, a considerable emphasis is placed by Sheehan on the possibility of Scandinavians resident at the site (2012a). Sheehan references a report in the Annals of the Four Masters from the year 846 that accounts for raids on three church sites in Meath by the King of Ailech that were 'against the foreigners'. Downham has suggested that these may have been Vikings billeted at these sites by the Kings of Brega as part of a political alliance (Downham, 2003/04, 240). Therefore, if Scandinavians were resident at the ecclesiastical site at Inishargy, it could be for political reasons. However, is also likely that the location of the Inishargy ring-money 'could be interpreted as testifying to the developing role of monasteries as market centres during the tenth century' (Sheehan 2012). Regardless, the Inishargy ring-money should be interpreted as evidence for the persistence of the connections between the Scandinavians and the Ulaid, specifically with Uí Echach Arda, into the later Viking Age.

*White Park Bay, Co. Antrim*

This ingot, complete, is in the form of an oblong bar of plano-convex cross section. One end is rounded in form, while the other is sub-rectangular. The convex surface is pitted from the mould. It was found at White Park Bay, on the northern shoreline of Co. Antrim, well-known for its five-kilometer long beach with extensive sand dunes (pers. comm. Ulster Museum).

The political context for the find is the *trícha cét* of Dál Riata, which also includes Rathlin Island, in the kingdom of Dál nAraide. The main royal centre of Dál Riata was Dunservick/Dún Sebuirge, on the cliffs that overlook White Park Bay.

*Killard Upper, Co. Down*

The object was found in November 2019 by a metal-detectorist in a field of stubble in the townland of Killard Upper, near Ballyhornan, Co. Down (pers. comm. Ulster Museum). It is a gold ingot, complete, in the form of an oblong bar of plano-convex cross section with rounded ends. Both surfaces of the ingot's wider end have been slightly flattened by hammering.

Killard Upper, overlooking Ballyhornan Bay, is on the western side of the mouth of Strangford Lough where it opens into the Irish Sea. The political context for the find is the *trícha cét* of Leth Cathall, an early medieval sub-kingdom within Dál Fiatach. Killard Upper is in the civil parish of Kilclief, named after an early monastery close to which, in 2005, a stone was discovered which bears a graffiti of a Scandinavian-style ship (McCormick and Kastholm 2017). This is also the find-spot of a fragment of a Kufic coin, discussed in Chapter 5.

***Conclusions***

It has been noted above that the distribution of Scandinavian silver hoards in Ireland suggests that a considerable amount of the Scandinavian silver discovered in Ireland was in Irish ownership at the time of its deposition. On this basis, the interpretation made here of the majority of these finds is that they represent interaction between the Scandinavians and the authorities among the Ulaid, and that much of this interaction was political. Although the hoards suggest that connections were established throughout Ulaid, with no particular emphasis on one over-kingdom, the isolated finds certainly place a strong emphasis on Dál Fiatach (see Fig. 4.8).

The distribution of the isolated finds in comparison to the hoards raises a reasonable question. Is it possible that this change in the distribution trends is more likely to represent the activities of metal detectorists in the region south of Belfast than to reflect the Viking Age politics of Ulaid? However, because historical evidence is available for a prominent power in Dál Fiatach, this inevitably influences the conclusion of the chapter. Allowing the archaeological record to speak for itself, independently of any historical sources, emphasis must be placed, primarily, on the dating and observation of the artefacts.

The most represented artefact among the Scandinavian silver of Ulaid is the Hiberno-Scandinavian broad-band arm-ring. The finds from Walshetown, Poobles and Ballylesson represent plain broad-band arm-rings. If an arm-ring lacks ornamentation, it surely was not primarily used for display purposes. Therefore, these discoveries must represent commercial activity. The hoards from Magheralagan, Ballyaghagan, Ballinderry and the unlocalised Antrim hoard represent broad-band arm-rings ornamented by bar-stamping. The Hiberno-Scandinavian broad-band arm-ring was the

most common object used in Dublin's bullion economy during the Early Viking Age, indicating any broad-band arm-ring discovered in Britain or Ireland is most likely to have served a commercial purpose. Although a broad-band arm-ring ornamented by bar-stamping could potentially have been used for display purposes, this could not have been the case for any of the examples in Ulaid, certainly not at the time of their deposition. The arm-rings from Magheralagan, Ballyaghagan and Antrim were deposited in hoards, and the Ballinderry find had been folded and flattened, indicating that these artefacts were part of the bullion economy at the time of their deposition. Ingots or fragments of ingots are represented in the finds from Newry, Ballyaghagan, Antrim, Poobles and White Park Bay. Ingots certainly represent commercial activity.

The finger-ring from Groomsport and the ringed-pin-and-chain from the hoard found near Garron Point are more distinct artefacts. It has been mentioned that the Groomsport finger-ring is located close to the site of the Ballyholme burial and may have belonged to a Scandinavian resident in the area. However, if domestic settlement took place, this would further emphasise the extent of interaction between the Scandinavians and the Dál Fiatach. The ringed-pin-and-chain from near Garron Point, although likely manufactured for display purposes, is believed to have been part of the hoard. It has been mentioned that the location of this hoard may represent the connections established between the Norse and Uí Thuirtri, or the adjacent Dál Riata, or its maritime location might suggest material lost by Scandinavians.

Nearly all of these finds date to the late ninth or early tenth century, c.880-c.930. The two exceptions are the piece of hack-gold from Brickland and the Scotto-Scandinavian ring-money from Inishargy. The Brickland hack-gold is ascribed the more broad-date of c.850-c.1000, which is still similar enough to contribute to the same picture as the remainder of the material. The Inishargy ring-money is of late tenth-century date but should, nonetheless, be interpreted as evidence for the endurance of the Scandinavian impact on Ulaid, even if on a smaller scale, into the later Viking Age.

The distribution of hoards and single-finds within the north and east Down/south Antrim region strongly suggests that commercial activity involving the Norse and the Dál Fiatach took place on a large scale in the period around the late ninth/early tenth century. The finds from White Park

Bay and near Garron Point indicate that the Scandinavians commercial network also reached the *trích céts* of Dál nAraide, even if on a smaller scale. However, to suggest that the Norse impacted Dál nAraide on a similar scale to Dál Fiatach would require further discoveries.

The artefacts from Groomsport and Walshetown could potentially be associated with the Viking encampment on Strangford Lough. The same must be said of the Ballinderry arm-ring and the Poobles hack-silver, all of which are from close to the shores of Lough Neagh. This raises the question of the importance of *longphuirt* in Ulaid. It has been established that the vast majority of Scandinavian silver deposited in Ulaid dates to the period around the late ninth and early tenth centuries, the time of the *longphuirt*. The concentration on the kingdom of Dál Fiatach must reflect the social and political circumstances of their deposition. On this basis it can be concluded that the Scandinavians were involved in considerable commercial activity in the kingdom of Ulaid during the late ninth and early tenth centuries and that connections with the Dál Fiatach were important in establishing this network.

# CHAPTER FIVE

## Viking-Age Burials in Ulaid

A considerable portion of Ireland's Viking Age Norse burials discovered outside of Dublin are provenanced to the territory of Ulaid. In their catalogue of Ireland's Scandinavian burials (2014), Stephen Harrison and Raghnall Ó Floinn record twenty examples of what they believe to be burials of this type outside of Co. Dublin. The territory of Ulaid contains seven of these (Fig. 6.1), more than the territory of any other early medieval kingdom. These include the burial of a Viking warrior from Larne, Co. Antrim, the burial of a Scandinavian woman from Ballyholme Bay, Co. Down, the burial of a warrior in a churchyard at St. John's Point, Co. Down, and a Scandinavian burial cluster on Church Bay, Rathlin Island, Co. Antrim.

Burial evidence representing the inhumation of warriors provides key insights into the movements of the Vikings. However, a warrior burial (an assemblage including weapons of a Late Iron Age Scandinavian type), on its own does not indicate a long-lasting Scandinavian presence at a location as the Vikings are known to have shown mobility in their military operations. The territory of Ulaid, thus far, has yielded evidence for the inhumation of at least two Viking warriors. The warrior burial from Larne is situated in an area with toponymical evidence, giving rise to the potential of a long-lasting Norse presence here during the Viking Age. The inhumation of the warrior burial at Saint John's Point in a church site suggests specific circumstances that will be discussed below.

Burials of women accompanied by artefacts such as oval brooches, however, indicate that the Scandinavian presence at a location served more than just a military purpose. A female burial suggests that domestic activity took place among the community of the dead woman and, therefore, that permanent settlement must have taken place or have been intended to take place. It should be noted that the assemblage from Ballyholme Bay represents the only Scandinavian burial discovered outside the Greater Dublin area likely to be that of a woman. However, what is problematic is the absence of any direct evidence for domestic Scandinavian settlement (housing plots, hearths etc.). The absence of such settlement

archaeology means that an analysis of the Norse burials in Ulaid cannot provide a definite answer to the question of Scandinavian settlement in Ulaid, only suggest that it is likely to have taken place.

It has been suggested that the Scandinavian burial and toponymical evidence from Ulaid only represents temporary occupation (Graham-Campbell and Batey 1998, 95). However, the existing evidence does suggest that the Norse presence in Ulaid was as strong as would have been required for permanent settlement. The purpose of this chapter is to analyse and conclude the evidence associated with these burial sites. Four case studies on each of the burial sites will form the core part of the chapter. The discovery and history, and previous commentary on each of these sites will be discussed and the artefacts or other aspects of the burials that provide the most important information, such as dates for the burials, will be considered. The overall picture provided by the analysis of the burials will form the chapter's conclusion.

***Ballyholme***

This assemblage of artefacts, representing the grave of a Scandinavian woman, was discovered by workmen levelling a ridge on the site of an elevation at Ballyholme Bay, Co. Down, in 1903. Information on the discovery and provenance of this burial is attributed to the accounts of the antiquarians Seaton F. Milligan and Robert Cochrane. Milligan's brief note, written in 1906, is the earliest surviving account of this burial. Two publications were made in the same year by Cochrane who was then the honorary secretary for the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland (Harrison and Ó Floinn 2014, 598). Milligan's note, entitled 'Danish finds from Ireland', is very brief. He records that he was sent for by the landowner to look at the grave goods and he identified them as 'relics of the Viking period' (Milligan 1906, 206). Cochrane's account includes detailed information about the excavation and detailed analyses of the artefacts as well as an illustration of the brooch ornamentation. Harrison and Ó Floinn note that Cochrane includes 'topographical and other information' that Milligan does not and, given that Milligan was resident in Bangor at the time, this suggests that Cochrane either visited the site or questioned witnesses closely (Harrison and Ó Floinn 2014, 598).

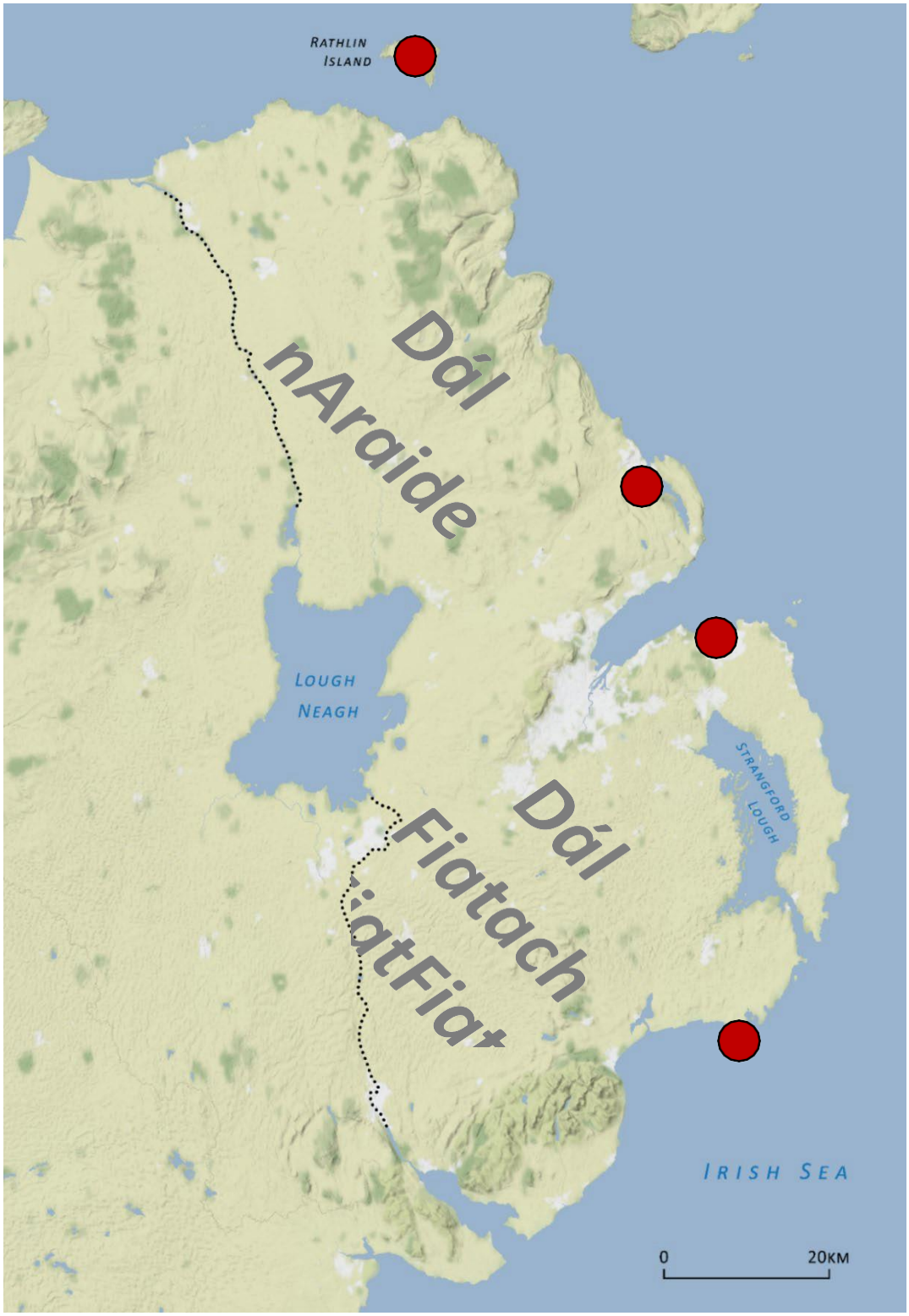



**Fig. 5.1: Map of Ulaid with its two principal sub-divisions, Dál Fiatach and Dál nAraide, showing the locations of Viking-age burials.**

The most significant finds from the site are two Scandinavian oval brooches of ninth-century date. The landowner referred to these as a 'tobacco box' (ibid. 599). This suggests that they were deposited back to back, similar to the Scandinavian oval brooches discovered in the grave of a woman at Claughton Hall, Lancashire (Griffiths 2010, 91). It is conceivable that this represents a regional burial practice connecting the Scandinavians in Ireland to those in the north-west of England. A damaged bronze bowl of insular manufacture was also discovered. This may be interpreted as an insular relic that ended up in the ownership of a Scandinavian woman as a result of Viking raiding. Cochrane stated that a 'piece of fine chain' was attached to the bowl. Milligan noted that 'a quantity of what I though was human hair, light or fair in colour' was found inside the bowl. Bones were recorded as found within the grave cut in both Milligan and Cochrane's accounts (Harrison and Ó Floinn 2014, 604). All of these components are assumed lost except the brooches and bowl, which are in the National Museum. It is the brooches and the burial's location that provide the most significant information.

*The oval brooches*

The presence of oval brooches indicates that this is the burial of a woman. Both of these (113 & 114) are single-shelled oval brooches of Rygh Type 647 and Petersen Type 37.3. 113 is mostly intact, but 114 is badly damaged. Both have hinge- and catch-plates, indicating the former presence of an iron pin. Bender-Jorgensen noted the impression of a 'tabby weave' on the back of one of the brooches, presumably 113 (ibid., 602-603). Brooches of this type are dated to the ninth century on the basis of Petersen's proposal that they came into use during the early ninth century and persisted into the centuries' second half. Harrison and Ó Floinn are firm in the belief that this dates the burial to the ninth century. Graham-Campbell has identified this brooch type as the most common oval brooch type of the early Viking Age. At least five hundred examples are on record from across the Viking World (Graham-Campbell 1980, 27). Ballyholme contains two of the Irish examples from graves,



**Fig. 5.2: The likely location of the Ballyholme burial**



**Fig. 5.3: The Ballyholme oval brooches**

the remainder are from the Kilmainham/Islandbridge burial complex and other locations in Dublin. Petersen Type 37.3 brooches may have seen the end of their production in the second half of the ninth century, but that is not to say that a pair could not remain in use at the beginning of the tenth. The brooches from Ballyholme were certainly manufactured in the ninth century and they appear well worn in comparison to other finds of Scandinavian oval brooches. On this basis, the Ballyholme brooches are ascribed a deposition date of c.850 to c.910.

*The burial location and place name*

Milligan notes that the find was made 'not far from the seashore, about a mile from Bangor, County Down…(at) the top of a slight elevation' (Milligan 1906, 206). Cochrane provides a far more detailed description where he notes that the artefacts were 'found in a hillock on a portion of the raised beach at Ballyholme, between Bangor and Groomsport, County Down…where the ground was being excavated for building purposes' (Harrison and Ó Floinn 2014, 600). Elsewhere he notes that a 'small rivulet, which has formed a deep ravine, divides the hill from the adjoining ground and the sea is in front'. Harrison and Ó Floinn have identified this as a site that saw the construction of a number of houses between 1901 and 1926. Cochrane's emphasis on a 'rivulet' suggests that the find was made on the plot of the easternmost house or a plot of land next to it. A stream entering the Irish Sea at Ballyholme Bay cuts this site off to the west from the surrounding land.

The place-name 'Ballyholme' is possibly a combination of the Irish word *baile* and the Old Norse *holmr*. Harrison and Ó Floinn state this would mean 'river meadow'. The Old Norse *holm*r denotes an 'island' or an 'inlet' (Zoega 1910, 178). Hughes and Hannon (1992, 153-4) agree that this is a possibility, but they classify Ballyholme as 'meaning uncertain'. Oftedal (1976, 127), when discussing place-name compounds says that they are 'not Norse names', and quotes Liam Price who argues that there are no *baile* place-names datable to before c.1150. Fellows-Jensen argues that *baile* may date to the tenth century, but Harrison and Ó Floinn do not associate this with the burial because of its ninth- century date (Harrison and Ó Floinn 2014, 601). However, according to Gregory Toner, *baile* is mentioned in a glossary attributed to Cormaic mac Cuilennáin, who died in 908 (Toner 2004, 31).



**Fig. 5.4: The Ballyholme bowl**

On this basis, *baile* had the potential to be used at the time of the inhumation at Ballyholme. A partially Norse place-name would indicate that Scandinavians were prominent in the area.

The Ballyholme coastal area is situated close to the Copeland Islands, a name that derives from the Old Norse *Kaupmanneyjar*, 'Merchant's Island' (Mac Giolla Easpaig 2002, 457). It is also close to Groomsport, where a Hiberno-Scandinavian silver ring, of late ninth/early tenth-century date, was discovered in 2017. Ballyholme is also located 2.5km from Bangor, an early medieval ecclesiastical site that was the main religious site of the Dál Fiatach, a sub- kingdom within the kingdom of Ulaid. Permanent settlement close to Bangor, which is known to have functioned throughout the ninth and tenth centuries despite Viking raids in the years 823 and 824, would likely indicate that agreements and political arrangements were being made. The Ballyholme burial, being of late ninth/early tenth century date, is classifiable alongside the silver objects from Groomsport, Walshetown, Poobles and Ballylesson, and the hoards from Magheralagan, Newry and Cave Hill, as a body of archaeological evidence providing evidence for the diplomatic connections between the Scandinavians and the Dál Fiatach during this period.

***Larne***

This burial was discovered on November 7th 1840 by workmen during the construction of a railway line near Larne, Co. Antrim. It was the burial of a Viking warrior with a Petersen Type X Sword, a Petersen Type K/Dublin Type Spearhead, a ringed-pin and a comb. The grave goods are currently on loan to the Ulster Museum, Belfast. The skull, the only part of the skeleton that remains, was identified by Harrison and Ó Floinn in Trinity College, Dublin (2014, 643).

The grave goods from Larne, which had been assumed lost, were re-identified by Fanning at Alnwick Castle during his study of Viking Age ringed-pins (Fanning 1970). Publications were made by Davis and Thurnam (1852) and Worsaae (1865), both of which derive their information from Joseph Huband Smith. Smith's article was based on a presentation he delivered to the Royal Irish Academy on 11 January 1841 (ibid, 642). Harrison and Ó Floinn refer to Smith's paper as 'unusually detailed'. He provides considerable information on the discovery of the burial as well as detailed analyses of the artefacts discovered. However, Smith must have had scant knowledge of Viking Age artefacts as he discusses the possibility of the sword being associated with the 'Ancient Irish' or the Knights Templar (Smith 1841, 43). Therefore, the level of detail in the drawing included in Smith's article is what must have allowed Fanning to re-identify the grave goods at Alnwick Castle. At an unknown date the grave goods were acquired by the Duke of Northumberland, before they were re-identified by Fanning at Alnwick Castle in 1969 and subsequently loaned to the Ulster Museum (Harrison and Ó Floinn, 2014, 642).

The earliest account of this burial was Smith's published presentation to the Royal Irish Academy on 11th January 1841. It was Worsaae who first identified the burial as Scandinavian. Smith notes the following of the discovery: 'In levelling the line marked out for the purposes of such construction, on the afternoon of the 7th of last November, the workmen discovered these remains…the skeleton, when uncovered, lay obliquely, the head pointing towards the north-west…across the breast was found the sword, its handle disposed towards the right hand. On the same side, but beneath the sword was the lance head. The position of the remaining articles was not noticed at the time by the other workmen and, therefore, cannot now be ascertained' (Fanning, 1970, 42; Harrison and Ó Floinn 2014, 642). Harrison and Ó Floinn are confident on the reliability of Smith's presentation, referring to it as 'the most detailed account of a Viking burial before Joseph Raftery's 1961 publication on the burial from Eyrephort, County Galway'. This is,

accordingly, due to Smith's 'careful questioning and his interpretation of this material as a 'regular and orderly' burial. The skeletal remains were not exhibited by Smith during his presentation to the Royal Irish Academy in 1841 which suggests that he was only in possession of the grave goods (Fanning 1970, 72). Wilde exhibited the skull in a lecture to the King and Queen's college of Physicians which suggests that the skeleton and the grave goods were separated some time in 1844 or afterwards. Both Fanning and Harrison and Ó Floinn agree that the Duke of Northumberland likely acquired the grave goods through Albert Way, the London dealer.

In his concluding discussion Fanning notes that 'on the evidence of the associated grave goods, a probable late ninth or early tenth century date could be assigned to the Larne burial'. Harrison and Ó Floinn ascribe an early tenth-century date to the burial based on the sword-hilt (2014, 643). As will be discussed, the grave-goods ascribe a late ninth/early tenth century date for the burial. On this basis, the burial is part of the body of archaeology testifying to Scandinavian involvement in the kingdom of Ulaid during the late ninth/early tenth century. The grave goods that provide the evidence for this are the sword, the ringed pin and the comb.

*The Sword*

The sword is double-edged, broken at the handle, slightly bent and categorized as Petersen Type X. Smith describes it as 'a sword of very characteristic form, double-edged and rounded at the point' (Fanning 1970, 71). It was placed across the breast in the burial with its hilt on the right hand. Much of the tang appears to be of modern repair. All Fanning has to say about the date of the sword is that it is Petersen Type X and, therefore, likely of tenth century date. However, Harrison and Ó Floinn provide a far more detailed account of this in their discussion of Petersen Type X swords. Petersen ascribes Type X to two variants, the earlier Rygh Type 501 and the later Rygh Type 509 (Petersen, 1919, 158; Harrison and Ó Floinn 2014, 93). Petersen believes that both are of tenth century date, the former emerging around the beginning of the tenth century, the latter not developing until the mid to late tenth century



**Fig. 5.5: The Larne sword**

and remaining in manufacture until the middle of the eleventh century (Petersen 1919, 158). This has been challenged by Jones who argues, on the basis of finds from outside Scandinavia, that Type X is datable to the middle of the ninth century (Jones 2002, 20). While this suggests a mid-ninth century origin for Rygh Type 501, it would date Rygh Type 509, the later variant to the late ninth/early tenth century at the earliest. The sword from Larne is an example of Rygh Type 509, type 501 being absent from Ireland. There are three other examples of these from Ireland, from

Kilmainham and Bride Street, both in Dublin, and one unprovenanced find. Harrison and Ó Floinn note that the Irish examples are of the later variant and, therefore, may be of a late ninth/early tenth century date. On the basis of previous commentary on Petersen Type X, it's later variant, Type Rygh 509, likely first saw production in the late ninth/early tenth century and remained in use until the mid-eleventh century

*The Ringed Pin*

Both Fanning and Harrison and Ó Floinn categorize the Larne ringed-pin as the 'plain-ringed, loop-headed variety'. Smith refers to it as a 'small and very elegantly formed bronze pin'. Fanning compares the ringed pin to another from Craig Hill, Co. Antrim, and to examples from Birka in Sweden, but gives no indication as to how these help date the object. However, Fanning notes that 'in Scotland a pin of this variety was found in a grave at Ballinaby on the island of Islay for which a late ninth century date has been suggested' (Fanning 1970, 77).

*The Comb*

Smith refers to 'four fragments of bone, three of them being portions of a comb'. Harrison and Ó Floinn have noted that the Larne comb falls in the category of Ambrosiani's Type A3 and that Dunlevy has identified it as an example of her Class F1 (Dunlevy 1988, 363; Harrison and Ó Floinn, 2014, 647). It is referred to as 'four fragments comprising parts of both side plates and two shorter tooth plates, which together represent approximately half of a single-sided composite antler comb' (Harrison and Ó Floinn 2014, 200). Dunlevy referred to the Larne comb as the most complete example of a Class F1 comb in Ireland (Dunlevy, 1988, 363). Fanning compares this comb to examples from the Oseberg ship and Jarlshof in Shetland (Fanning 1970, 77). Harrison and Ó Floinn compare this comb to examples from High Street in Dublin and Hesket-in-the-Forest in Cumbria, both of which are tenth century in date. Harrison and Ó Floinn ascribe it a date range of c.850-950 AD (Harrison and Ó Floinn 2014, 200). In regard to the date of Class F1 combs, Dunlevy, notes only that the example from High Street was deposited in a tenth century level (Dunlevy 1988, 363; Ashby, 2011). Ambrosiani dates Type A3 combs to c.800 to c. 950 (Ashby



**Fig. 5.6: The Larne comb and ringed pin**

2011). Overall the typological data available for the Larne comb indicates that it cannot be dated to a period later than c.950. On this basis, Harrison and O'Floinn are correct in ascribing a date of c.850 to c.950 to the comb from Larne.



**Fig. 5.7: The probable location of the Larne burial**

*Place name evidence*

Anglo-Norman sources refer to Larne Lough as *Wulfrichford* as late as 1210 (Mc Giolla Easpaig 2002, 33; Harrison and Ó Floinn 2014. 644). Oftedal identified this place-name with *Ulfreksforðr*, referred to in *Óláfs saga hins Helga*, the location of a battle between an Irish king *Konofogor* (Chonchobar) and Einar, the earl of Orkney (Oftedal, 1976, 132; Laing(trans.), 1964, 199). Fellows-Jensen has suggested, on the basis that Ulfrek is not an especially common name in 'early Scandinavian sources', that this may be a 'Scandinavianised version of the English name *Wulfric* and might well point to a man from the Danelaw' (Fellows-Jensen 2001, 109). However, there is Runic evidence to suggest that the name *Ulfrik* may have been used in Scandinavia from the late tenth/early eleventh century. A runestone discovered in 1940 at a farm in Lingsberg, Uppland, Sweden commemorates a man called *Úlfrikr* who 'had taken two payments in England' (Friesen, 1911, 111). The inscription names *Danr, Húskarl* and *Sveinn* as the commissioners of the monument and refers to Ulfrik as their 'father's father'. 'Danegeld' was payed to Scandinavians in England in 994, 1002, 1007, 1012. This Ulfrik could have been present in any two of these years. Furthermore, the runestone is dated to the second quarter of the eleventh century and Ulfrik is referred to as 'their father's father'. On this basis, Ulfrik must have been born in the late tenth century. This shows that the personal name present in the place name *Wulfrichford* or *Ulfreksfjorðr* was used by Scandinavians in the same century as the date of the burial. Harrison and Ó Floinn also rightly point out that the Larne burial has more in common with the Viking burials of Scotland and Norway than those in eastern England (Harrison and Ó Floinn 2014, 644), indicating that the community of the Larne warrior were unlikely to be Anglo-Scandinavian. The annalistic name for Larne Lough is *Inber nOllarba*. Mac Giolla Easpaig has suggested that, prior to using the name *Ulfreksfjorðr*, the Norse refered to the location as *Ollamarfjorðr*, the 'ford of Ollam', a Norse adaptation of the Irish name (Mac Giolla Easpaig 2002, 473).

In addition to *Ulfrecksfjordr*, the townland of Ballylumford is located at the natural entry to the port of Larne Lough in front of *Olderflete* Castle. Mac Giolla Easpaig has identified this as *Baile an Longphort*, 'commune of the *Longphort*' (ibid, 2002), suggesting the presence of a *longphort* at what would be the most strategic location in the area, at the opening of the lough into the Irish Sea. It has been established that from the late tenth century, a *longphort* could also refer to Irish encampments, but given the location of a burial and a Norse place-name in the same area, this is

unlikely to be the case at Larne, as discussed in Chapter 3, The archaeological period of the Viking *longphort* appears to end around the middle of the tenth century which would suggest that this place-name is of a similar date to the burial. Mac Giolla Easpaig suggests that this toponymical and archaeological evidence may suggest the presence of a Norse colony on Larne Lough (ibid, 473).

***Rathlin Island***

The Viking Age cemetery on Rathlin Island consists of, at least, four burials. The presence of a Scandinavian burial cluster suggests that a settlement could not have been located far off. The 'Rathlin Brooch' ascribes a late ninth/early tenth century date to one of the burials, and perhaps the overall cemetery. This bossed penannular brooch is the most significant find from the site and will be discussed below. One of these burials was discovered in c.1780, two in 1845 and another in 1983/4. These were inserted into a pre-existing Bronze Age cemetery at Church Bay (Harrison and Ó Floinn 2014, 609). More recent excavations in the area have provided additional information for a Bronze Age flat cemetery, as well as early medieval settlement and burial.

This cemetery has a complex history of recording. The earliest evidence for a Viking Age burial ground is from a letter describing the burial discovered around 1780 by Rev. Dr. William Hamilton, a Donegal-based businessman and antiquary (ibid., 609). An account, containing additional information, was provided seventy years later by the Rathlin-based naturalist Cathrine Gage, in 1851. Gage also described two additional graves discovered in the nineteenth century, one of which was the warrior burial. The fourth burial was discovered in excavations at Church Bay in 1983/4 (ibid. 610).In Hamilton's letter of 1784, these finds were described as the result of the opening of 'a number of small tumuli … in a little plain about the middle of the island'. According to Gage they were made 'in a field…a short distance from the shore of Church Bay' (ibid., 610). 'Over the brooch grave stands a large stone somewhat resembling a modern tombstone in shape' which, Gage notes, is 'regarded with some degree of veneration by the islanders'. The standing stone is in Demense townland, at the top of a steep slope, overlooking Church Bay (ibid., 610). Harrison and Ó Floinn suggest that, although Gage is writing seventy years after the discovery was made, she is recording an established local tradition. The warrior burial was also

found in the vicinity of this standing stone. O'Laverty (1887, 375) notes that the area around Church Bay is known locally as *Ouig*. He suggested that this is derived from the Irish *Uaighe*. However, Harrison and Ó Floinn suggest that this more likely derives from the Old Norse *Vík*, 'bay' or 'inlet'. This is likely as *Uig* is a common place name in Scotland (Harrison and Ó Floinn 2014, 612). This would suggest that the Vikings used Church Bay as a landing place.

In addition to the burial evidence from Church Bay, a possible longhouse at Doonmore, in the northern part of the island, may confirm Norse settlement on Rathlin. This consists of a 'substantial flat-topped basalt plug' in the townland of Ballygill North (McConkey and Forsythe 2012, 137). The building plan of Doonmore described by fieldworkers conforms to the structural design of Viking Age longhouses and is comparable to the ground plan of houses from Dublin and stone built examples from Orkney and Shetland (ibid, 138). The only artefact associated with Doonmore is a ringed pin, known only from sketch, that is comparable to Irish and Scandinavian contexts, bearing a design common in Dublin (ibid, 138). Due to its parallels in Dublin and Orkney and Shetland, it can be said that the Doonmore longhouse is more likely to have been a Scandinavian, rather than an Irish, residence. This, however, could only be proven if the site were to be excavated. Additionally, a grass-covered mound at Ballygill Middle, in the centre of the island, is known locally as the 'Dane's Burial'. The suggestion that this feature may represent a Viking Age boat burial is based on its configuration not seeming typical of Irish prehistoric burial monuments and its structure being 'boat-shaped' (ibid, 139). However, no human remains or grave goods are associated with the mound, though this may change upon excavation. Furthermore, a similar feature on Westness, in Orkney, is interpreted as a cenotaph rather than a boat burial due to the absence of grave goods (ibid, 140). On this basis, the 'Dane's Burial is not listed among the Viking Age burials of Ulaid.

*c.1780*

The following is recorded in Hamilton's 1784 letter: 'among the small tumuli…lately opened… "the chief himself" lay in a stone coffin…a large fibula was found in one of the tumuli, which was deposited in the Museum of Trinity College, Dublin...the workmanship is good and argues considerable skill in the artist' (Harrison and Ó Floinn 2014, 613). Gage notes that 'in one of these was found a silver fibula and a number of beads' that are now in the Museum of Trinity College Dublin. References to urns probably indicate the presence of Bronze Age cremation burials.

Likewise, Gage notes the presence of spearheads. These, however, are more likely to be Bronze Age deposits. Harrison and Ó Floinn note that, although Hamilton does not confirm that 'the chief' was found in the same stone coffin as the fibula, that this association is most likely the reason he refers to this burial as that of 'the chief' (ibid., 613).

*1845A*

'In a field a little distance (from the standing stone) a bronze age vessel of a curious shape was dug up…and with it were a number of iron knobs, with rings of the same material'. This is the only source to record this find, which may or may not represent a Viking Age burial. The absence of a specific reference to cists or human remains indicates that this might be a hoard of ecclesiastical relics buried for safe keeping (ibid., 615). It is assumed that this discovery was made in 1845 on the basis that Gage discusses it immediately after discussing the 1845B burial (ibid., 615). These objects are assumed lost. Descriptions of them are only known from Gage's drawings.

*1845B*

The only source for this burial is Gage's note that a few years before 1851 (presumably 1845) labourers digging the foundation of a wall near Church Bay coastguard station 'came upon one of these ancient tombs (cists) and on removing the stones which covered it, there was an urn containing ashes and an iron sword which 'crumbled away soon after being exposed to the air' (ibid., 616). Harrison and Ó Floinn note that Gage's drawing is insufficient to allow classification and was likely drawn from 'fancy report'. Warner notes that Gage's drawing of the Rathlin Brooch is also far from correct. The only information provided by the drawing is that the point was broken off. Although we know nothing of the sword's typology, we should assume that it was a Viking sword. The sword was discovered in an area with evidence for Bronze Age and Viking Age settlement. If the sword were bronze, it would not have crumbled away as soon as it was exposed to the air. We know that it was an iron sword and, having been found in the vicinity of the standing stone, next to the burial in which the Rathlin Brooch was discovered, it is more than likely that this sword represents the burial of a Viking warrior.

*1983/4*

This burial was discovered in a rescue excavation of Bronze Age cists on the south-east side of Church Bay. Evidence for early medieval occupation was provided by sherds of souterrain ware, the upper stone of a rotary quern, a series of iron objects including a bolt or rivet and, most significantly, a decorated Scandinavian antler comb (ibid., 617). The comb, like the one from Larne, is of Ambrosiani Type A3/Dunlevy class F1. Harrison and Ó Floinn suggest that a Scandinavian burial is represented in this assemblage on the basis of other Scandinavian graves in the vicinity, the rarity of these combs in Ireland and the presence of an iron rivet often associated with Viking graves. It has been mentioned in the section on Larne that combs of this type may be ascribed a date of c.850-c.950. The iron rivet is compared to an iron rivet of the same type from a sub-group of burials from Islandbridge, Dublin. This sub-group contains swords of Petersen Type C and Petersen Type H, which would suggest a ninth century date (ibid., 2014,430-433). On this basis, the burial can be ascribed a date of c.850-c.900.

*2018*

In August 2018 archaeological monitoring was being conducted by Northern Archaeological Consultancy Ltd at a location on Rathlin Island. Human remains were discovered and nearby a fine piece of insular metalwork, a circular mount, was recovered. It seems possible, if not probable, that this derived from a furnished Viking grave. However, the report of this investigation has not yet been completed. I have contacted Northern Archaeological Consultancy Ltd seeking further information on this discovery, but I have not yet received this.

*The Rathlin brooch*

It has been mentioned that this bossed penannular brooch is almost certainly what caused Hamilton to refer to the burial of c.1780 as that of 'the chief'. The Rathlin brooch was classified by Johannsen as an example of his subgroup F of bossed penannular brooches. Three known brooches of this type represent a 'Norse form of what is more generally an insular brooch type (ibid., 149). Harrison and Ó Floinn note that 'the use of bosses decorated with scrolls of silver filigree and the stamped decoration on the pin-head are not techniques used by Irish silversmiths'. The Rathlin Brooch is categorized, alongside a brooch from Hattenberg, Hordaland, Norway as 'products of Norse craftsmen working on an insular brooch tradition'. Although Hamilton refers (most likely) to the



**Fig. 5.8: The Rathlin brooch**

owner of the brooch as 'the chief himself', Harrison and Ó Floinn suggest that it could be the grave of a man or a woman as both are known to have worn penannular brooches and beads.

However, it is suggested here that this is most likely the burial of a woman based on the occurrence of silver brooches of this type in Viking Age graves. Examples of this include a woman's grave from Westness, Orkney, and female graves from Norway such as at Hålen, Sogn og Fjordane and Sn*å*sa, Nord-Trøndelag (ibid., 149). Two fragments of similar brooches are found in the Cuerdale hoard, deposited in c.905-10 (ibid., 149). On this basis a late ninth/early tenth century date is suggested for the Rathlin Brooch.

***Saint John's Point***

This is the burial of a Viking warrior within, or close to, an early medieval church and burial ground, discovered in 1857 or shortly before. Its only publication was from the *Proceedings…*, which record a presentation from Major Browne to the Royal Irish Academy on 11th May 1857 (ibid., 656). This entry notes that 'fragments of an iron sword, found near St John's Point in the

County of Down were presented by Major Browne'. The following is recorded in a letter accompanying the sword, preserved in a 'rough minute book': 'the sword presented by Major Browne was found by that gentleman near the ruins of St Johns church on his property at St John's Point in the county of Down in a stone coffin or grave, which formed one of seven similar graves placed in a circular or oval form thus which the one in question pointed east and the remainder north and south' (ibid., 656). Harrison and Ó Floinn note that the author of the letter in the rough minute book was probably William Wakeman, the only antiquarian known to have consistently maintained that the cists of St John's Point were 'arranged in the form of an oblong circle, to the centre of which there were also cists oriented north-south'. According to a letter preserved in the rough minute book, this grave was found 'near the ruins of St John's Point in the county of Down'. St John's Point is located at the eastern end of Dundrum Bay on the south coast of County Down. It is recorded in early medieval sources as *Tech Eoin* (ibid., 658). Harrison and Ó Floinn have pointed out that 'the St John's Point sword must correspond to one of the two remaining sword fragments (in Wakeman's catalogue) recorded as unprovenanced – either Wk18 or Wk30' (ibid, 658). They suggest Wk18 is in a 'more fragmentary condition' than its counterpart and, therefore, propose that it represents the St. John's Point burial and that Wk30 is not fragmented enough to be recorded as such. However, analyses of Wk18 and Wk30 argue against this. In the opinion of the author, Wk30 could potentially be the St. John's Point sword. Only the blade of Wk18 remains. The absence of the hilt makes the sword impossible to date. The blade is bent and badly damaged and this must have caused Harrison and Ó Floinn to assume this was the blade of the sword from St. John's Point. However, Wk30 is in four pieces and is, therefore, fragmentary. In the records of William Wakeman, the following is said of the locality of Wk18; 'uncertain, but most probably (no reason given) the neighbourhood of Kilmainham' (ibid, 658). On this basis, it is suggested here that Wk18 and Wk30 are equally likely to represent the St. John's Point burial. Wk18 is not datable due to the absence of a hilt. Wk30 is an example of Petersen Type H, which would date the burial to the mid-late ninth century (Jones, 2002, 18).




**Fig. 5.9: Swords Wk18 (left) and Wk30 (right), one of which is from St John's Point**

***Conclusion***

The main question raised by the discovery of the burial at Ballyholme is, 'to what extent is permanent domestic Scandinavian settlement in the region represented here?' The burial at Ballyholme is almost certainly that of a Scandinavian woman. The brooches date the burial to c. 850 – c. 910. It has been mentioned that toponymical evidence suggest a likely Scandinavian trading site on the nearby Copeland Islands and a possible long-lasting Norse presence at Ballyholme. The inhumation took place on the northern coast of County Down. The north and east Down region is an area with considerable archaeological evidence for connections between the Scandinavians and the local rulers, the Dál Fiatach, during the late ninth/early tenth centuries. This evidence takes the form of a series of metal-detected silver finds discussed in Chapter 4, one of which, a Hiberno-Scandinavian finger ring, was discovered in Groomsport, the townland next to Ballyholme. Annalistic references confirm that Vikings were active in this region in the period to which the archaeology is dated. The combination of the burial evidence from Ballyholme with the remainder of the archaeological, historical and toponymal evidence for a Scandinavian presence in the Down region suggests that the Ballyholme burial most likely represents permanent settlement.

In Harrison and Ó Floinn's catalogue, sixteen female burials are recorded among the Viking graves of Ireland. Of these, eleven are from the Kilmainham/Islandbridge burial complex, and three are from elsewhere in Dublin (Finglas, Golden Lane and Phoenix Park). In addition to Ballyholme, two female burials have been recorded outside of Dublin. One of these is from near Arklow, Co. Wicklow and the other from near Castlerock, Co. Derry. The Derry find, consisting of a single oval brooch from the River Bann, is suggested by Ó Floinn to indicate a burial. However, because this brooch was deposited in the River Bann, it is unlikely to represent a burial. If the River Bann brooch is a stray find, Ballyholme is the only female burial discovered outside the greater Dublin area.

The evidence for the date of the Larne burial indicates that it lies within the late ninth or early tenth century. It has been established above that the Larne sword does not date to earlier than the late ninth century and that the comb from the burial does not date to later than c.950. It is clearly the burial of a Viking warrior, therefore, it cannot be presented on its own as evidence for permanent

settlement. However, the date of the burial is consistent with the majority of the Scandinavian material from Ulaid. On this basis, the Larne warrior burial is seen alongside the majority of the burials and silver finds in this study as evidence for prominent Scandinavian involvement in the kingdom during the late ninth/early tenth centuries. Furthermore, toponymical evidence at Larne Lough suggests the establishment of a Viking Age *longphort* and, likely, a long-lasting Norse presence. Ballylumford, at the opening of Larne Lough, would have been the most strategic site in the area for a military encampment and this is likely where any settlement would have taken place but further archaeological discoveries would be required to demonstrate this. The site of the burial is situated on high ground on a hill on the western bank of Larne Lough. The steep hill and the marshy ground make this far less likely than the other side of the lough, which is a peninsula separating the lough from the Irish Sea, to be the site of any permanent or temporary Scandinavian occupation. The fact that the burial of the Larne warrior took place here suggests that the community of the deceased man wanted to show regard for him by burying him on an elevated site overlooking the lough. Thomas Fanning has suggested that the absence of a stone setting may indicate a hurried inhumation. However, because of the Norse toponymical evidence and because stone settings are not a common feature of Viking Age burials in Ireland, this is highly unlikely to be the case. The artefacts from the burial indicate that the Norse presence at Larne could have begun in the late ninth or early tenth century and the evidence for *Úlfrecksfjorðr* suggests that it endured into the mid to late tenth century at the earliest.

The Rathlin brooch may be ascribed a late ninth/early tenth century date. The burial discovered in 1973/4 is datable to c.850-c.900. On this basis, a Scandinavian settlement on Rathlin Island would have begun in the late ninth century, the same period as the majority of Viking Age finds from Ulaid. It has been mentioned that a Scandinavian burial ground means that a Norse settlement could not have been located too far away. Furthermore, the Doonmore longhouse may provide further evidence for the likelihood of settlement on the island. In the case of the ‘Dane’s Burial’, although the existing evidence is not completely convincing, an excavation of this mound could potentially add another burial to the list of Viking Age burials in Ulaid. On the basis of this overview of the Viking Age archaeology of Rathlin Island, material discussed thus far might suggests a settled Norse presence on Rathlin Island, the Church Bay material representing a communal burial ground. While the Norse of Rathlin may be connected to their counterparts at

Larne and the Down region, they are just as likely to share connections with the Scandinavians of western Scotland. Graham-Campbell and Batey have pointed out that, Scandinavian newcomers could well have seen Rathlin Island as the southernmost of the Hebrides (Graham-Campbell and Batey 1998, 93).

The location of the burial at St John's Point in the vicinity of a church is significant. If the inhumation took place within the church itself, this would indicate that the individual himself had, at least nominally, converted to Christianity. However, based on the deposition of the burial outside the church, it remains a possibility that this reflects the use of a church site as an encampment by Vikings, in what would have been a strategic coastal location. Perhaps this burial can be viewed in a similar light to the 'ring-money' from Inishargy, as an indication that these relations between the Scandinavians and the Ulaid may have required formal conversions and, thereby, led to Scandinavian residence at ecclesiastical sites. Which unprovenanced sword from the collection of William Wakeman was discovered at St. John's Point remains inconclusive. However, if it were Wk30 (c.850-c.900), it may indicate that Scandinavian conversions took place considerably early in Ulaid or that St. John's Point was occupied by Norse raiders at some point in the latter half of the ninth century.

Overall, the Scandinavian burials of Ulaid provide considerable insights into the activity of the Norse in Ulaid during the Viking Age. When combined with the remainder of the archaeological, historical and toponymal evidence for the Scandinavians in the kingdom of Ulaid, these four burials suggest that permanent settlement is more than likely to have taken place.

# CHAPTER SIX

## Viking-Age Coin Hoards in Ulaid

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the six hoards from Antrim and Down that consist exclusively of numismatic silver. Although the term 'Viking Age' is used as a convenient short-hand in the title of the chapter, it deals with hoards datable to the period 800 to 1200AD. The majority of these hoards are datable to the Late Viking Age and after the Viking Age. At the close of the tenth century, coinage replaces bullion as the primary form of commercial exchange among the Hiberno-Scandinavians. Only one hoard in Ireland deposited following 1000 AD is known to contain any non-numismatic silver, from Fourknocks, Co. Meath (Dolley, 1966, 63-64; Graham-Campbell 1976, 67).

The hoards discussed here are provenanced to Derrykeighan, Co. Antrim, Red Bay, near Cushendall, Co. Antrim, Carnacavill, Co. Down, Ballycastle, Co. Antrim, Rathlin Island, Co. Antrim, and Scrabo Hill, Co. Down. The chapter does not list the find from Ballywillin, Co. Antrim, among the Viking Age hoards of Ulaid as the coins from this hoard are believed to be of thirteenth-century date (Harrison and Ó Floinn, 2014, 721), even if the find was incorrectly published as a Viking boat burial (Briggs 1974). The discovery, components, contemporary political context and deposition date of each coin hoard will be discussed. It must be emphasized that the approach taken to these hoards is archaeological and numismatics does not form a core focus of the chapter.

*Derrykeighan, Co. Antrim*

A man digging a grave in a churchyard discovered this hoard at Derrykeighan, near Devock, Co. Antrim, in March 1843 (Seaby 1959, 248; Dolley 1965, 32). The church comprises post-medieval ruins on the site of medieval parish church and an early medieval ecclesiastical site with a souterrain. The hoard consists of over 280 coins, the majority of which are Anglo-Saxon and including some Anglo- Scandinavian and one Carolingian (Hall 1974, 78). The latest mint represented is that of King

Eadgar (d. 975). Hence, the suggested date of the hoard is c. 975 (ibid. 78). Some of the coins from the Derrykeighan hoard are kept in the Ulster Museum, others were scattered among the collections of antiquarians (Seaby 1959, 248).

The Anglo-Saxon kings represented in the hoard include Æthelstan (d. 939), Eadmund (d. 946), Eadred (d. 955), Eadwig (d. 959) and Eadgar (d. 975). The Scandinavian rulers represented are Rognvaldr Guthrøthson (d. 945) and Eiríkr (d. 948). The Carolingian king represented is Philip II of Aquitaine (d. 858) (Hall 1974, 78). The hoard was more than likely deposited during the reign of King Eadgar, the most represented monarch in the hoard. Coins of Eadgar appear in more than twice the number of Eadred, the second most represented king in the Derrykeighan hoard.

The contemporary political context of the Derrykeighan hoard is the *trícha cét* of Dál Riata (McCotter 2008, 231). Dál Riata's control in western Scotland is documented from the fifth century and this may suggest that the components of the hoard travelled through western Scotland. However, the absence of Scoto-Scandinavian 'ring-money' (Sheehan, 2016b) in a tenth century hoard might also suggest that the hoard was unlikely to have been compiled in Scotland. The coinage of the hoard might suggest that it was compiled in England or Dublin.

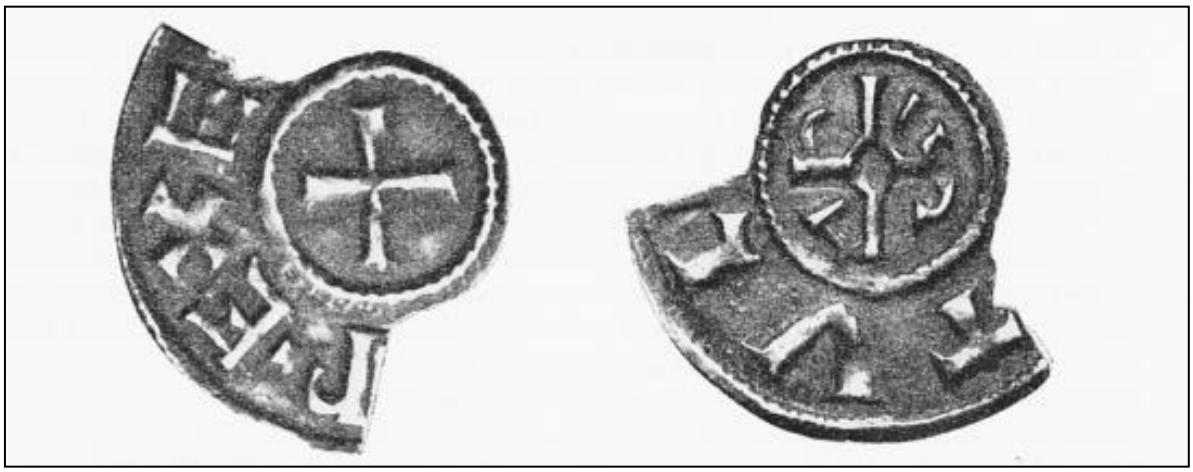


**Fig. 6.1: Carolingian coin of Philip II of Aquitaine from the Derrykeighan, Co. Antrim, hoard (source: Dolley 1965, fig. 1)**

*Rathlin Island*

This hoard, believed to consist of 7 or 8 Hiberno-Norse coins, was discovered on Rathlin Island in 1916 and it has been ascribed a deposition date of c. 1040 (Hall 1974, 80). Hall notes that one of the coins was in the possession of a Ballycastle collector (ibid. 80).

Dál Riata forms the contemporary political context of Rathlin Island (McCotter, 1980, 231). The coinage of the Rathlin hoard is described as 'Hiberno-Norse' indicating that it was struck in Dublin. On this basis, and based on the ascribed date of the find, the hoard provides evidence for connections between the Hiberno-Norse of Dublin and the Dál Riata that endured into the eleventh century.

*Red Bay, Cushendall, Co. Antrim*

This hoard, consisting of two Anglo-Saxon coins, was discovered at Red Bay, near Cushendall, in County Antrim in 1849 (Hall 1974, 73). These coins were discovered at the same time as a Bronze Age burial when the cave at Red Bay was destroyed during quarrying (Sheehan 2016, 160). It is agreed that the two coins are associated finds and, therefore, represent a hoard (Dolley 1966, 19-20; Hall 1974, 73; Blackburn and Pagan 1986, 294, no. 56; Sheehan 2016, 160).

One of these is a coin of the Mercian King Berhtwulf (840-52), the other is of the Archbishop of Canterbury Ceolnoth (833-70) (Hall 1974, 73; Sheehan 2016, 160). The coinage certainly indicates a mid-ninth century deposition date for the hoard. Red Bay is identifiable as the contemporary territory of the *trícha cét* of Uí Thuirtre. The coins could potentially represent commercial interaction among the Scandinavians of Britain and Ireland. However, the coastal location and isolated discovery of the coins suggests that they are likely to represent a stray loss.

*Carnacavill, Co. Down*

This hoard, consisting of two 'Hiberno-Manx' coins, was discovered during metal detecting in a field in May 2016 (Heslip 2016, 1). Both of the coins conform to the second of the seven phases of Hiberno-Norse coinage. On the basis of an analysis carried out on a hoard discovered on the

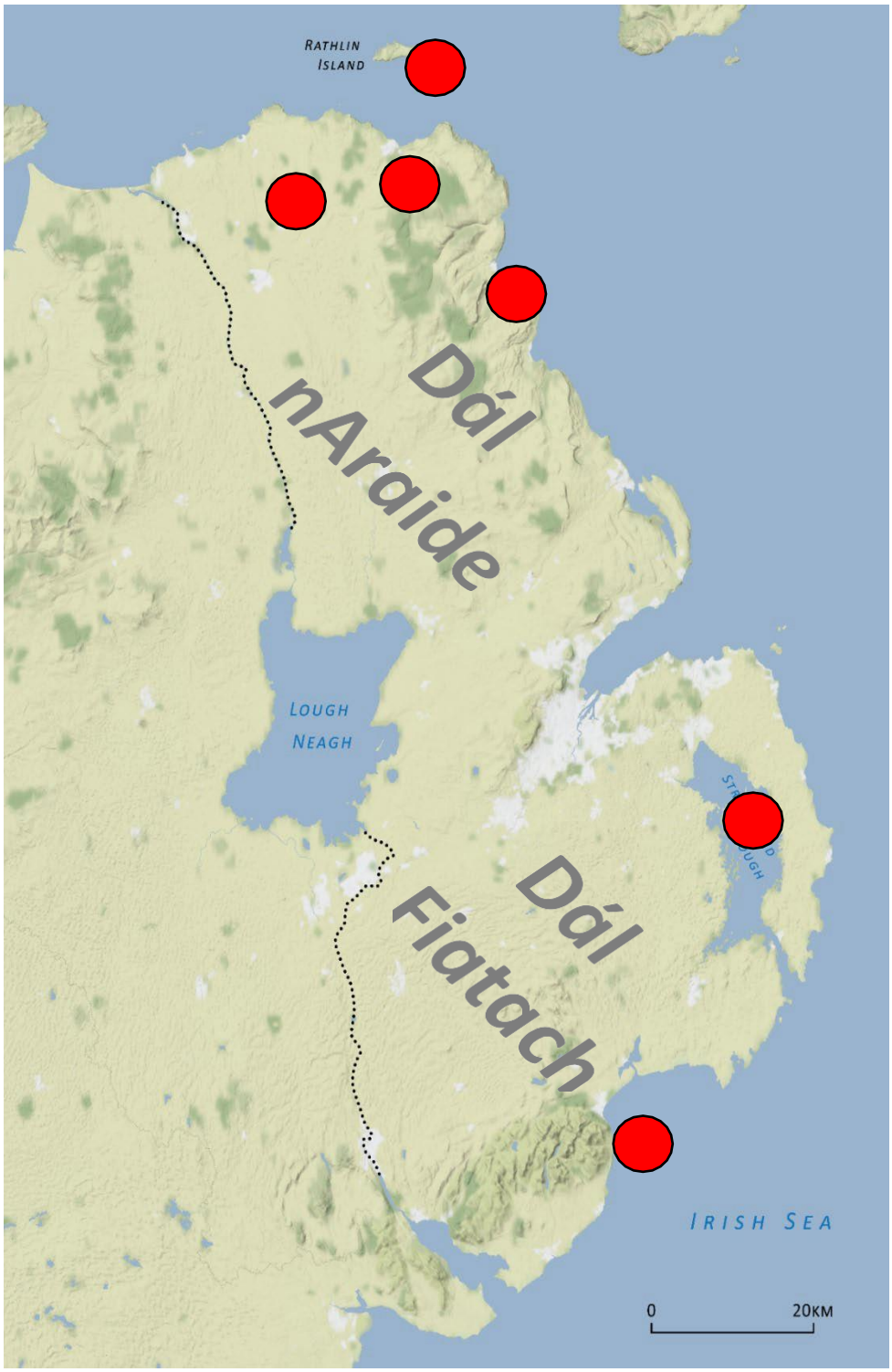



**Fig. 6.2: Map of Ulaid with its two principal sub-divisions, Dál Fiatach and Dál nAraide, showing the locations of Viking-age coin hoards.**

Isle of Man in the mid- 1970's, this coin type has been identified as exclusive to the Isle of Man. According to Heslip, this coin type was certainly not present before 1020, and likely not before 1035, its manufacture continuing into the latter half of the eleventh century.

The find was made in a field close to the south bank of the Ballybannan River which flows into Dundrum bay (ibid. 5). The nearest contemporary archaeological site is the ecclesiastical complex on Maghera Parish located three hundred metres to the west of the find spot (ibid. 5). Since 2016, when Heslip compiled his report on the two coins, fourteen further coins of the same type have been recovered from the same location (pers comm, Greer Ramsey). However, these are presently going through the coroner's process and no further information is available.

The contemporary political context of Carnacavill is the Dál Fiatach *trícha cét* of Leth Cathail (McCotter 2008, 234). Heslip favours the suggestion that the coins from Carnacavill represent contemporary links between Ulster and the Isle of Man (Heslip 2016, 6). Significantly, the discovery of eleventh-century Hiberno-Manx coinage in the Down region could indicate that the connections established between the Dál Fiatach and the Norse during the Viking Age may have continued or seen a revival into the later part of the period.

*Ballycastle, Co. Antrim*

Seventy coins from Ballycastle were discovered by a worker on the trench farm in the townland of Carnsampson, in the parish of Ramoan, County Antrim in c.1890 (Warner 1975, 89). In some cases, the material from Ballycastle is treated as two separate hoards (https://www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/dept/coins/projects/hoards/index.list.html). This is presumably on the basis of a piece from the collection of Canon W. Grainger, accounted for by R. B. Warner (1975, 89). Accordingly, a servant of the landowner, Thomas White, 'came upon the silver coins in two piles about 4 inches each in height, and so closely that only a few were got out of the whole, and on separating, these were carelessly broken up, the finders having no idea they were of any value' and 'thus, only 17 of the first find can be accounted for' (ibid. 89). On this basis the coins were discovered in the form of two separate piles. Whether or not this indicates that they were deposited at different points during the Early Medieval period will remain unknown to us due to the carelessness of their treatment upon their discovery. If Ballycastle 2 were datable to an

earlier or later period than Ballycastle 1, we would have reason to suggest that the finds represented two different hoards, otherwise there would be no reason to classify the two piles as separate hoards if they were datable to the reign of the same monarch and were discovered at the same site. Regardless, the only data available is derived from Ballycastle 1, in which case, only coins from this pile provide a context for the assemblage.

Of the seventy coins deposited at Ballycastle, seventeen can still be accounted for (Warner 1975, 89; Dolley 1973/4, 87). Of these, some are Hiberno-Norse, others are Anglo-Saxon.
The monarchs represented include: Eadgar of England (957 – 975), Sigtryggr Silkenbeard of Dublin (982 – 1029) and Knut of England (1014 – 1039) (Warner 1975, 89; Dolley 1973/4, 87-88). This coin data indicates an early eleventh century deposition date for the Ballycastle assemblage (or at least the pile referred to as Ballycastle 1). Dolley, who treats the Ballycastle assemblage as a single hoard, ascribes it a deposition date of c.1030 – c.1040 (Dolley 1966, 64).

The contemporary political context of Ballycastle is Dál Riata. On this basis the most reasonable assumption is that the hoard(s) represents late tenth/early eleventh century connections between the Dál Riata and both Hiberno-Norse Dublin and Anglo-Saxon England. This variety in the regions represented in the coinage suggests that the hoard was assembled in Dál Riata in the early eleventh century.

*Scrabo Hill, Co. Down*

This hoard, consisting of over one hundred Hiberno-Norse coins, was discovered on a megalithic site in 1855 (Carruthers 1855, 315- 21; McErleann 2002, 84). At least 53 of these remain extant. These are in the possession of the National Museum of Ireland (Hall 1974, 81). The date of the hoard is disputed. Richard Hall and Michael Dolley ascribe a date of c. 1130 to it (Hall, 1974, 81; Dolley, 1966, 87). However, T.C.R. Crafter (1998, 60) has suggested a deposition date of c. 1180. According to Crafter, the coinage represented in the hoard includes Class B (c. 1162-3) and Class F (c. 1174-80) of the coinage of Henry II.

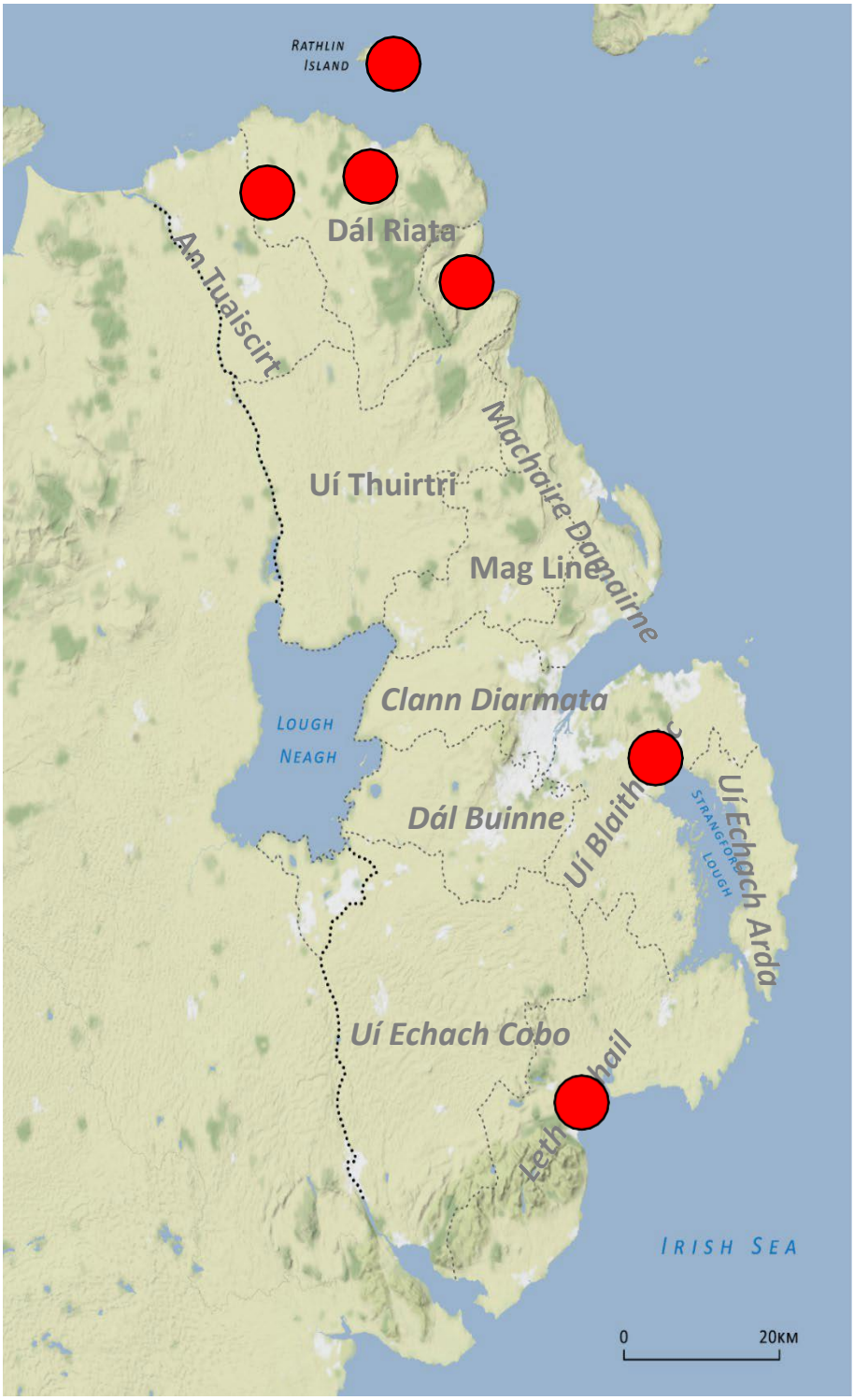



**Fig. 6.3: Map of Ulaid and its *trícha céts* (based on MacCotter 2008), showing the locations of Viking-age coin hoards.**

***Conclusions***

The Early Medieval political context of Scrabo Hill is the *trícha cét* of Uí Blaithmeic. The presence of Hiberno-Norse coinage would signify twelfth century connections between the Hiberno-Norse of Dublin and the Dál Fiatach. The presence of English coins from the late twelfth century, however, would probably be reflective of political circumstances prior to the Anglo-Norman conquest.

A significant observation to be made from the distribution of coin hoards in Antrim and Down is that the majority are found in the northern half of Antrim, the opposite to the finds of non-numismatic silver, the majority of which are from Down and south Antrim. The coin hoards do not collectively portray any social or political patterns as the hoards and isolated finds do. The most common period seen among the date range of the coin hoards is the early eleventh century. The hoards from Rathlin Island, Ballycastle, Carnacavill date to this period. The hoards from Rathlin Island, and Ballycastle testify to the connections held by the Dál Riata in the early eleventh century. It seems unreasonable to make the assumption that the assemblage from Ballycastle represents two separate hoards on the basis that they were discovered in two separate piles. The coinage discovered at Carnacavill is certainly of a Manx type. On this basis, the coin hoard from Carnacavill provides evidence for early eleventh century links between Dál Fiatach and the Isle of Man. The hoard from Derrykeighan contains a large quantity of coins derived from England and Frankia. The hoard, therefore, likely represents connections to Anglo-Saxon England held by the Dál Riata in the late tenth century.

The coins from Red Bay do stand out in this chapter due to their deposition date of c. 870. This means they reflect circumstances in a period of high levels of Viking activity. It is possible that Mercian coinage in the Northern Irish Sea, datable to the early years of the campaign of the Great Heathen Army in England may be a sign of corroboration among the Vikings of the 'Great army' and those active in Ireland and/or the Northern Irish Sea. However, the coastal deposition of these coins also makes it likely that they represent stray loss at sea. The coin hoard from Scrabo Hill may represent early twelfth-century connections between the Dál Fiatach and Dublin. However, if coins of Henry II are present in the hoard they would signify that the hoard's early twelfth century Hiberno-Norse coins were in use for close to half a decade before being deposited.

Overall, it cannot be said that the coin hoards provide a pattern as revealing as the non-numismatic silver finds of the region. They do, however, provide specific insights into the connections between Ulaid and other areas within Ireland and Britain, particularly in the late and post Viking Age.



**Fig. 6.4: A coin from the Scrabo Hill hoard (source: Woods 2013).**

# CHAPTER SEVEN

## Conclusions

The purpose of this concluding chapter is to provide an overview of the significance of the Viking Age in Ulaid on the basis of the various analyses made throughout the main body of this thesis. This conclusion will contain detailed discussions of the two most significant paradigms established in the thesis, the Norse and the Dál Fiatach and the Vikings on Larne Lough. When both of these bodies of evidence have been outlined, the archaeology discussed in the thesis will be the subject of a broad overview. This conclusion attempts to identify why this area has not received considerable attention in the past and, also, to outline our understanding of Viking Age Ulaid based on our current evidence.

The most important finding that emerged through research on this subject is the evidence for the connections established between the Vikings and the Dál Fiatach. This paradigm is the main way in which the archaeological record of the Viking Age in Ulaid speaks independently of any evidence from historical sources. These connections are emphasised by the following finds: The hoard from Magheralagan, Co. Down, the finger-ring from Grooomsport, Co. Down, the broad-band arm-ring from Walshetown, Co. Down, the hack-silver from Poobles, Co. Antrim, the arm-ring fragment from Ballylesson, Co. Down and the arm-ring from Ballinderry, Co. Antirm. It has been established in Chapter Four that all of these finds are datable to the period around the late ninth and early tenth centuries, *c.*880 – *c.*930, and that they are all of Hiberno-Scandinavian character. Almost all of these finds were certainly being used for commercial rather than display purposes at the time of their deposition, therefore representing commercial activity involving Scandinavians and the Dál Fiatach. The one possible exception is the Groomsport finger-ring. It has been mentioned in Chapter Four that this ring could potentially have belonged to a Scandinavian. However, it has also been explained that a Scandinavian residence near or close to the location would still represent some sort of diplomatic agreement. It can, therefore, be established that all of these finds testify to connections between the Norse and the Dál Fiatach. Note must also be taken of the proximity of the Ballinderry arm-ring to Lough Neagh and the discovery of the Walshetown arm-ring on the shore of Strangford Lough. Does this imply that the

Dál Fiatach saw Viking raiders established in *longphuirt* as valuable allies? Furthermore, the burial of a woman containing Scandinavian oval brooches discovered at Ballyholme, Co. Down, took place in the territory of Dál Fiatach. A burial containing domestic grave goods associated with women is more likely than a warrior burial to represent a permanent residence on the surrounding area. Furthermore, this inhumation is unlikely to have simply represented a stop off as it is situated in an area containing considerable evidence for commercial activity involving Scandinavians as well as Norse toponymal evidence. The possible significance of the place name 'Ballyholme', as well as similar evidence on the nearby Copeland Islands, has been discussed in Chapter Five. If the Copeland Islands do derive their name from the Old Norse *Kaupmanneyjar 'merchant's islands'*, this may provide a further insight into the organization of the commercial network accounted for above.

Another significant, previously unrecognized body of evidence discussed in the thesis is the paradigm of a long-lasting Norse presence at Larne Lough in County Antrim. The 866 annalistic reports mentioning the destruction of *longphuirt* by Aed Finnliath, significantly refers to the destruction of 'flocks and herds'. This indicates that, wherever these *longphuirt* were, their occupants must have intended to settle permanently. It has been explained in Chapter Three that Larne Lough is a likely candidate for an area settled by Scandinavians that may have been attacked by Aed Finnliath in 866. The Larne warrior burial indicates the presence of Vikings in the lough in the period around the late ninth century and the early part of the tenth century. This burial was discovered at a distant part of Larne Lough to the opening of the lough into the Irish Sea, meaning that the community of the dead warrior must have been somewhat secure in the area. Fieldwork undertaken in the duration of this project has determined that the area of the burial, just west of the train tracks, is situated on a hill. The area is forested, and the ground is particularly marshy. Although this would likely have been seen by the Vikings as an appropriate place to bury one of their warriors, it is probably one of the least strategic locations on the banks of Larne Lough to encamp or settle. Looking at Larne Lough on a map, one might assume that a Viking raiding party would choose to establish themselves on the eastern side of Larne Lough with easy accessibility to the Irish Sea. Evidence that this could well have been the case is provided by toponymal evidence discussed in Chapter Three. Ballylumford, meaning 'place of the *longphort*', suggests that the eastern side of Larne lough saw the establishment of a longphort during the Viking Age.

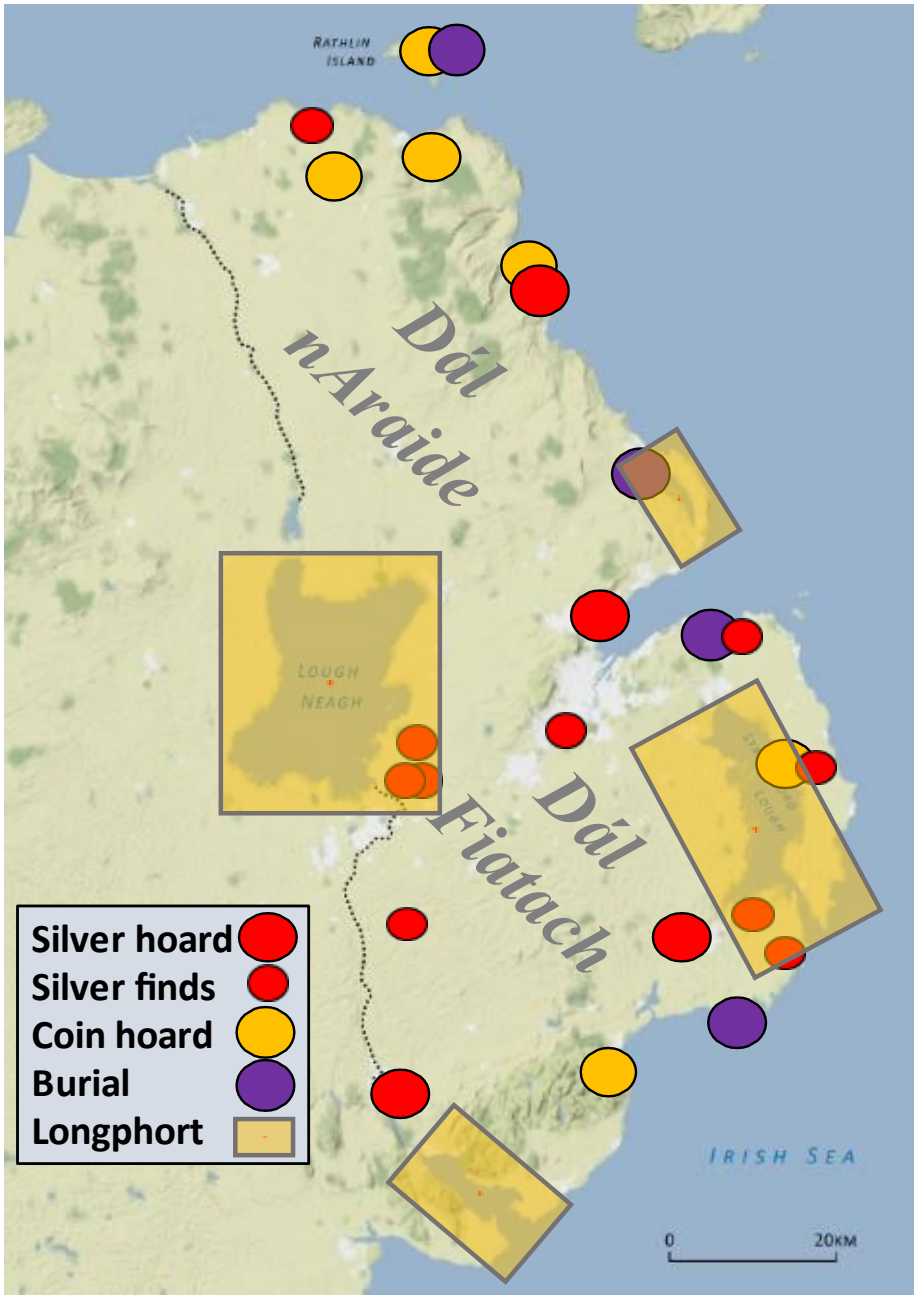



**Fig. 7.1: Overview map showing the principal archaeological evidence for the Scandinavians in Ulaid.**

More well-known toponymal evidence is provided by the Old Norse name *Ulfreksfjorðr*.Overall, the evidence from Larne certainly provides evidence for a Scandinavian military presence during the Viking Age. However, the evidence from Larne stands out in how long-lasting a Norse presence it suggests. It has been established in Chapter Five that the warrior burial from Larne conforms to the same late ninth/early tenth century date as the majority of the archaeology discussed in the thesis. The annalistic report for Aed Finnliath's destruction of the *longphuirt* in 866 indicates that settlements were established by that year. It has also been explained in Chapter Six that the place-name *Úlfrecksfjörðr* dates to the late tenth century at the earliest. The evidence from Larne itself, the burial and the place name together indicate that the Norse were likely present in the location throughout the tenth century. If Larne was among the locations attacked in 866, not only would it mean that the Scandinavians returned and remained in the area for a long time after Aed Finnliath drove them out, far longer than they had already been there. It would mean that the Scandinavians frequently occupied Larne for a period of at least a century and a half. Overall, the evidence from Larne suggests that Scandinavian occupation of Larne Lough took place throughout the tenth century (or at various points during the century) and possibly for the greater part of the Viking Age.

The evidence from Rathlin Island is quite likely to represent a permanent Scandinavian settlement. The Rathlin Brooch, from the burial discovered in c.1780, and the antler comb, from the burial discovered in 1983/4, together indicate that the Norse were present on the island during the late ninth/early tenth century. Furthermore, the Viking Age archaeology of Rathlin Island yields far more evidence for domestic activity than military activity. The brooch and the comb are certainly domestic artefacts, as are the reported beads. The only military archaeology from Church Bay is the sword discovered in 1845, reported to have crumbled away as soon as it was exposed to the air. The ecclesiastical artefacts from the site may testify to the activities of Viking raiders, but it is known that such raided artefacts often ended up in the graves of women as appears to be the case at Ballyholme. Based on the artefacts from Church Bay, it can be said that the Norse community on Rathlin Island were there for settlement purposes. This was not a temporary base established to facilitate the activities of raiders. Permanent Scandinavian settlement on Rathlin Island would be made a certainty if the longhouse at Doonmore could be established as Scandinavian or Hiberno-Scandinavian in type. As discussed in Chapter Five, the Doonmore longhouse is more likely to

have been a Norse residence than a native Irish one, but this can only be proven if the site were to be excavated.

The '*longphort* phenomenon' of Viking Age Ireland, which has been the subject of considerable debate among scholars, has been a central focus of research carried out for this thesis. The historical record indicates that military bases on Strangford Lough, Carlingford Lough and Lough Neagh were crucial to Viking activities in Ulaid. The third chapter of the thesis has demonstrated that the archaeology in the vicinity of each of these loughs consists of the same type of archaeology that scholars have previously used to identify specific locations with *longphuirt* mentioned in the annals. Annalistic reports concerning 'heathens' and 'foreigners' in Ulaid during the period around the late ninth and early tenth centuries place a strong emphasis on Strangford Lough, Carlingford Lough and Lough Neagh. The Viking Age in the north of Ireland, therefore, provides a typical example of the *modus operandi* of the Vikings in Ireland. As discussed in Chapter Three, the formation of these *longphuirt* must played an important part in the diplomatic connections established between the Norse and the Dál Fiatach outlined above.

The above discussions of the material from Dál Fiatach and Larne, as well as analyses of burials and silver finds throughout the main body of the thesis, show that the archaeological evidence for the Norse in Ulaid places considerable emphasis on commercial and settlement activity. However, it has been demonstrated in Chapter 2 that early medieval annalists document a history of the Vikings in Ulaid involving considerable conflict between the Norse and the population groups in the region. For example, diplomatic connections between the Norse and the Dál Fiatach is the most significant paradigm presented by the archaeology discussed throughout the thesis. The body of archaeology that represents this paradigm indicates that this network was upheld in the late ninth and early tenth centuries. However, the final report of the Strangford Lough encampment in 943, documents how almost all of the Strangford Vikings were killed by the Leth Cathaill, a *trícha cét* of Dál Fiatach. Downpatrick, the primary religious site of the Dál Fiatach, was attacked and burned by the Vikings in 989 and possibly again in 990. Sigtryggr Silkenbeard, the Hiberno-Norse king of Dublin led two raids in Dál Fiatach, on Inch and Kilcleif, in 1002. Although the archaeological record forms the core focus of this thesis, this contradiction cannot be ignored. Indeed, this may explain why, despite the amount of Viking Age archaeology in the region, the Viking Age in the

north of Ireland has not previously been the subject of specific research. Viking Age Dublin and Waterford have been subject to extensive archaeological research and public interest, which should not be surprising as there is a widespread consciousness of the origins of the modern cities as Hiberno-Scandinavian towns. One can therefore see why the Viking Age archaeology of Ulaid has not received the attention it warrants. Despite the impact that the Norse had on Ulaid in the Viking Age proper, this came to a conflicting end in the tenth /early eleventh century making the Vikings of Ulaid far less visible in the landscape than those in the south-east.

This thesis has clarified the extent of the archaeological, historical and toponymal evidence for Viking Age Scandinavians in Ulaid. The region contains considerable evidence, compared to the remainder of the country outside the east-midlands, for Scandinavian military, commercial and settlement activity throughout the ninth century and in the early part of the tenth. In this period, the Early Viking Age (c.800-920), the activities of the Norse in Britain and Ireland involve raiding and warfare under the leadership of mobile war-leaders. The same cannot be said of the later Viking Age when raiding no longer takes place on the same scale, the Hiberno-Scandinavians establish a centralized monarchical authority in Dublin and become Christian. On this basis, the north-east of Ireland should be seen as one of the most important parts of the island when considering 'the Vikings'. In the broader landscape of Viking Age Britain and Ireland, the province-kingdom of Ulaid should be seen in a similar light to regions such as the Isle of Man, Cumbria and as an area impacted significantly by the Norse presence in the Northern Irish Sea during the Viking Age. Overall, it can be said that the consequences of the Viking impact on the province-kingdom of Ulaid included raiding and warfare but also, as the archaeological record reveals, the foundation of economic connections between the Scandinavians and the provinces ruling dynasties, and the establishment of settlements on the region's coastal areas. The analysis of the Viking Age archaeology of Ulaid reveals that this commercial and settlement activity was predominantly a feature of the period around the end of the ninth and the beginning of the tenth centuries.

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