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A VIKING AGE MARITIME HAVEN: A REASSESSMENT OF THE ISLAND SETTLEMENT AT BEGINISH, Co. KERRY.

JOHN SHEEHAN, STEFFEN STUMMANN HANSEN & DONNCHADH Ó CORRÁIN

ABSTRACT

The results of O'Kelly's excavations on Beginish Island are reassessed and it is proposed that there was a long-lived settlement there that functioned as a Viking-age maritime way-station. This re-evaluation is conducted in the light of recent scholarship on the nature of Scandinavian and Hiberno-Scandinavian settlement in Ireland and, in part, is based on the finds that have emerged on Beginish since the conclusion of the excavations there. The site is considered in the context of its location on the sea route that joined Hiberno-Scandinavian Cork with Limerick, and it is suggested that other such way-stations await discovery.

INTRODUCTION

Beginish Island lies between Valentia Island and the Iveragh peninsula mainland at the northern end of Valentia Harbour, Co. Kerry (Fig.1; Plate 1). During vernal equinoctial tides it is connected by a curving sandbar to Church Island, on which the well-known Early Medieval ecclesiastical site that was excavated during the mid-1950s (O'Kelly 1958) is located. The eastern end of Beginish comprises a narrow sandy isthmus, with a beach on both sides, which terminates in a plateau known locally as Canroe (*An Ceann Rua*). The date and background of the settlement complex located on this part of the island, which was investigated and partly excavated in the early 1950s (O'Kelly 1956), forms the subject of this paper.

The principal aim of the authors is to reassess some of the results of the excavations carried out on the Beginish settlement, particularly those relating to its apparent second phase of occupation. O'Kelly, in the context of his discovery of a rune-inscribed stone on the island, noted that there was some form of 'Viking' element to this phase and proposed a novel but somewhat flawed interpretation of this (O'Kelly 1956, 191). In the decades since the publication of the excavation results, however, it has become apparent that a number of the small finds from the site are of Scandinavian or Hiberno-Scandinavian character. In addition, further finds of Scandinavian or Hiberno-Scandinavian material have emerged separately as stray-finds from the island. All of these objects now need to be considered together in order to reassess the background and character of the Beginish settlement. Furthermore, the significance of the sunken-floored form of the best preserved of the Beginish houses, and the recent recognition of a Scandinavian North Atlantic parallel for an unusual feature of this building, must also be considered in this context.

It is the authors' opinion that this reassessment of the results of the Beginish excavations is both necessary and justified. It is proposed that the occupation of Beginish, at least in its apparent second phase, was clearly of Scandinavian or Hiberno-Scandinavian character and that this probably primarily functioned as a maritime haven or way-station. Furthermore, it is argued that this was not a short-lived Viking base, such as are occasionally referred to in other parts of Ireland in the annals and in other historical sources, but rather that it was an enduring settlement. Finally, it is suggested that two distinct areas of Scandinavian or Hiberno-Scandinavian settlement on the island - one of tenth century date and the second most probably of the eleventh and early twelfth centuries – may now be identified.

Throughout this paper the terms 'Scandinavian' and 'Hiberno-Scandinavian' are used in preference to other somewhat unsatisfactory labels, such as 'Norse' / 'Viking' and 'Hiberno-Norse' / 'Hiberno-Viking'. The authors feel that the terms 'Norse and 'Viking' are rather reductionist and serve to simplify what they understand were complex cultural processes. It is almost impossible, and perhaps even impractical, to define terms such as Scandinavian and Hiberno-Scandinavian precisely. However, the following definitions are offered as working models for these terms in the context of Viking Age Ireland. 'Scandinavian' is used to refer to material culture forms that are understood to be ultimately derived from Scandinavia. In the Irish context, however, contact with Scandinavia may commonly have been mediated through other regions and may also, therefore, carry influences from those regions. Material culture cannot automatically be equated with biological heritage, of course, though they can be correlated. Indeed, material culture may also be correlated with a sense of self-identity and, in using the term Scandinavian, the authors are implying that sites characterised by such material culture traits were the domain of groups of Scandinavian origin (or perhaps of groups of mixed heritage who consciously privileged their Scandinavian connections). The term 'Hiberno-

Scandinavian' refers to material culture traditions that are characterised by a fusion of elements that are derived from both Scandinavia and Ireland. While artefacts that combine the traditions of both areas are found in several contexts in Early Medieval Ireland, concentrations of artefacts and novel settlement forms - such as occurs in urban sites and, as is proposed here, on Beginish - suggest that these may have been populated by individuals, many of whom may have been of Scandinavian background, who had become acculturated through the cumulative effects of processes such as trade, intermarriage and, perhaps, changes in self-definition by cohorts of the local population (Ó Donnabháin and Halgrímsson 2001, 66-68, 79). Viewed from this perspective, Hiberno-Scandinavians were more likely than Scandinavians to be bilingual and, generally, were of later date than Scandinavians in the Irish context.

O'KELLY'S EXCAVATIONS

The complex identified by O'Kelly comprised eight houses, fifteen cairns, eight animal shelters and two poorly constructed structures, most of which lay on the Canroe plateau within a network of fields bounded by low stone walls (Fig. 1). Two houses, a cairn and an animal shelter were fully excavated. Prior to the excavations most of the structures were visible as exposed features due to the fact that erosion, which was hastened by the introduction of rabbits to the island in the 1920s, had obliterated Canroe's grass-cover as well as most of its other vegetation. This erosion has now spread down to the isthmus that joins Canroe to the remainder of the island, and here shifting sands have exposed a number of new walls and a cairn as well as engulfing two of O'Kelly's houses (nos 6 and 7).

In O'Kelly's view, the excavation results demonstrated the occurrence of two principal phases of activity in the settlement. The first of these, he suggested, dated to the Early Medieval period and may have preceded the second phase, which was also Early Medieval in date, by only a short space of time. This later phase was the one which produced features and finds of Scandinavian or Hiberno-Scandinavian character. The excavations also provided some evidence for the temporary occupation of Canroe during the Later Medieval period.

The evidence for the supposedly earlier period of occupation consisted of five houses, fifteen cairns, six animal shelters and all but four of the field walls. All of these features occurred on the turf-covered surface of the boulder clay, which was later engulfed by wind-blown sand. One of the five houses (O'Kelly's no. 2) was excavated. Only the foundations of this circular structure, which was 6.5m in internal diameter, survived and no domestic refuse was recovered from it. The remaining houses (O'Kelly's nos. 3, 4, 5 and 8), all circular in plan, were marked only by the remnants of their foundation courses. The cairns were mainly composed of small stones and the excavated example, which yielded no finds, measured 3.5m in diameter and stood 0.5m in height. The field-walls, which were formed of upright stones and were one stone in thickness, were poorly preserved and survived to a maximum height of 0.5m. They combined to form a network that extended over Canroe.

The excavator interpreted the presence of cairns as being suggestive of the practice of tillage in the earlier settlement complex, a theory reinforced by the finding of two quern stones which had been re-used in the construction of one of the later houses. Stock raising also appears to have been practised in the settlement and deposits of limpet and periwinkle shells were associated with all of the houses. The site appears to have been abandoned following the accumulation of a layer of sand, averaging 0.5m in thickness, over Canroe.

The period of abandonment was followed by a period when vegetation again became established on Canroe. This resulted in the development of another turf-layer, averaging 0.55m in thickness, on which a great scatter of angular stones accumulated. O'Kelly suggested that the second phase of occupation was contemporary with this. The structures that he consigned to this phase comprised three houses (O'Kelly's nos 1, 6 and 7), two animal shelters and four field-walls. He proposed that these three houses were probably contemporary with one another on the basis that they were built on a similar turf-layer (It is proposed below that this theory is incorrect, and that House 1 is considerably later in date than Houses 6 and 7). The first of these houses was fully excavated and is described in some detail below. The foundations of the remaining two, which were roughly rectangular in plan, were situated adjacent to one another on the southern side of the sandy isthmus a short distance above the beach. The four field-walls associated with this second phase of occupation differed from the earlier walls in that they were each formed from a double line of upright stones.

Houses 6 and 7, even though they were not excavated, are of particular interest partly because of the finds that have come to light from their immediate vicinity over the years. These finds comprise a soapstone bowl of Scandinavian character and a Hiberno-Scandinavian ringed pin, which were separately found some years after the excavations on Beginish had been completed, as well as a Scandinavian type rotary whetstone and a hollow bone cylinder of the type commonly found in Hiberno-Scandinavian towns, both of which were found prior to the excavations.[1] These finds, and their significance, will be fully considered below.

The evidence of the faunal remains recovered from the excavated house suggested to O'Kelly that there may have been a greater emphasis on stock-raising during this second period, with ox, pig and sheep being represented in its bone assemblage. The bones of fish and sea birds, as well as great quantities of shellfish, were also uncovered. The three houses, he argued, were abandoned when a sand layer, 0.8m in depth, accumulated very rapidly. This process was followed by the formation of more thin turf-layers.

Plate 1. View of Beginish Island from Valentia Island, with Canroe on right.

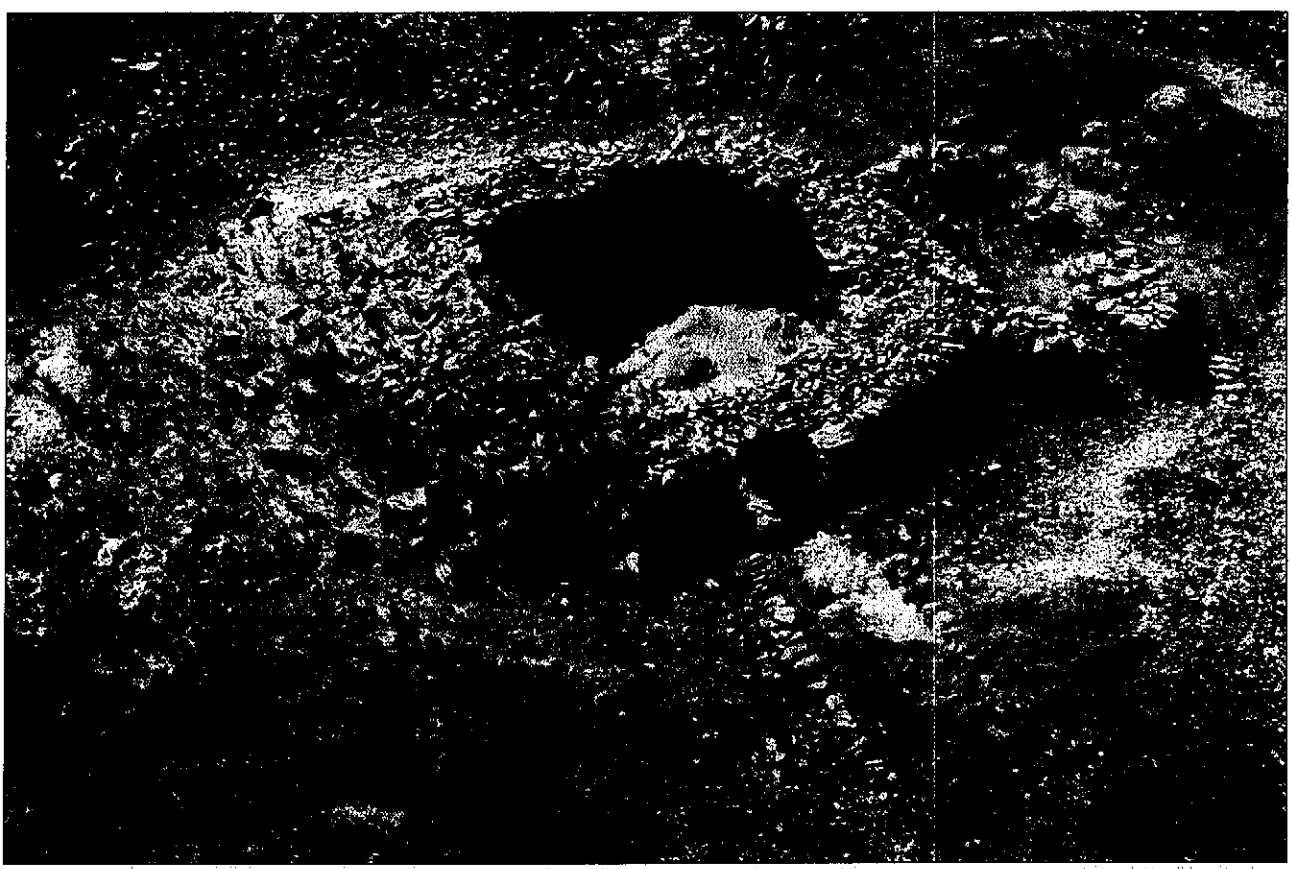

Plate 2. Aerial photograph of House 1, Beginish, from east. Photo: Dúchas.

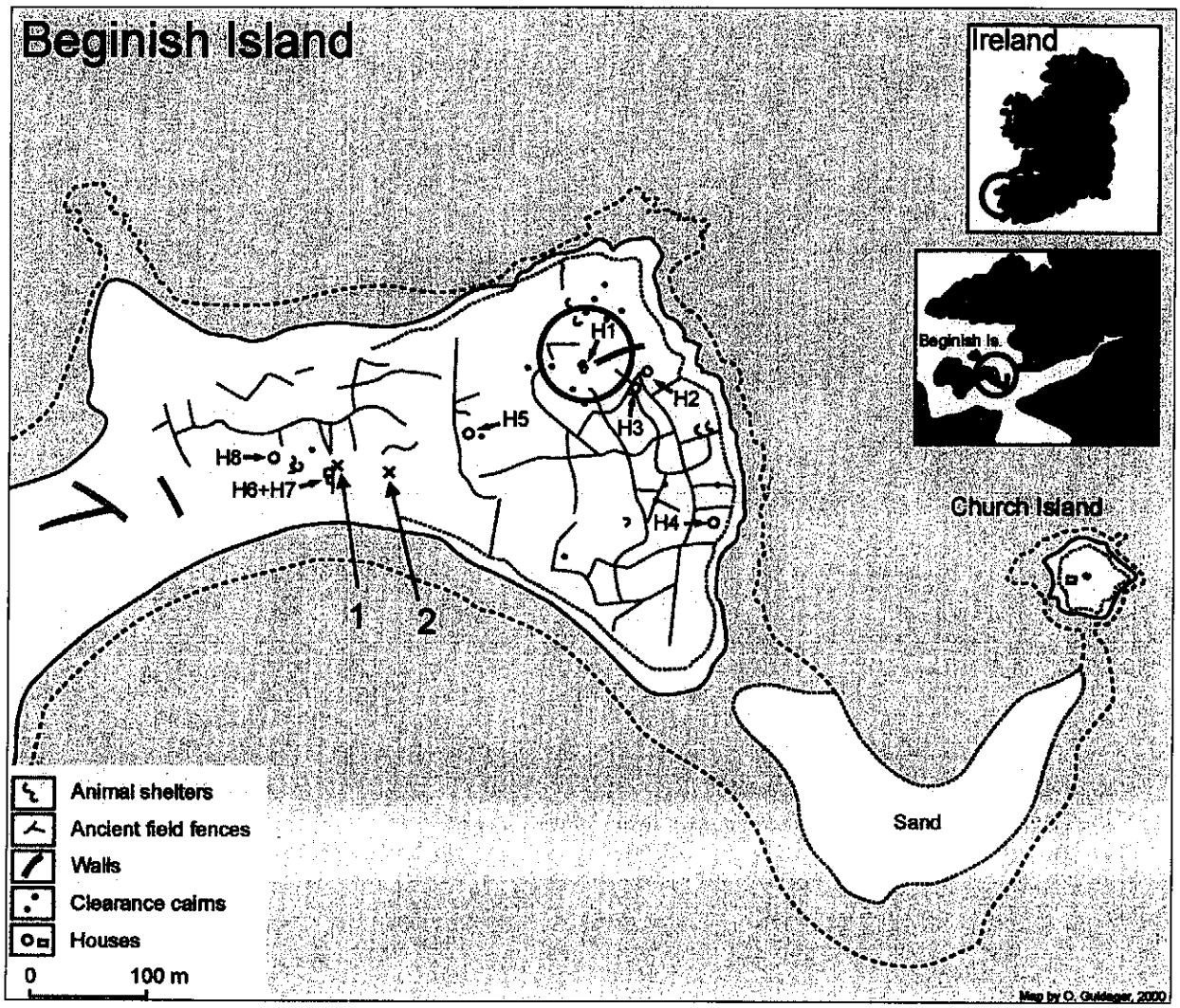

Fig. 1. Location map of Beginish, Co. Kerry. 1: soapstone bowl; 2: ringed pin.

THE BEGINISH HOUSE (House 1)

Description

Located on the east-facing slope of Canroe and just below its summit, this unusual house was fully excavated by O'Kelly (1956, 160-166). Prior to this it appeared as a large mound of stone, with some wall-facing visible, and with a large deposit of shells and animal bone extending out from its eastern side. Excavation revealed it to be a large circular house, 11m in external diameter, of sunken-floored construction (Figs. 2-3, Plate 2). Its corbelled wall stood to a maximum height of 3.5m above the original floor-level and averaged 1.9m in basal thickness. Although it is well built, the finish of the wall is rather rough and uneven and many large interstices are evident. At the eastern side of the house there is a lintelled entrance passage, 2.5m in length, with inclining jambs; at its inner end it measures 0.82m in basal width and 1.75m in height, while at its outer end, which is marked by a threshold slab, it measures 1.15m and 1.95m respectively. Beyond the outer wall-face an open sunken entranceway, with sides formed by retaining walls of boulders, extends for a further 5m (Plate 3). The innermost lintel of the entrance passage bore a Runic inscription on its underside (see below).

The internal diameter of the house at floor level is 6.75m. Its corbelled wall features an overhang of 0.25m, and its internal basal course occurs approximately 1m below the level of that of the exterior. The building had a timber-framed roof, and O'Kelly suggested that the ends of its radial timbers were anchored in the six oblique sockets that are located around the circuit of the wall-face at an average height of 2m above floor level. A lintelled opening is located above the doorway, and the rear wall of this feature contains a small ope that runs through to the outer wall-face of the house (Plate 4). At the north-west a number of interstices, which may have facilitated the erection of some wooden furnishing, occur at a height of 1.5m. An oval wall-niche is located in the wall at the south, 0.75m above the original ground level.

On excavation the floor deposit of this house was found to comprise a black, sticky, carbonised spread that contained large quantities of shell and bone. A bronze pin with a disc-shaped head, which was found on the surface

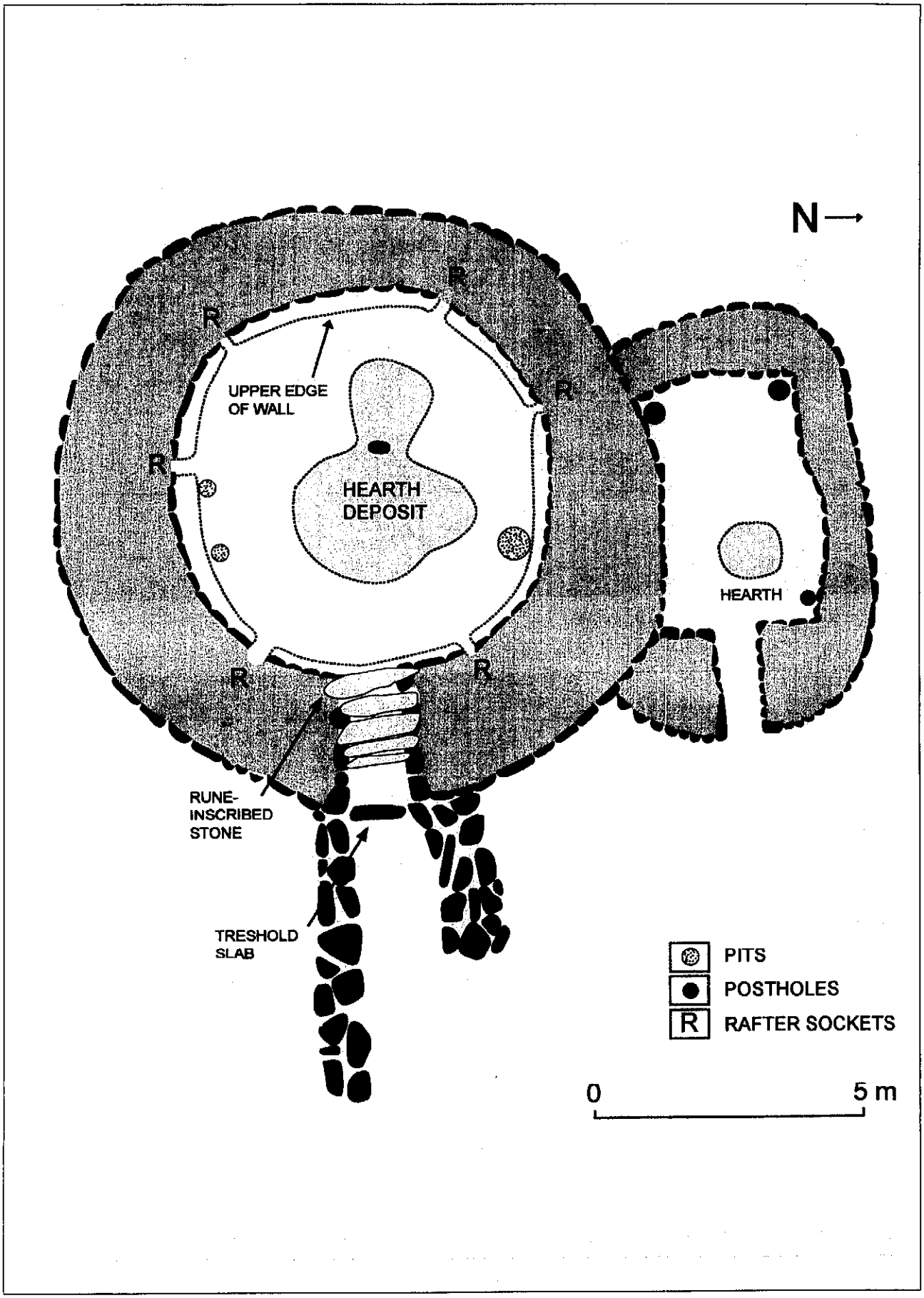

Fig. 2. Plan of House 1, Beginish (after O'Kelly 1956).

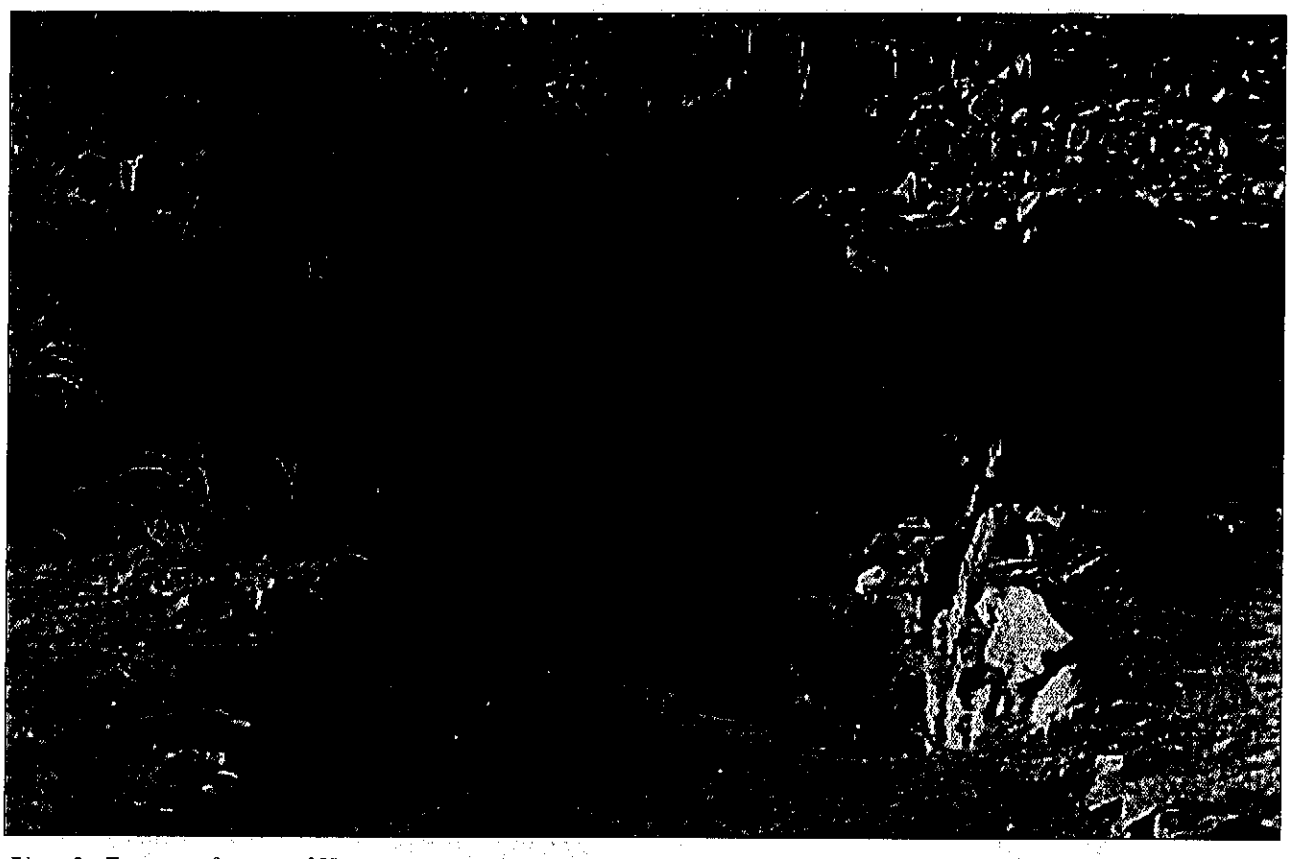

Plate 3. Entrance feature of House 1, Beginish.

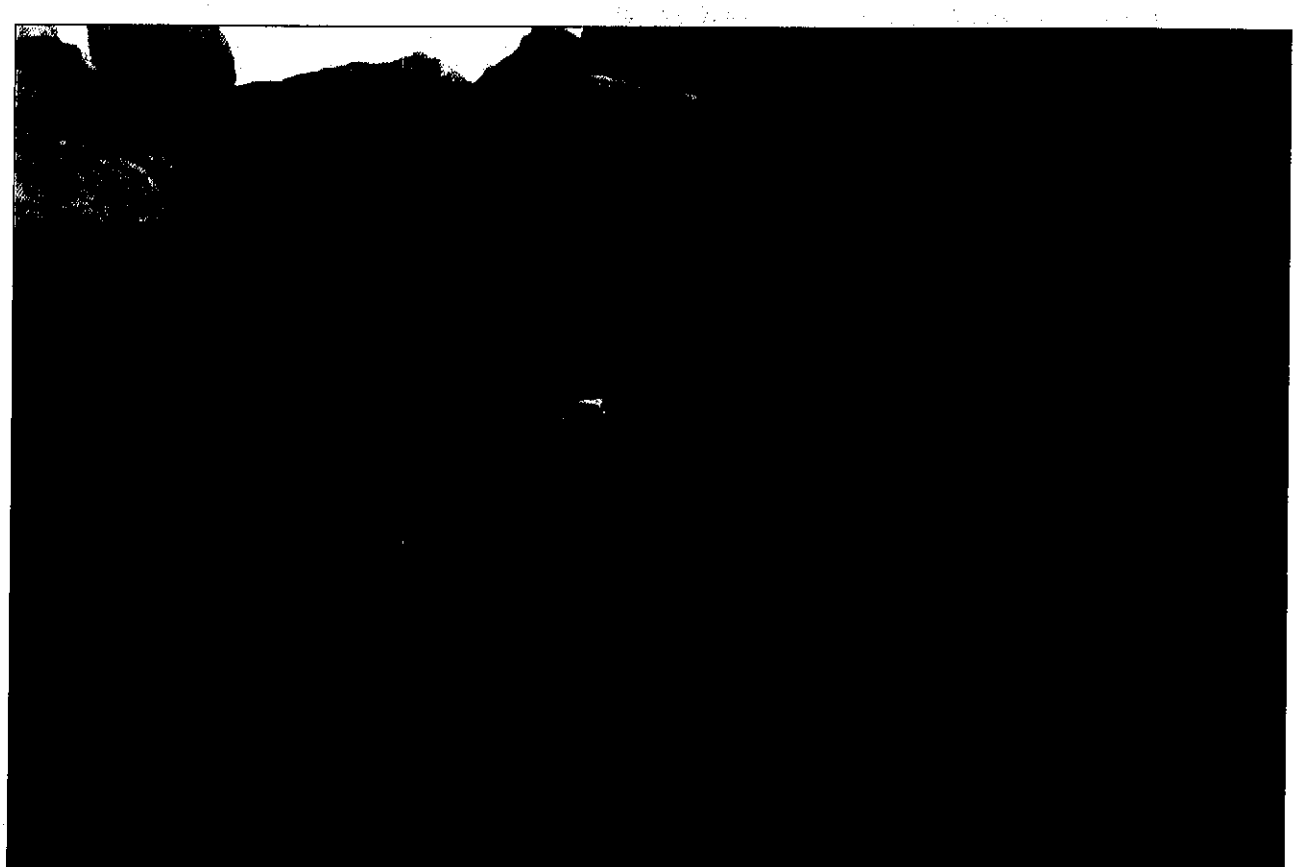

Plate 4. Vent-like feature above entrance in House 1, Beginish, from interior.

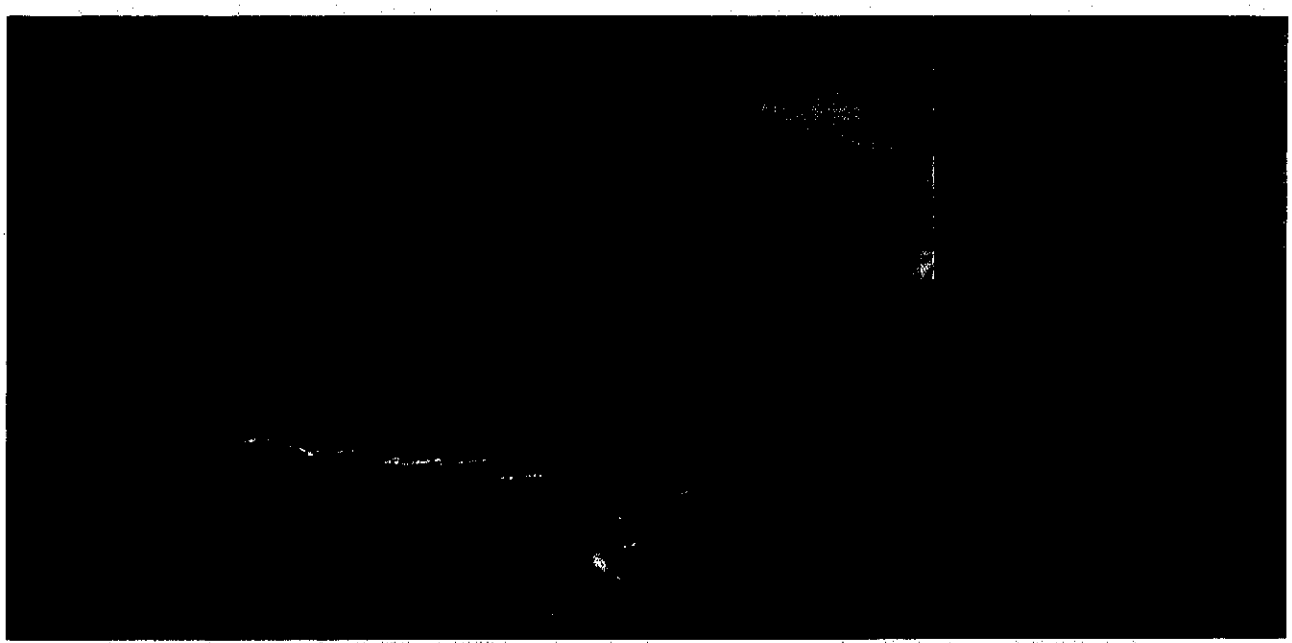

Plate 5. View of isthmus on Beginish from WNW, with both beaches and Canroe visible.

of this habitation deposit, will be discussed below. This thick spread overlay a large hearth, centrally located, which contained wood ash, shell and bone; an upright slab served as a hearth-back. Near the edge of the hearth was found a highly polished, cruciform-shaped pin, which is made from either bone or ivory, and a fragment of a bone comb. These finds are also considered below.

Abutting the north side of the house is a rectangular building of inferior masonry. It measures 4.5m x 3m internally and its walls stand to a maximum height of 1.15m. They average 1.2m in width and reach a maximum thickness of 2m on either side of the 0.75m wide entrance, which is positioned in the eastern end-wall. Excavation revealed a floor deposit comprised of a layer of refuse overlying a hearth. Beneath this was the original floor of humus-laden sand, in which post-holes were found at three corners; these presumably held the roof supports. A layer of habitation refuse extended from outside the entrance of this house towards the entrance of the adjoining one. On the basis of several arguments, O'Kelly concluded that the period of occupation of this rectangular house was probably contemporary with that of the sunken-floored one.

Parallels and context

The Beginish house is extremely unusual in an Irish context on account of its sunken-floored form. This feature is the principal defining characteristic of the *grubenhaus* tradition of the Scandinavian, Germanic, Slavic and Anglo-Saxon worlds in which the houses may be of rectangular, square or circular plan. Although there are a number of possible sunken-floored buildings known from native settlement contexts in Ireland, it is argued below that none of these serves as a convincing parallel for the Beginish example. In fact, it seems more likely that the background of the Beginish house lies in a fusion of native Irish building traditions with other architectural concepts that were being transmitted into Ireland through the Hiberno-Scandinavian towns.

At the outset, it is necessary to consider the Beginish house in the context of those apparently sunken-floored buildings known from Early Medieval native contexts elsewhere in Ireland. There are actually very few of these structures on record, with a total of only four examples being referred to by Murray (1983, 66), Wallace (1992, 73) and Walsh (1997, 52) in their separate discussions of the sunken-floored buildings known from the Hiberno-Scandinavian towns.[2] These are: Inishkea North, Co. Mayo, where two of the four examples occur (Henry 1945, 137-140, fig. 8); Illaunloughan, Co. Kerry (White Marshall & Walsh 1998, 110, fig. 11.5) and Inis Tuaiscirt, Co. Kerry (Cuppage 1986, 298, fig. 174). The first two of these sites have been excavated and from the published results of this work it is clear that their houses are not directly comparable the Beginish house either in form or intention. In both locations these were constructed in very exposed coastal locations where their sunken nature may have primarily resulted from a response to the need for insulation from the elements. This seems quite likely in the case of the Illaunloughan house where, significantly, the floor does not actually appear to be of true sunken form, being cut below external ground level on one side only (White Marshall & Walsh 1998, 110). It is of crucial importance to note that the houses at neither of these sites feature anything like the sunken entranceway which is such a distinctive and defining characteristic of the Beginish house. In the case of both the Inishkea North and the Illaunloughan houses, therefore, their partly sunken forms should, perhaps, not be interpreted as the

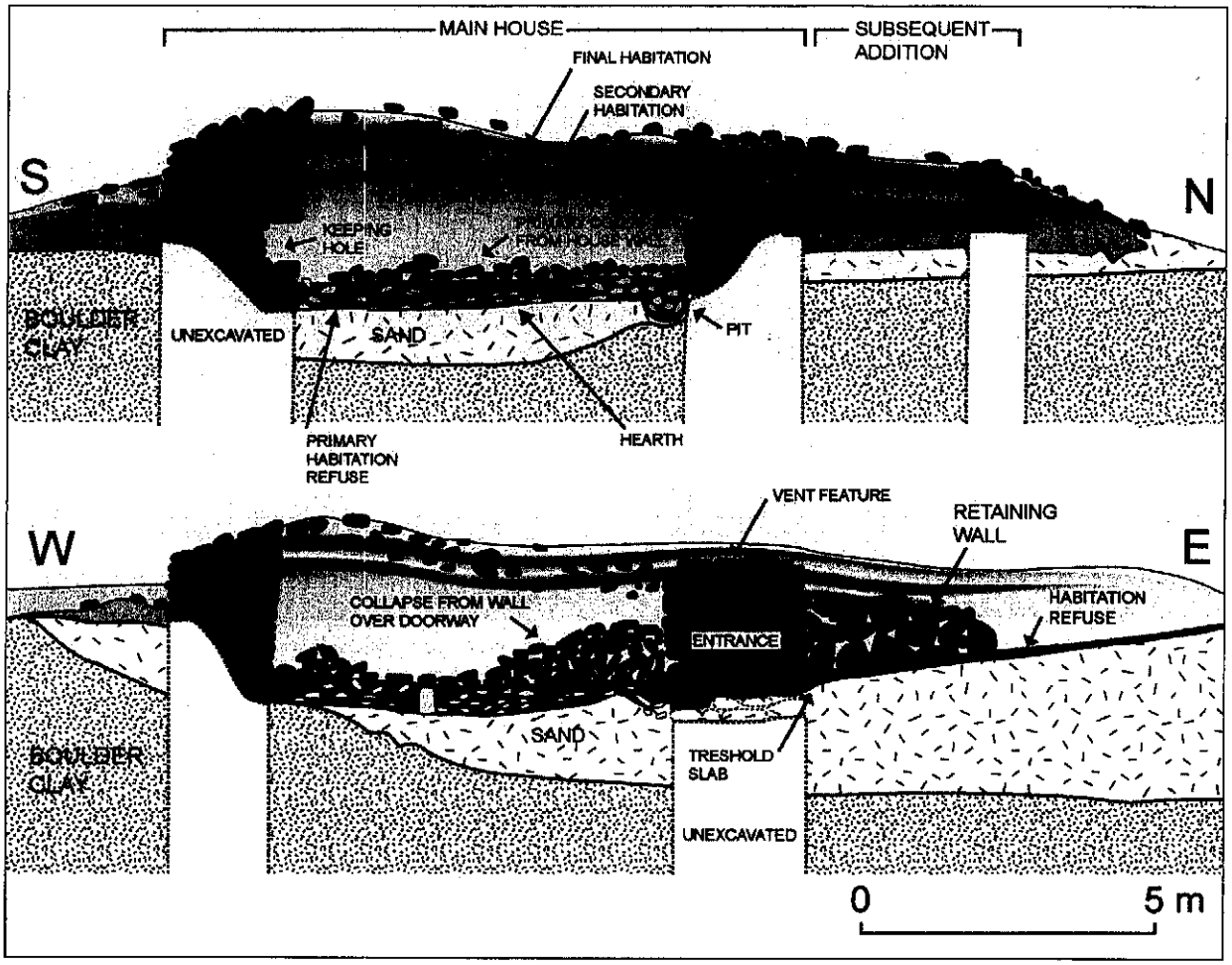

Fig. 3. Cross-sections of House 1, Beginish (after O'Kelly 1956).

result of any form of a conscious cultural expression but rather as the consequence of processes of localised environmental determinism.

The house on Inis Tuaiscirt, even though it has not been excavated, appears to have considerably more potential and relevance as a parallel for the Beginish house. It is of dry-stone corbelled construction, is circular in plan, and its floor-level lies 1.5m below the level of the exterior surface. Of particular interest is the 3.6m long sunken entranceway, with its dry-stone faced sides, for this unusual feature is also represented at the Beginish site. The location of the Inis Tuaiscirt house within the bounds of an Early Medieval ecclesiastical site may present some interpretative difficulties, however, and in the absence of excavated evidence it would be unwise to speculate further on its context.

It is proposed here that to include the Beginish sunken-floored house within the same category of building as those excavated on Inishkea North and Illaunloughan is both unwise and unwarranted. There are three good reasons for regarding it as being not only distinct from these structures but also related to buildings of Scandinavian or Hiberno-Scandinavian character. Firstly, its sunken-floored form is unlikely to have resulted as a consequence of local environmental conditions. Rather, in terms of this aspect of its character, it appears to represent a variation on a distinctive and well-known type of house which occurs in both Scandinavian and Hiberno-Scandinavian contexts but which is not represented on native Irish settlements. Secondly, two important features of the house - apart altogether from its sunken-floored form - may only be paralleled in houses from Scandinavian contexts; these features comprise its sunken entranceway, which is also found in houses in Viking-age Dublin and Waterford, and elsewhere, and the lintelled opening containing the small ope above its doorway, the only known parallel for which occurs in a building in Scandinavian Greenland. Thirdly, the Scandinavian and Hiberno-Scandinavian character of a large proportion of the finds from the Beginish house, and from elsewhere in the Beginish settlement complex (see below), serves to indicate the distinctive cultural affiliations of this building and of its occupants.

If it is accepted that the conclusions outlined above are valid, then it follows that comparanda for the Beginish house and its features should be sought for in Scandinavian and Hiberno-Scandinavian contexts. Houses with sunken floors ('pit-houses' or *grubehuse* in Danish) are of widespread occurrence in the settlement archaeology of southern Scandinavia from the late

Roman Iron Age until the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Here, they are often found in association with larger wooden dwellings and are usually interpreted as sheds or work huts. They have been divided into three morphological types by Bender Jørgensen and Eriksen (1995, 26-29): oval (Type A), circular (Type B) and rectangular (Type C). Structures of Type B, which are of relevance in this context because of their general similarities to the Beginish house, even though the latter is of stone construction, are defined as 'round sunken huts with closely-spaced stake-holes and larger post-holes at the gable ends'. Excavated houses of this type in the rural settlement at Trabjerg, Jutland, Denmark, varied between 2.5m and 4m in diameter while their sunken floors were up to 0.7m in depth (Bender Jørgensen & Eriksen 1995, 28-29). The Trabjerg houses date to the ninth and tenth centuries, though there are some indications that the type began to develop during the eighth century.

Recent excavations in Dublin, at the Temple Bar West site, have revealed evidence of sunken-floored buildings there (Simpson 2000, 22-23). These normally consist of a small, rectangular, wattle-walled area, measuring c.3m by c.4m, with the roof being supported by vertical posts at opposite ends. They are entered through a sunken passageway of the sort represented on Beginish. Some of these buildings were dated by radiocarbon determinations to the late eighth and the ninth centuries. Three other examples of similar buildings, all of early to mid-tenth century date, were found in Dublin during earlier campaigns of excavation conducted by Ó Ríordáin (Murray 1983, 15-16). Larger and more sophisticated sunken-floored buildings emerge in Dublin and Waterford during the eleventh century (Simpson 2000, 31; Walsh 1997, 52-53), and Walsh has argued that these represent influence from England. While this may be the case, especially in view of the considerable body of archaeological evidence for increasing levels of trade and contact between England and the eastern parts of Ireland at this time, it is also possible that the earlier Dublin examples, dating to the ninth and tenth centuries, may be related in some more direct way to buildings of the *grubehus* tradition.

Whether the early Dublin sunken-floored buildings represent Scandinavian or English influence is actually of little relevance in the present context of discussing the Beginish house. What is important is that sunken-floored structures existed in Hiberno-Scandinavian urban settlements from at least the tenth century onwards, and that, in the absence of any convincing evidence for similar buildings from native contexts, the Beginish house should be considered to be a variant type of such buildings. Its distinctive entranceway and its sunken-floored form find strong parallels in Hiberno-Scandinavian contexts, while the stone construction and corbelled form of its walls most probably derive from the native Irish building tradition. In short, this house appears to be truly Hiberno-Scandinavian in character.

One feature of the Beginish house remains to be discussed. This is the unusual vent-like aperture that runs from the rear of the opening located above the doorway through to the outer wall-face of the house (Plate 4). Although in excess of a thousand houses and hut-sites are on record from Kerry (Cuppage 1986, 384-423; O'Sullivan & Sheehan 1996, 382-418), none of these exhibit a feature of this type. There is only one parallel for it known to the authors and this is at Anavik, in Greenland's Western Settlement (Stummann Hansen & Sheehan, *forthcoming*). Anavik is a Scandinavian farmstead that was investigated by Roussell in the 1930s. He recorded ten structures on the site including a church, a dwelling house, a byre and barn, a stable, a storehouse and sheep-sheds. The storehouse was a well-built two-storied structure and, on account of its splendid state of preservation, it is probably the best-known ruin in the entire Western Settlement (Roussell 1941, 34, 231-234, figs. 14, 129, 145). Vent-like apertures, very similar to the feature on the Beginish house, occur in four places in the walls of this building (ibid, 25, figs. 5-6). It is difficult to come to a definitive conclusion about the actual relevance of this parallel, given the great distance that lies between Greenland and Ireland, nonetheless it is worth noting that the only known comparable feature to the Beginish vent occurs in a secure Scandinavian context.

RUNE-INSCRIBED STONE

This large slab of slaty sandstone, which measures 1.85m in length, 0.45m in maximum width and 0.20m in thickness, was found serving as the innermost lintel of the entrance to the sunken-floored house (Fig. 4). It is now on exhibition in Cork Public Museum.[3] The initial words of the inscription are quite well preserved but its end is almost completely obliterated. A small equal-armed cross is pocked onto the surface of the stone above the second word of the inscription. O'Kelly and Kavanagh read the inscription as:

LIR . RISTI . STIN . ThINA+[MUNUIKL] . RISTI . [RUN]

This reading was translated by Kavanagh (in O'Kelly 1956, 174) as:

LIR ERECTED THIS STONE ; M..... CARVED (THE) RUNES

Johnsen, a Norwegian runologist, was the first to recognise that this reading of the Beginish inscription was probably flawed (1968, 220-221). In her consideration of the stone she agreed with the general formula O'Kelly and Kavanagh proposed for it but, crucially, offered alternative readings of the two personal names contained in it. She suggested that the name of the carver should be read as MUNULFR instead of MUNUIKL. More importantly, however, she proposed that the initial personal name was probably not the Irish name LIR, as suggested by O'Kelly and Kavanagh, but was more likely to be VERR, an Old Norse name. Barnes, Hagland and

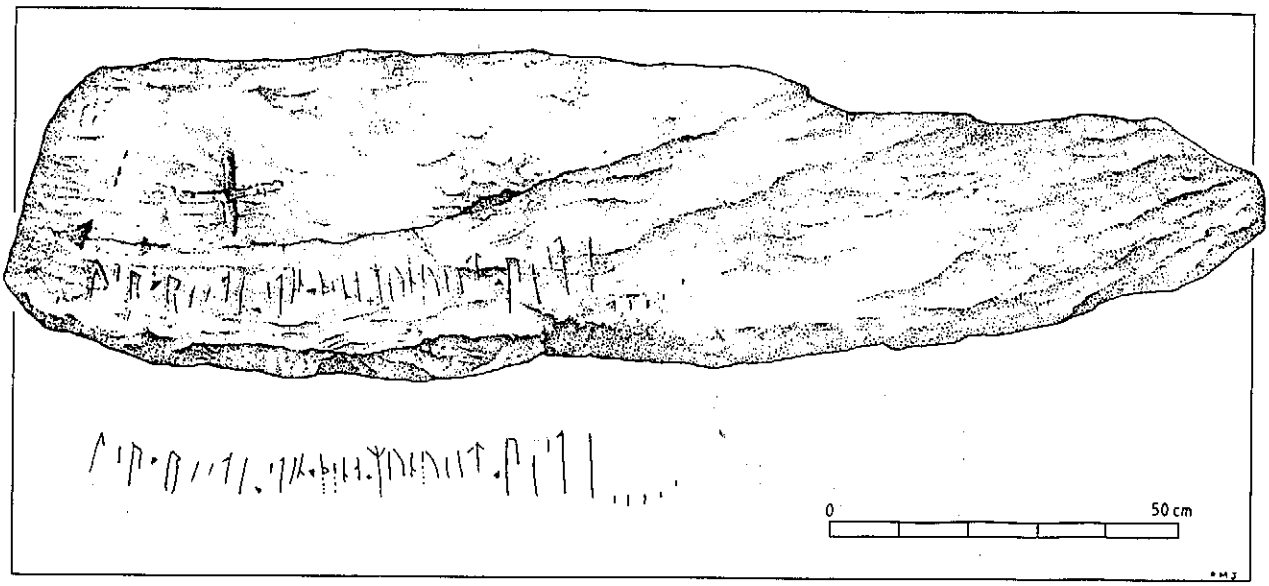

Fig. 4. Rune-inscribed store from Beginish (after O'Kelly 1956).

Page, who argue on linguistic grounds that the LIR reading is unlikely to be accurate, have recently supported Johnsen's doubts about it. They suggest that it may be read UIR (1997, 58). The considered reading offered by them for the full inscription is:

* (i) r (·) r (i s) t i (·) st *i* * (·) * * n * * m *u* * *u* * * * *r i s t i* . . .

The alternative readings of the Beginish inscription offered by Johnsen, and subsequently by Barnes, Hagland and Page, must be accepted as being more authoritative than that proposed for it by O'Kelly and Kavanagh, if only on the grounds that the former individuals are specialists in runes while the latter were not. It must therefore be accepted that the interpretation of the broader significance of the inscription offered by O'Kelly (1956, 191), which was strongly influenced by his belief that the initial personal name was an Irish one, is seriously flawed. It is clear that this assumption, which is now seriously undermined, influenced his interpretation of both the nature of the Beginish settlement and of Hiberno-Scandinavian relationships in general. In short, without the LIR element there is absolutely nothing inherent in the inscription to suggest that it may be used to support O'Kelly's admittedly attractive concept of Hiberno-Scandinavian integration. The issue of O'Kelly's interpretation of the Beginish settlement is returned to in the discussion below.

Kavanagh suggested, on linguistic grounds, that the inscription was carved sometime between AD 1000 and 1100 (in O'Kelly 1956, 175). Barnes, Hagland and Page, in their discussion of the inscription, agree with this date-range and suggest that it is 'unlikely to be older than the middle of the eleventh century' (1997, 58). Solely on archaeological grounds, on the basis of the date of the artefacts derived from the occupation layer of House 1, it is possible to support this dating.

In his discussion of the purpose of the rune-inscribed stone O'Kelly interpreted it as 'a monument in its own right' (1956, 188), meaning that it originally did not form part of House 1. He indicated that it could have originally served as a grave-marker. The shape of the stone, with its slab-like form and pointed end, could indeed be taken to suggest that it was originally selected because of its potential suitability for erection as a standing monument. The presence of the cross on the stone, furthermore, if it is contemporary with the inscription, could indicate that the individual commemorated was a Christian (O'Kelly 1956, 188). It is interesting to note, however, Barnes, Hagland and Page's observation that if the stone served as a grave-marker then its inscription is unusual in that it does not mention the name of the deceased (1997, 58-59). It is now, of course, impossible to verify whether the stone originally served such a function. Given the fact that its inscription does not make it clear that it was intended to serve as a grave-marker, however, the possibility of it performing altogether another type of function arises. Indeed, it is quite possible that it was originally erected on the island as an assertion of Scandinavian identity in an otherwise native Irish environment.

O'Kelly argued cogently that the positioning of the rune-inscribed stone as a door lintel was a secondary usage (1956, 171-172). Is it conceivable, however, that its positioning over the entranceway to the house was purely fortuitous? It seems possible that the builders of the house regarded this stone as being more than just building material. Furthermore, the fact that its positioning made its inscription only partly visible is of interest. This may not have been perceived as problematic if the importance of the stone was regarded as symbolic. The large number of runic inscriptions found in church buildings in Scandinavia has led to the suggestion that their presence in such contexts has a symbolic meaning, designed to emphasise a degree of continuity between the person or

community who originally raised the stone and those responsible for building the church (Marie Stoklund, pers. comm.). Is it possible that the rune stone from the Beginish house was deliberately incorporated into its entrance as a reminder of the link, cultural or ethnic, which may have existed between those responsible for its creation and those who built the house? If so, this would further strengthen the argument that the builders were Scandinavians or Hiberno-Scandinavians.

THE BEGINISH FINDS

O'Kelly's excavations produced a fairly wide range of small finds, especially from the occupation layers of House 1 (1956, 175-181, figs. 3-5). In addition, the published report contains details of a number of unstratified finds that came to light during the 1940s and 1950s, especially from the vicinity of Houses 6 and 7, as a consequence of the erosion that was affecting the island at this time (1956, 181-182). The overall corpus of the finds is remarkable in that not a single one of the six culturally diagnostic artefact-types within it is demonstrably of native Irish type. All of them, significantly, are either of Scandinavian or Hiberno-Scandinavian character or are usually derived from cultural contexts of this type. These finds will now be discussed.

Cruciform-headed Pin

This unusual object, registration no. E977: 2, was found near the edge of the hearth in House 1. It is a cruciform-headed pin, one of the arms of which is missing, and measures 7.5cm in length (Fig. 5). The shank is of circular cross-section. The pin is very highly polished, and it is unclear if it is made from bone or ivory. On the basis of visual examination, however, it appears more likely that it is made from the latter substance.

Pins of this form are not on record from any other known Early Medieval context in Ireland. O'Kelly, in his discussion of the find (1956, 177), noted a possible parallel for it from Carraig Aille II, Lough Gur, Co. Limerick (Ó Ríordáin 1949, 81-82, fig. 14, no. 37). This pin, however, has a much less well-defined head than the Beginish example and is not a particularly convincing parallel, even though other material of Scandinavian or Hiberno-Scandinavian type is known from this site (Ó Floinn 1998, 149-150). O'Kelly, however, also drew attention to a parallel for the Beginish pin in Stavanger Museum, southwest Norway.[4] He described this example as being of tinned iron or bronze, and he noted that it was found in association with a fragment of 'a triangular hanging bowl'. The find that O'Kelly refers to derives, in fact, from a richly furnished male cremation grave which was discovered in 1942 at Hegreberg, on the island of Vestre Åmøy (Stavanger Museum 1942, 157). The pin, which measures 12.6cm in length, is actually made of silver (Foldøy 1995, 178-179). In addition to this object the grave contained, amongst other things, hack-silver, a possible lead weight, a bird-shaped cauldron mount, iron-working tools, an axe and a sword. On the basis of these finds the burial has been dated to the first half of the tenth century (Foldøy 1995, 179). It is of interest to note that another pin, broadly similar to the Hegreberg example, is also on record from this region of Norway. This appears to be of lead and was found in the late nineteenth century in a cremation grave at Grødem, Jæren (Helliesen 1894, 85: 1899, 61).[5] No other examples of comparable cruciform-headed pins are known from Scandinavia.

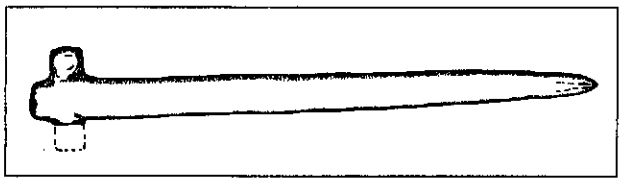

Fig. 5. Cruciform-headed pin from Beginish. Scale 1:1.

Cruciform-headed pins have also occasionally been found in the Scandinavian settlements of Scotland. Although they vary somewhat in form from the Beginish example, five examples are on record from the Scandinavian phases of Jarlshof, Mainland Shetland. The closest parallel measures 12.7cm in length and its arms are slightly expanded at the terminals (Curle 1935, 292-293, fig. 22.3; Hamilton 1956, 147-148, fig. 69,2; Graham Campbell 1980, 60). This was found in a midden deposit that was dated to the early eleventh century by Hamilton (1956, 141). The remaining four pins were found in midden layers dating to the late tenth or early eleventh centuries (Curle 1935, 292-293; figs. 22.4-5; Hamilton 1956, 150).

Another collection of five cruciform-headed pins derives from the excavation of a multi-period settlement site at Skaill, on Mainland Orkney. This was excavated by Gelling between 1963 and 1981 and its extensive collection of structures and small finds has recently been fully published by Buteux (1997). One of the pins, a cruciform-headed hipped example of native (Pictish) type, derived from an occupation layer dating to the eighth century (Buteux 1997, 49-55, 98, 135, fig. 8.4). The remaining pins, two of polished bone and two of polished antler, were more crudely manufactured (Gelling 1984, 29-30, figs. 13:20-23; Buteux 1997, 98-99, 135, fig. 8.3: 1023-1026). These were found in a midden in a Scandinavian context which was dated by Buteux to the '10th century or later' (1997, 77).

Excavations of Viking Age settlements in Iceland have also resulted in the discovery of cruciform-headed pins. One example, for instance, was found in the well-known Icelandic farmstead at Stöng (Vilhjalmsson 1996, 123, fig. 53). Another is known from the excavated settlement at Hofstaðir, where it derived from a tenth century context (Friðriksson & Vésteinsson 1998, no. 217; Vésteinsson, pers. comm.). In addition, two further pins of this type were found in the recently excavated settlement site at Sveigakot. One of these has been dated

to between AD *c.*950 and 1050 while the second has been provisionally assigned an eleventh-twelfth century date (Vésteinsson, pers. comm.).

Cruciform-headed pins of the type found at Beginish are clearly of Scandinavian character. Even though such pins are not of common occurrence, examples have been found throughout most of the North Atlantic region as well as in southwest Norway. All datable examples can be assigned to either the tenth or eleventh centuries. While it is not possible to date the Beginish pin independently, a general eleventh-century date for it is probably indicated by its presence in the occupation layers of House 1. If it is of ivory, as seems probable, it may be taken as an indication of the importance of the Beginish settlement at this time. It is likely that this exotic object ultimately derives from one of the Hiberno-Scandinavian towns, most probably Dublin, where it is known that walrus ivory was imported and worked (Roesdahl 1995, 26).

Comb

A small fragment of a one-sided bone comb, registration no. E977: 6, was found close to the hearth in House 1 (Fig. 6). This is 3cm in length and consists of a flat plate of bone measuring only 0.2cm in thickness (O'Kelly 1956, 177). In his discussion of this object O'Kelly paralleled it with a type of comb represented among the finds from Lagore crannog, Co. Meath, which the excavator described as being 'closely connected with the ordinary long comb of the Viking Age' (Hencken 1950, 184).

The comb fragment from Beginish may be assigned to Dunlevy's Class G which she describes as follows: 'Single-edged, straight-backed, composite, usually undecorated combs with narrow D-shaped side plates when taken in cross-section' (1988, 350). This type of comb has a rather broad date-range, with examples having been found in contexts dating from the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries in Dublin (ibid., 368), Waterford (Hurley 1997a, 656) and Cork (Hurley 1997b, 243-246). An early example is on record from a ninth-century context in Dublin (Dunlevy 1988, 368). It is not possible to assign a close date to the Beginish fragment, nor may it be definitively regarded as a Hiberno-Scandinavian product.

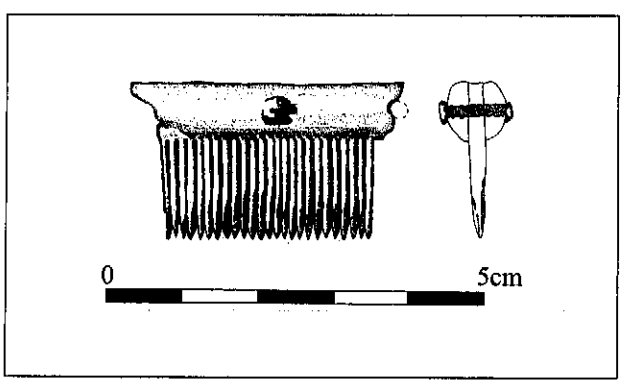

Fig. 6. Comb fragment from Beginish. Scale 1:1.

Disc-headed Pin

This bronze pin, registration no. E977:1, was found in the surface of the primary habitation deposits in House I (Fig. 7). It is 9cm in length and is of circular cross-section throughout. The upper part of the shank features two panels of incised decoration. This ornamentation and the head of the pin were described by O'Kelly as follows: 'On one side the ornament consists of three sloping bands while on the other there is a hatching of closely-set vertical lines. At the top of the shank there is on each side a minute projecting fillet. The fillets are surmounted by the head, a flat, more or less circular expansion. The front face of this contains a circular inset of a white substance.....The back of the head has an incised decoration of two opposed D's.' (1956, 175, fig. 3:1). The substance in the circular inset has been preliminarily re-identified as the remains of glass (Ó Floinn, pers. comm.).

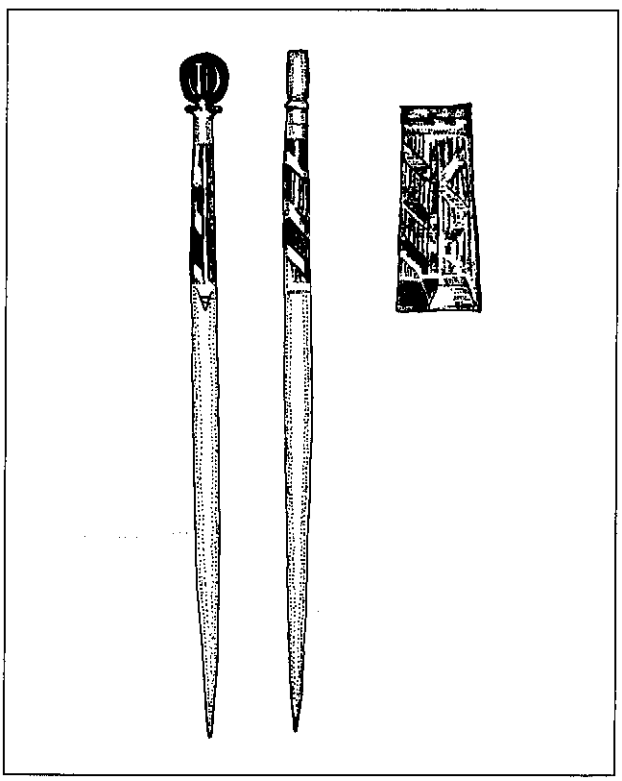

Fig. 7. Disc-headed pin from Beginish. Scale 1:1.

O'Kelly noted only one parallel for this pin (1956, 175). This was an unstratified example from Lagore, which only resembled it in general outline and had neither inset nor incised decoration. The Beginish pin belongs to a group of pins which has recently been classified by O'Rahilly as spatula-headed, with a sub-group consisting of disc-headed pins (1998, 29-30). O'Rahilly only includes one example of this type in her work on the pins from Dublin, dating it to the eleventh century (1998, 30, pl. 3). Two further examples of disc-headed pins are on record from Clonmacnoise, Co. Offaly, and these feature interlaced designs related to those on St. Lachtin's arm-shrine, an object decorated in the Hiberno-Urnes art-style that was made during the first quarter of the twelfth

century (Ó Floinn 1987, 183, pl. IIc). Examples of this type of pin are also known from a number of sites in Scotland (Crawford 1997, Ill. 9:121, 485, 503; Laing 1975, 324-326; Newman 1995, 155-157, Ill. 9), including the Scandinavian settlement at Freswick Links, Caithness (Batey 1987, 142, pl. 23c). It seems appropriate to date the Beginish pin to the eleventh or twelfth centuries.

Rotary Whetstone

This large fragment of a cylindrical object, which the excavator termed a 'grindstone' (O'Kelly 1956, 181, fig. 5:5), was found as an unstratified find near Houses 6 and 7 by Dr. Peter Delap, an antiquarian from Valentia island, in 1952. It is made of sandstone and its outer and inner diameters measure approximately 12.0cm and 6.6cm respectively. The object appears to have been broken during a stage of its manufacturing process, as there are chisel and punch marks preserved on both its inner and outer faces. Those on the outer face would have been smoothened away if the object had been used as a rotary whetstone, as this face would have served as the edging surface. The marks on the inner face may have been deliberately retained in order to improve its grip when rotating on a wooden axle. The central perforation of the object would have allowed it to be fixed on such an axle, so that it could serve for sharpening or pointing metal objects.[6]

O'Kelly cited only one parallel for the Beginish object, a broken example found during the excavations at the stone fort of Carraig Aille I (Ó Ríordáin 1949, 100, fig. 16, no. 115. I). Three further examples, however, which O'Kelly does not seem to have been aware of, are known from Lagore: two of these were unstratified finds while the third derived from Period II of the site's occupation (Hencken 1950, 173, fig. 90). This phase is dated by the excavator to between AD 850 and 934.

Since the Beginish excavations were published, a number of further examples of this type of object have turned up in Ireland and Britain. Many derive from Dublin, where they have been interpreted as devices for 'sharpening large tools and weapons and putting an edge on newly forged ones..... to judge by the numbers found, they were standard items of equipment and many belong to the earliest phase of the settlement' (*Viking and Medieval Dublin* 1973, 14). Other examples, from Waterford, derive from contexts ranging in date from the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries (McCutcheon 1997, 421-422, fig. 14.9.4). More examples, although somewhat disc-shaped, have turned up in Viking-age York, an urban centre which had close relationships with Dublin (MacGregor 1982, 76, 158, fig. 38; Radley 1971, 42 & 49). The Dublin and York finds, therefore, raise questions about the cultural attribution of this type of object. It is not surprising, given the strong archaeological indications of Scandinavian or Hiberno-Scandinavian influence at this site, that four fragments of such objects have been recovered from the excavations at the Irish Sea monastic centre of Whithorn, in Scotland, from levels dating to between AD *c.*845 and the mid-thirteenth century (Nicholson 1997, 457-458). The discovery of examples from Viking-age contexts in Norway, Sweden, Iceland and Greenland, however, combined with the general absence of such objects from native Irish settlements, makes it clear that these are finds of Scandinavian or Hiberno-Scandinavian, not Irish, character (Stumman, Hansen and Sheehan, 2001).

Petersen listed six examples of this type of object from Norway (1951, 243-244, fig. 136), some of which are more disc-shaped than the one from Beginish. Two of these derive from undateable male burials, while two others come from Viking-age graves dated by Petersen to the early ninth and the later tenth centuries. The remaining two probably derive from settlement sites, but are not from dateable contexts. One of these, however, is possibly from a Merovingian Iron Age (i.e., pre-Viking Age) context. The presence of objects of this type in Sweden is evidenced by a later nineteenth century reference to 'a pair of rotating whetstones' found in the 'black earth' area of the Viking town of Birka, on Björkö (Montelius 1879-1881, 177).

Examples of rotary whetstones from Iceland include one from a grave from Brú, in Biskuptungahreppur, to which a tenth-century date has been assigned (Eldjárn 1956, 62-63, 292-293, figs. 16 and 108; 2000, 85-86, fig. 24, 352-353, fig. 210). Others are on record from Viking-age settlements sites, such as those at Hólar in Biskupstungur and Hofstaðir in northern Iceland (Vésteinsson, pers. communication). Finally, one object of this type, though more disc-shaped, is also known from the River Farm site in the Eastern Settlement in Greenland (Nørlund & Stenberger 1934, 132, fig. 98).

It is clear from the contextual data, therefore, that finds of this kind from Ireland should be interpreted as Scandinavian or Hiberno-Scandinavian in terms of their cultural background. The presence of examples at Lagore and Carraig Aille I is not surprising given that other finds of Scandinavian character are known from these sites (Ó Floinn 1998, 149-150). What is of particular importance concerning the Beginish example, however, is that the evidence indicates that it was probably made on the island. This point, and its implications, will be returned to in the discussion below.

Bone Cylinder

This object, registration no. E977:8, termed a bone ferrule by O'Kelly (1956, 181, fig. 4.2), was found by Dr Delap near Houses 6 and 7. It is fabricated from the long bone of an animal. It belongs to an artefact-type of uncertain purpose that is well represented among the finds from the excavated Hiberno-Scandinavian towns. Many examples are known from Dublin (Wallace, pers. comm.), Waterford (Hurley 1997, 685, fig. 17:9) and Cork (Hurley 1997b, 263-266, fig. 108; 1997c, 144). Objects of this general type have also been found on Dalkey Island (Liversage 1968, 116, 225, fig. 27.212 & 291-292) and are also known from sites in England. Such objects are

sometimes regarded as by-products of bone and antler working, but they may also be regarded as artefacts in their own right. They are often highly polished and show evidence of friction with strings, hair or fibre. Various interpretations have been suggested for the Irish examples, for instance that they functioned as loom weights or beads (Liversage 1968). In a few cases they have been found in sets (Hurley 1997a, 685).

Soapstone Bowl

In 1959, a few years after the completion of O'Kelly's excavations on Beginish, Mr. Fred Mackey of Valentia Island discovered several fragments that together represented an almost complete example of a stone bowl (Fig.8). He found these about three metres north-east of House 6, one of the unexcavated structures located on the southern shore of the island's isthmus (see Fig. 1). The following summary description of the find, registration no. 1959:748, is based on that of O'Kelly (1961, 64-68).

The circular bowl is round bottomed with a maximum external diameter of 34.8cm and a maximum vertical height of 17.5cm. It varies between 1.5 and 2cm in thickness and has a flat rim. Tool marks are visible on both the inner and outer surfaces, with the external surface being smoother than that of the interior. An iron handle was attached to the rim of the bowl by means of two iron escutcheons, though this arrangement only partly survives. There are a number of ancient cracks in the bowl that were repaired by stitching using iron wire. Its outer surface is darkened by burning and there is an accretion of carbonised soot on its bottom.

O'Kelly obtained an identification of the stone from which the bowl was fashioned, from Dr. J. Jackson, as 'a chlorite schist' (1961, 67). Despite this geological misidentification he recognised that the comparanda for the bowl lay in the corpus of soapstone bowls known from Scandinavian contexts. The authors have recently obtained a new identification of the bowl, courtesy of Ivor Paul Harkin of the National Museum of Ireland, which states 'it is steatite (soapstone). It comprises finely laminated crystals, but does not have the normal texture associated with such material. This I suggest may have been caused by external heating of the bowl'. The Beginish bowl may now be safely regarded as an example of the typical Viking-age form.

Soapstone (steatite) is a soft, greasy stone that is easy to carve and form. It was an extremely important resource in the North Atlantic region during the Viking Age, resulting in this region being virtually aceramic. It was manufactured into a wide range of domestic utensils, such as cooking vessels, baking stones, spindle whorls, loom weights, gaming pieces, net and line sinkers etc. Quarrying of soapstone outcrops has been documented at various locations in Norway, western Sweden, Shetland and Greenland (Butler 1989; Resi 1979; Skjølsvold 1961). A few small outcrops have been located in Ireland, such as those at Crohy Head and Garton Lough, both in Co. Mayo (Ritchie 1984, 65-66, fig. 24), but there is no evidence to indicate that these were ever quarried in antiquity.

The numbers of soapstone objects of Viking-age date found in Ireland are very few. Excepting the

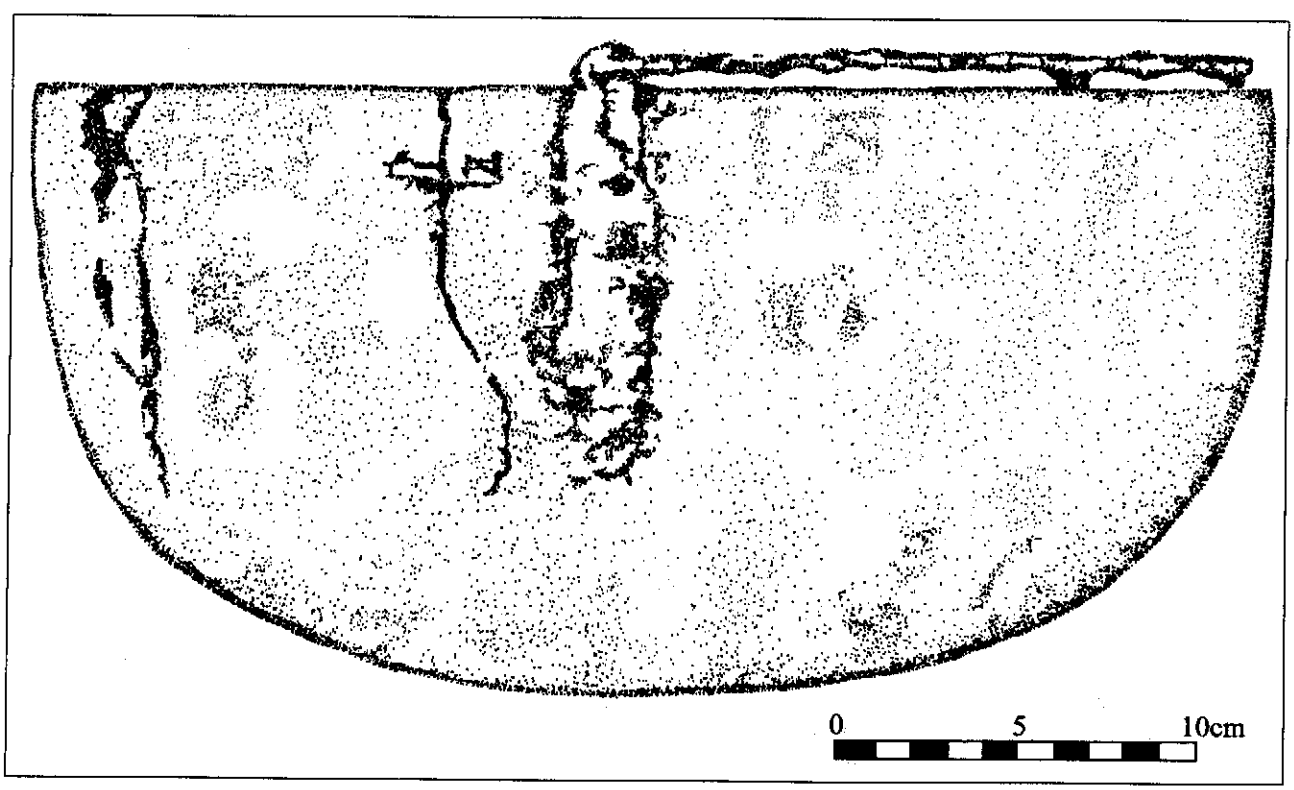

Fig. 8. Soapstone bowl from Beginish. (after O'Kelly 1961).

Beginish bowl, all of them derive from Hiberno-Scandinavian Dublin where they may be assigned a tenth-century date (Wallace, pers. comm.). These comprise half a dozen vessel sherds and a number of ingot moulds. Two of the Dublin fragments comprise rim sherds, and both of these seem to derive from circular vessels similar the one from Beginish. One of these (E172:12782), in fact, shares an additional characteristic with the Beginish bowl of having a flat rim.

Unfortunately, the soapstone bowl from Beginish does not derive from a stratified context and consequently it is not possible to propose an independent date for it. However, circular bowls form the classic type of soapstone vessel during the ninth and tenth centuries throughout the North Atlantic region. After the tenth century other forms, such as sub-rectangular and oval types, become common. It is likely, therefore, that the Beginish bowl dates to before the end of the first millennium.

Ringed Pin

Mr. B. Condon, of Valentia Island, found this object on the sandy surface of the Beginish isthmus in 1963. Its find-spot was recorded as being located about fifty yards east-south-east of where the stone bowl had been discovered a few years earlier (see Fig. 1). Previously unpublished, it now forms part of the collections in Cork Public Museum where it is registered as 1777:2915.

The well-preserved pin is 10.3 cm in length and its shank is of circular cross-section (Fig.9). The pin is of polyhedral-headed form and the lozenge-shaped panels at its front and rear each bear four simple dots while that on the top bears one such motif. The sides of the pinhead are bored or perforated to accommodate the ends of the ring. The ring, which swivels freely, is plain in form and is of circular cross-section. The object may be assigned to Fanning's plain-ringed, polyhedral-headed group of ringed pins (1994, 25-35). It represents the only example of its kind on record from the south west of Ireland.

Fanning's study has demonstrated that this type of ringed pin 'is the most typical dress-pin associated with the Insular Viking areas settled or frequented by the Hiberno-Norse' (1994, 25). Indeed, it is the dominant type represented in the large assemblage of ringed pins on record from Viking-age Dublin, from where the stratigraphic evidence clearly indicates that it was largely being produced in the mid-tenth century (though some examples derive from early eleventh-century contexts). As the 'classic' and most numerous form of Hiberno-Scandinavian ringed pin, it is not surprising to find that its distribution extends well beyond Dublin. Several examples have been found on native Irish settlements, for instance, and the type is also well-represented amongst finds from excavated Scandinavian settlements and graves throughout the North Atlantic region, from the northern and western isles of Scotland across to Newfoundland (1994, 30-34, figs. 11-12).

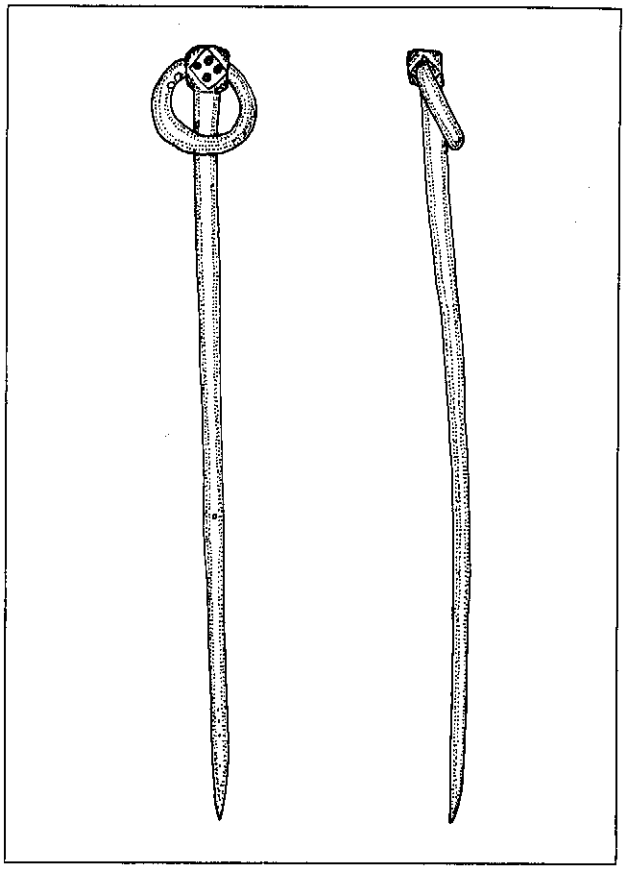

Fig. 9. Polyhedral-headed ringed pin from Beginish. Scale 1:1.

DISCUSSION

Previous Interpretations

One cannot but be struck, when reading O'Kelly's discussion of the results of the Beginish excavations, by how little attention was focused on the Scandinavian elements of the site. There is no doubt that Kavanagh's reading of the inscription on the rune stone, with his mis-identification of the initial personal name in it, strongly influenced O'Kelly's interpretation of the nature of the settlement. In short, as a consequence, O'Kelly considered the rune stone to be evidence of cultural integration between the Irish and the Scandinavians, and wrote (1956, 191):

> The discovery of a new Runic inscription is of importance.... Though it gives concrete proof of a Viking visitation of Beginish, there was no evidence that the visit resulted in pillage, destruction and slaughter. In fact, all the evidence available to us goes to show that the islanders lived in peace, and if the cross on the Rune stone is contemporary with the inscription, it may be that the Viking who carved the letters had already himself become a Christian and had settled down to live with his Irish friends. The Lir who erected the slab was probably an Irishman, and whatever may have been the original motive for

> setting up the monument, the inscription gives testimony that Gael and Gall could co-operate when the need arose!

It is quite clear from the above quotation that O'Kelly regarded the inhabitants of the Beginish settlement as being Irish. Two years later, in his preface to the excavation report of nearby Church Island, he re-stated this belief: 'Beginish had proved to be the domestic settlement of a group of farming-fisher folk some of whom still lived there in the early twelfth century...' and proceeded to note a possibility that the two islands formed 'parts of one and the same settlement' (1958, 57). He does not seem to have considered at this stage that it could have been a Scandinavian or Hiberno-Scandinavian settlement and the fact that a rune stone, probably the most characteristic of all Scandinavian monument-types, was found on the excavation does not seem to have altered his view. It should be remembered, however, that up until recent decades Scandinavian and Hiberno-Scandinavian settlement in Ireland was widely regarded as being predominantly an urban phenomenon. Therefore the concept of a Scandinavian or Hiberno-Scandinavian settlement existing on a small island off the coast of Kerry may have seemed almost inconceivable to the scholars of the 1950s.

If this was the case for O'Kelly then it is perhaps not so surprising that the presence of the rune stone, the only element of the site that he considered to be Scandinavian, did not suggest to him the possibility that Beginish was a Scandinavian or Hiberno-Scandinavian settlement. Instead, it represented a 'Viking visitation' (1956, 191). According to the prevailing understanding of Scandinavian activity in Ireland at that time, such a 'visit' would almost inevitably have taken the form of a raid on an Irish community. The incorrect reading of the VERR element of the inscription as LIR, however, prompted O'Kelly to offer a completely alternative interpretation of the presence of the rune stone on Beginish, which was indeed radical in the context of its time, namely that of peaceful interaction between the Irish and the Scandinavians.[7]

It is interesting to speculate how O'Kelly might have interpreted the Beginish settlement had he been furnished with a correct reading of the runic inscription and had he recognised that the cultural backgrounds of several of the diagnostic artefacts from the site lay in Scandinavian or Hiberno-Scandinavian contexts. It is impossible to answer this question, unfortunately, but the discovery of the soapstone bowl on Beginish in 1959, within three metres of House 6, did give him an opportunity to write about this island settlement again (O'Kelly 1961). It is interesting to note that his interpretation now changes somewhat, in that his view of Beginish as an Irish settlement is not re-stated and is replaced instead by an apparent openness towards the possibility of there being some degree of Scandinavian settlement in the area: - 'Viking activity in the area is attested in annalistic references and the Runic inscription found on Beginish itself shows that there was some settlement of these people in the district' (1961, 68). It is surprising, however, that he remained reluctant to specifically connect Beginish and its excavated settlement to this idea. This is especially so when his comments concerning Houses 6 and 7 are considered, in which he noted that their rectangular form 'may be due to Viking influence' (1961, 68). It is unlikely that O'Kelly would not have realised the significance of the ringed pin which turned up a few years later, also in the immediate vicinity of these houses but, unfortunately, he never published this find.

In overall terms it seems that, despite the accumulating evidence, O'Kelly remained reluctant to fully re-consider his original interpretation of the Beginish settlement. The consequence of this reluctance is that there has been a general lack of appreciation evident amongst subsequent scholars for the potential that this site holds towards the study and understanding of the Viking Age in Ireland. This is illustrated not only by the limited amount of attention that Beginish has subsequently received in this regard, but also by the fact that some scholars continue to interpret the cultural background of this settlement as being an Irish one.

It may be noted, for instance, that Ó Corráin, following O'Kelly, interpreted Beginish primarily in the context of its physical proximity to the Early Medieval ecclesiastical site on nearby Church Island, suggesting that it 'may well have been the out-farm of the church, farmed on its behalf by church tenantry' (1981, 340). It is not impossible that this interpretation is valid for O'Kelly's phase I of the settlement, which might be pre-Viking Age in date and contemporary with the Church Island site, but Ó Corráin's argument takes no account of the possibility of there being a Scandinavian or Hiberno-Scandinavian element in O'Kelly's phase II of Beginish. More recently, in a passing reference to Beginish, Ó Floinn appears to concur with Ó Corráin's interpretation of the site as some sort of adjunct to the ecclesiastical site on Church Island (1998, 164).

The excavation of sunken-floored buildings in Hiberno-Scandinavian Dublin and Waterford has led Wallace (1992, 73) and Walsh (1997, 52) to consider Beginish in their respective discussions of these structures.[8] It is clear from these that both authorities regard House 1 as being an Irish type, albeit an unusual one, presumably because of its location in what they consider to have been an Irish settlement. Such an ascription is fully in accordance with O'Kelly's original views but does not entirely conform to his later tentative proposal (1961, 68).

O'Kelly's later views, however, have been considered and developed independently by Sheehan and Bradley. In the context of his consideration of the atypical location of the Viking-age burial at Eyrephort, Co. Galway, Sheehan briefly discussed the possibility of the existence of Scandinavian settlements elsewhere along

Ireland's western littoral (1987, 68-70). Noting O'Kelly's discovery of the rune-inscribed stone and the subsequent find of the soapstone bowl, and recognising the Scandinavian character of the cruciform-headed pin, he stated:

> Whether such finds indicate a Viking settlement on Beginish remains a matter of conjecture, but it is hardly possible that the strategic importance of the island, situated as it is in Valentia Harbour which commands the entrance to Iveragh and the shipping around her headlands, could have been overlooked by the Vikings. Its location rendered it ideal for use as a raiding-base, a haven for shelter and repairs, a wintering-spot, a trading station, or, indeed, for a combination of all of these (Sheehan 1987, 70).

In his seminal paper on the nature of Scandinavian settlement in Ireland, Bradley considered the possibility of the existence of rural settlements in some of the west coast areas. He concluded that Beginish should be interpreted as a Hiberno-Scandinavian settlement, and stated:

> The location of the site is particularly significant because it is situated in a naturally sheltered inlet, within immediate access of the open sea. Such a settlement would help explain the place name Smerwick, which is applied to one of the finest natural harbours on the Dingle peninsula, and the presence of the fragmentary rune stone on Great Blasket Island. Indeed the presence of such settlements is likely, if only because way-stations would have been needed along the sea-route from Limerick to Cork, and indeed, from Limerick to the continent (1988, 67).[9]

The case for the Beginish settlement being of Scandinavian or Hiberno-Scandinavian character now seems much stronger than when Sheehan and Bradley wrote on this subject. If this is accepted, then the primary reasons for the establishment and maintenance of this apparently unique settlement must lie in its relationship with the Hiberno-Scandinavian settlements of Munster and beyond.

Re-interpretation

On the basis of the evidence presented in this paper it is proposed that the cultural context of what O'Kelly's termed Phase II of the settlement on Beginish is clearly of Scandinavian or Hiberno-Scandinavian character. In addition, it is argued that this 'phase', if it is actually attestable as a discrete period at all, should be equated with two chronologically and spatially distinct sets of buildings. The earlier of these is of tenth-century date, while the date of the later one focuses on the eleventh and possibly the early twelfth centuries. Finally, attention is given to the purpose of the Beginish settlement and a number of relevant possibilities are considered. It is concluded that it probably primarily functioned as a maritime haven and way-station.

The first and earliest of the two Scandinavian or Hiberno-Scandinavian periods of activity was not discerned as such by O'Kelly. It is represented by his Houses 6 and 7 which, although now engulfed in sand, are located adjacent to each other a short distance above the beach on the southern side of the isthmus that joins Canroe to the remainder of the island (Fig. 1; Plate 5). O'Kelly proposed that these houses were broadly contemporary with House 1, adding, however, that this suggestion 'cannot be established with certainty' (1956, 167-168). Owing to the presence of the rune-inscribed stone, House 1 has a *terminus post quem* of AD c.1050 for its period of construction. It is probable, however, that Houses 6 and 7 are considerably earlier in date than this on the basis of the finds that have emerged from their immediate vicinity.

These finds have already been considered in detail above. In summary, they comprise: a hollow bone cylinder of the type commonly found in Hiberno-Scandinavian towns; a rotary whetstone such as are found in Scandinavia, the West and the North Atlantic region in Scandinavian contexts dating from the ninth to the thirteenth centuries; a soapstone bowl of probable tenth-century Scandinavian type, the only example of its kind on record from Ireland outside of Hiberno-Scandinavian Dublin and, finally, a ringed pin of a type produced in Hiberno-Scandinavian Dublin during the tenth century. The overall temporal focus here is a tenth-century one. The fact that the finds are largely Scandinavian or Hiberno-Scandinavian in terms of their cultural background, with no diagnostically Irish objects being represented, supports the possibility that the occupants of these houses were of Scandinavian or Hiberno-Scandinavian background. It has already been noted that the houses are of rectangular form, a trait which O'Kelly suggested in his amended view of the site 'may be due to Viking influence' (1961, 68). In addition, the presence of the rotary whetstone fragment in the vicinity of these houses may also be indicative of a Scandinavian or Hiberno-Scandinavian context for them. This is so because of the fact that, as this characteristic object was broken during its manufacturing process, there is a very strong likelihood that it was actually made on Beginish.

It is proposed, therefore, that these houses represent a tenth-century Scandinavian or Hiberno-Scandinavian settlement on Beginish and that this was focused on the sheltered south-facing shore of the isthmus. It is unfortunate that O'Kelly did not carry out any excavations in this part of the island. It is presently impossible to estimate what the size of this proposed primary settlement might have been, as only future excavation or further erosion will reveal whether or not there are more houses concealed beneath the sand here. The range and quality of the finds, however, seem to indicate that the inhabitants of this part of Beginish were

as sophisticated in terms of their material possessions as the occupants of the tenth-century Hiberno-Scandinavian towns were.

It is almost certain that O'Kelly's suggestion concerning the temporal relationship between Houses 6 and 7 and House 1 is incorrect (1956, 167-168). There can be little doubt that the construction of House 1, with its rune stone, dates to AD *c.*1050 or perhaps later, at least a generation or two after the settlement below it on the beach. There is no evidence to indicate that there was any period of discontinuity between these two settlements. The most important implication of this is the possibility that the settlement on Beginish lasted for so long - at least a century and most probably longer.

House 1, the sunken-floored building and its rectangular adjunct, which is certainly the largest and the most impressive of the Beginish houses, represents the second phase of Scandinavian or Hiberno-Scandinavian settlement on the island. It is located on top of the Canroe rise almost 300 metres distant from the beach settlement. This house has already been discussed in detail above where it was suggested that it represents a unique fusion of native Irish building traditions and distinctive architectural concepts that were being transmitted through the Hiberno-Scandinavian towns. If the house itself seems to be truly Hiberno-Scandinavian, then the

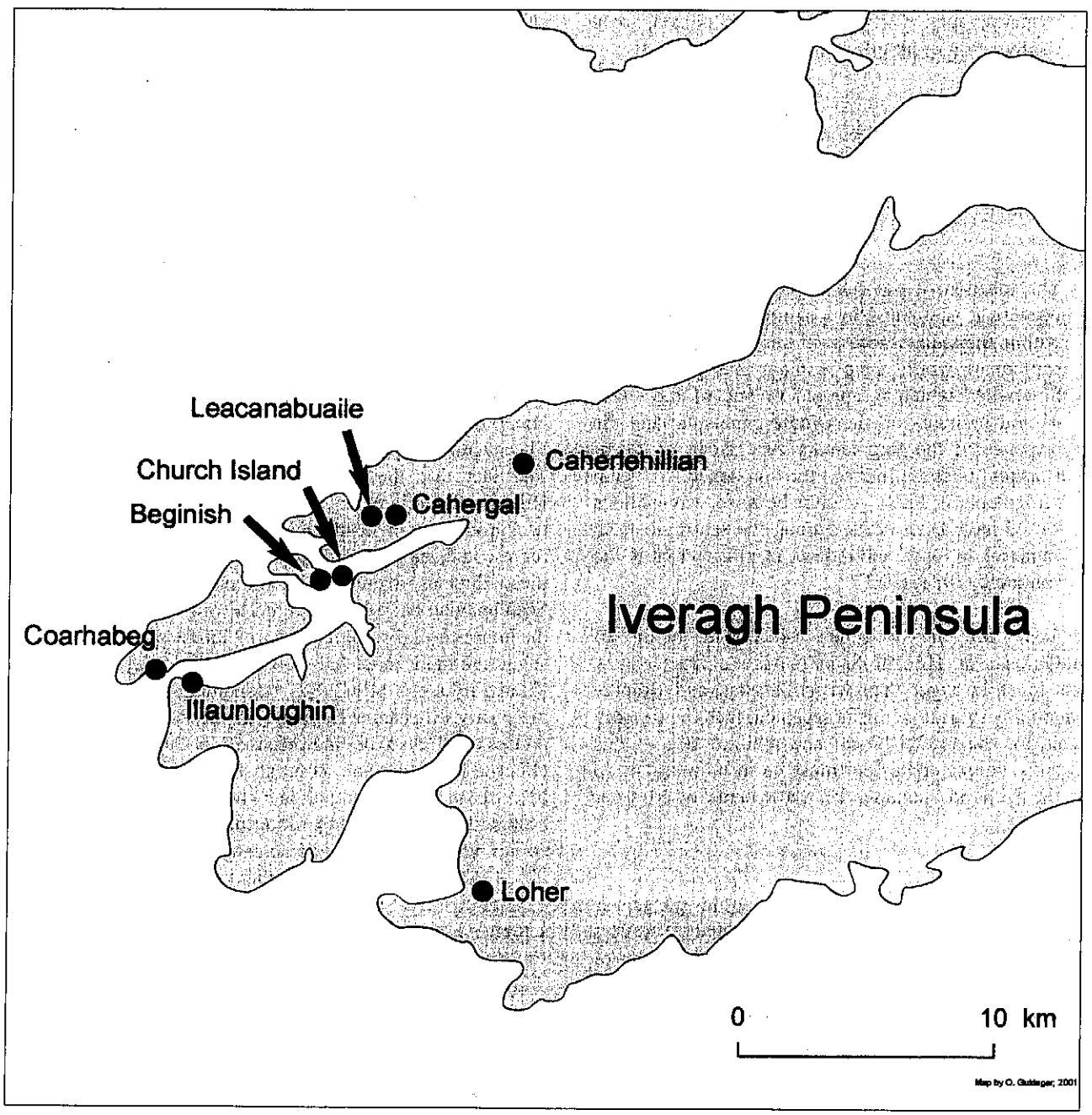

Fig. 10. The Iveragh peninsula, Co. Kerry, showing the location of Beginish and of other excavated sites of Early Medieval date.

artefacts derived from it also seem to be representative of the range of personal items that would have been in circulation in the Hiberno-Scandinavian towns. Two of these, the decorated bronze pin and the cruciform-headed pin (which may be of ivory), are high quality objects. Again, as was the case with the earlier settlement, no diagnostically Irish material is represented amongst the finds. These points suggest that the occupants of this eleventh or early twelfth century house were, like the inhabitants of the earlier settlement below them on the beach, culturally distinct from their surroundings. In this regard it is interesting to recall the possibility, already discussed above, that the presence of the rune-inscribed stone in the doorway of this house may have actually been intended to serve as a proclamation or reminder of ethnic distinctiveness.

A consideration of the purpose of the Beginish settlement, if indeed there was only a single purpose, raises a number of interesting possibilities. It may have been a Scandinavian or Hiberno-Scandinavian farmstead, a trading station, a *longphort*, a maritime way-station or a combination of some or all of these. Regarding the first possibility, it would appear very unlikely that Beginish was founded as an isolated farm settlement in the tradition of those known from the Scottish Isles, for instance, if only because the site lacks the building forms and artefact assemblages which are associated with such farmsteads right across the North Atlantic region. Neither, for geographical reasons, could it be realistically regarded as forming a component of the rurally settled hinterlands of the Hiberno-Scandinavian towns. There is little doubt that the occupants of the settlement did engage in farming, and indeed fishing, but this was hardly their primary motivation for settling there.

It also appears unlikely that the Beginish settlement was primarily established as a trading station, as a form of commercial link between the Hiberno-Scandinavian towns of Limerick or Cork and the western end of the Iveragh peninsula. Such markets are usually founded in locations of strategic importance, defined as such in terms of their economic or political centrality. It is unlikely that western Iveragh would have been regarded as fulfilling these criteria during the Viking Age. It may also be noted in this respect, for what it is worth, that none of the seven excavated Early Medieval settlement sites in Iveragh, most of which are located within ten kilometers of Valentia Harbour (Fig.10), have produced any archaeological evidence - in the form of diagnostic artefacts, for instance - for the existence of a Hiberno-Scandinavian trading station in the region.

The third possibility, that the Beginish site functioned as a *longphort*, should probably also be discarded. While there has been some debate about the question of the recognisibility of *longphuirt* (see Ó Floinn 1998, 161-164), it is generally accepted that they took the form of defended ship-bases from which raids were launched. Although the historical sources do record a number of Viking raids in this region, such as the attack on Sceilg Mhichíl in AD 824 (MacAirt 1951, 125), there is no reference to the existence of a *longphort* there. The lack of any defences or of potentially defensive structures on Beginish might also militate against its use as a *longphort*. In any case, it seems likely that such bases would not normally have been founded in the more economically peripheral regions of the country.

The final suggestion, that the Beginish settlement functioned as a Hiberno-Scandinavian maritime haven or way-station, has most to commend it. The geographical location of the island is particularly suited to such a purpose because it is situated, within easy access of the open sea, in the shelter of one of the safest harbours on the sea-route between Cork and Limerick (Fig.11). In addition, boats can be hauled up the shelving beaches on either side of the sandy isthmus that extends westwards from the foot of Canroe, and this would have been an important advantage in poor weather.

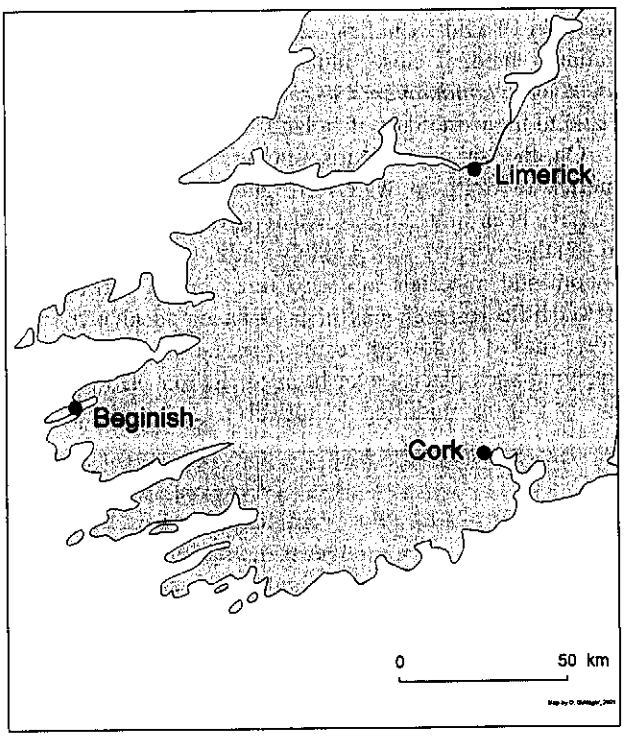

Fig. 11. South-west Ireland showing the location of Beginish and the Hiberno-Scandinavian towns of Limerick and Cork.

There can be little doubt about the necessity for way-stations along the dangerous sea-route that links Hiberno-Scandinavian Cork with Limerick and the mouth of the Shannon. These would have been necessary as havens in times of bad weather and could also have been used as places to rest or carry out repairs to ships. It has been calculated, on the basis that a typical Viking boat could be rowed a maximum distance of thirty-six nautical miles per day in poor weather, that as many as nine or ten way-stations may have been necessary on the Cork-Limerick route (pers. comm., Max Vinner). The implication of this is that the settlement on Beginish is

unlikely to have been unique. So, what evidence is there for other such settlements?

In this context the site at Eyrephort (parish of Omey, barony of Ballinhinch, Co. Galway) has already been referred to above not as a casual burial but as a possible base. Not far to the south, and close enough to be associated with it, is one of the most famous sailing landmarks in Ireland, Slyne Head. Ó Tuathail (1948–52, 155–56) convincingly identifies the Old-Irish name *Léim Lára* 'the mare's leap' with Slyne Head. Its name in Modern Irish is *Ceann Léime* 'head of the leap' and Taylor (1958–61, 30–31) shows, on the basis of the portolan maps, that *Ceann Léime* is attested textually as far back as c.1500. Famously, this place name also occurs in *Landnámabók* as *Jölduhlaup* 'mare's leap': *Frá Reykanesi á sunnarverðu Íslandi er fimm dœgra haf til Jölduhlaups á Írlandi* (Benediktsson 1968, 32–34), 'From Reykjanes in southern Iceland there is a sailing of five days to *Jölduhlaup* in Ireland'. The Old Norse is a literal translation of Old-Irish *Léim Lára* and this points to a familiarity bred of close trading and cultural relations. Interestingly, *Landnámabók* suggests direct voyages from Iceland to the west coast of Ireland.

On the sailing route south and eastwards from Limerick to Cork, to Waterford, and to Wexford there must have been way-stations where one could put in from foul weather, victual, and possibly trade. The literary and toponomastic materials are very fragmentary, however, and too little research has been done on local names. Neither has a fieldwork campaign, targeted towards identifying such places, ever been carried out. However, there is fair to middling historical and toponomastic evidence for a dozen or so such places, excluding Beginish for which there are no data of this kind (Fig. 12).

The first port of call after Limerick is Scattery, in Irish *Inis Cathaig*. This island is situated in the Shannon estuary, a little to the southeast of Kilrush, Co. Clare, and is somewhat over 179 acres in extent. It controls access to the upper estuary, and thus to Limerick, and it is of vital strategic importance on that account. It is, of course, the ancient ecclesiastical foundation of St Senán. The actual etymology of its name is transparent enough: 'island of Cathach', where *cathach* is either an ordinary adjective, 'given to battle, bellicose', used as a personal name, or is a hypocoristic form of an Old-Irish compound name with the element *cath-* (Cathassach, Catharnach, Cathgal, Cathgus or the like). In the fabulous *Life of St Senán*, however, *Cathach* is a fierce monster that preserves the island in its pristine natural purity until the miracle-working Senán arrives (Stokes 1890, 56, 66–67). However, history and onomastics link it firmly with the Hiberno-Scandinavians of Limerick. The annals (Mac Airt, 1951, 160; O'Donovan 1848–51, ii 698) record that in 974 Magnus mac Arailt, leader of the Vikings of the Hebrides, raided it 'and took Ímar lord of the Foreigners of Limerick [prisoner] out of it and the outraging of Senán thereby'. This means that Ímar, lord of Limerick, sought refuge in the monastery of Inis Cathaig and that its sanctuary was violated when he was taken prisoner there. The Life of Senán records a purported prophecy of the angel Raphael that Inis Cathaig will be a sanctuary for Foreigners and Irish (*'Bid dín attaigh do Gallaib & do Gœdealaib'*) (Stokes 1890, 66). A much more important violation of its sanctuary took place in 977: Brian

Fig. 12. The coastline of south-west Ireland showing possible Hiberno-Scandinavian way-stations.

Bóroime 'violated Inis Cathaig against the Vikings of Limerick' and killed Ímar, king of Limerick, and his two sons, Amlaíb and Duibcend, who had fled there for refuge (Mac Airt, 1951, 162; O'Donovan 1848–51, ii 704) - an event long-remembered in historical tradition, for Senán is represented as ominously seeking compensation for his outraging from Brian Bóroime on the eve of the battle of Clontarf (Hennessy 1871, i 6–8; cf. Grosjean 1934, 71–72, 80, 83). A poem, perhaps of the fourteenth century but based on much earlier materials, has Ingen Baíth, saint of Killinaboy, telling a curmudgeonly Senán that the Vikings (*Uiginnigh*) will plunder his island and will settle there, that there will be 'kerne and marauding bands', that there will be 'fair blonde women flaunting their cloaks', and there will be sex and marriage on his island for the reign of three kings. Besides, kings will reside regularly on the island to the west of the stream called Ness (Grosjean 1934, 80–81). For the author of this poem, it is clear that there had been an important Hiberno-Scandinavian settlement on Inis Cathaig and it is evident that the island was seen as part of the Hiberno-Scandinavian kingdom of Limerick and that Senán was its patron saint.

The form *Scattery* does not occur before the seventeenth century (Jansonius, c.1630) and the form *Iniskattery* is first found in the Down Survey (c. 1660). Evidently, this form lived on in Scandinavian Limerick, and passed from there into English. It has been suggested that the *-s* of *Inis* got attached to *cathaig*, that *-ar* is a common element in the genitive of Old-Norse names and that the termination *-y* represents *-øy* 'island' (Ó Cíobháin 1971, 113–25). However, this is really an intercultural rendering. The Hiberno-Scandinavians realised *Inis Cathaig* in part-translation, part-assimilation, to Old Norse: *inis* was correctly rendered as Old-Norse *-øy* ; but *cath-*, with preposed *s-*, was understood as Old-Norse *skattr* (genitive in compositon *skattar*), meaning (1) 'tribute'; (2) 'treasure'. To the Hiberno-Scandinavians *Scattery* meant the island where tribute was collected from elsewhere, or the island subjected to tribute.

In light of the above evidence it seems appropriate to note the 1836 discovery of a Viking-age silver hoard from Scattery (Graham-Campbell 1972, 117). This is one of only two such finds on record from Co. Clare and comprises a pair of brooches of Irish workmanship. It is thus unlike hoards of Viking-age character from Ireland in terms of its composition, as these usually contain ingots and/or ornaments of Scandinavian or Hiberno-Scandinavian type and/or hack-silver derived from these object types, as well as, occasionally, coins (Sheehan 2000a, 57-62). As a hoard composed exclusively of native Irish material, however, it nevertheless seems possible, and may even be likely, that it represents Hiberno-Scandinavian loot rather than Irish treasure (Sheehan 2000b, 33). This is especially so in view of the historical and onomastic evidence presented above.

It is likely that there were other way-stations between the mouth of the Shannon and the tip of the Dingle peninsula. However, the next location for which there is evidence is Smerwick, now the name of a townland (in the parish of Dunurlin) on the north end of the promontory that forms the west side of Smerwick Harbour, in the Dingle peninsula. Murreagh, Irish *Muirbheach*, is the name of a townland (in the parish of Kilmalkedar) on the east side of Smerwick Harbour. *Muirbheach*, Old-Irish *muirbech*, *murbach*, derives from *muir* 'sea'+*-bach*, the old verbal noun of *bongid* 'breaks', and means 'sea breach'. This name would suit the low-lying flooded plain with wide sandy beaches and extensive areas of submerged peat that is Smerwick Harbour. Oftedal (1976, 132) states that Smerwick 'can hardly be other than ON *Smjör-uík* "butter bay". It may seems curious that the word for butter is used in a place-name, but in fact it is not uncommon and he goes on to cite *Smjörfjöll* 'butter mountains', *Smjörsund* 'butter sound', and *Smjörklettr* 'butter hill', and states that the Scandinavians used 'butter' as a term of praise for land. There is, however, another possible motivation. It appears that *Muirbech* was originally the name for the whole bay and its coastline, and that *smjör-vík* is an Old-Norse realisation (with prosthetic *s-*) of spoken Old-Irish *muirbech*. The Hiberno-Scandinavians understood what they thought they heard as *smjör-vík*. And it so happens that *Smjörvik* is very appropriate, for the harbour is surrounded by rich dairying land, much of it church land in the middle ages. The fishing village called *Baile na nGall* 'place of the foreigners' (a common term for Hiberno-Scandinavians) lies in Murreagh. It is uncertain how old this name is but it is not unlikely that the 'foreigners' were Hiberno-Scandinavians (Ó Corráin 1997b).

Viking raiders and settlers were active also in the inner waters of Dingle Bay, at Castlemaine, a little up the river Maine on its north bank. Here, on the borders of Ciarraige Luachra, they had a fortified settlement, called *Dún Mainne* in Irish sources. This was destroyed by the kings of Ciarraige Luachra, Eóganacht Locha Léin, and Uí Fidgeinte, that is, the leading kings of west Munster, about 867. Evidently, they considered it a major threat to them, and the annalistic record of the taking of women prisoners indicates that settlement, and not simply raiding, was in question (Ó Corráin 1996). It is a matter of conjecture whether there was any connection between *Dún Mainne* and the recently excavated cave at Cloghermore, located 13.5 km to the northwest of Castlemaine, which has produced a number of Scandinavian burials (Connolly and Coyne 2000). There is no suggestion in the historical sources that the occupants of *Dún Mainne* returned there following the events of 867, but one cannot rule out the possibility. On the south side of the harbour, the townland of Lonart (barony of Trughanacmy, parish of Killorglin) is another possible site of Scandinavian activity: the name deriving from *longphort* 'ship-enclosure'.

On the route southwards from Smerwick the next stop is the lee of the Great Blasket, especially if one encounters foul weather in the Blasket Sound. The

Blaskets, earlier Blasques - *Brascher* and *Blasct* in fourteenth-century maps - seems to have the termination *-øy*, but the first element is very unclear and no credible etymology has been suggested. The termination *-i* in the forms for the Aran islands (*arini*, Ir. *Árainn*) and Valentia (*draueri*, with metathesis of the first syllable, in Irish *Dairbre*) in portolan and later maps may be the result of the tacking on of Old-Norse *-øy* to the original Irish names (forms from Westropp 1912–13, 260). All this points to very considerable Viking activity on the southwestern coastline.

Beginish and Valentia may indeed have functioned as way stations but the next location for which there is good literary evidence is Dursey. There is no doubt that Dursey is Old-Norse but it is problematical. Oftedal (1976, 132) thinks 'perhaps *Dyárs-øy* 'deer island'. He had no suggestion about how one got the deer out there, and what one did with them on an island that is 1.15 miles long and 0.5 miles wide—754 acres of mountainous land with some rocky pasture and coarse arable. Not much room here for wild deer. However, there is a more likely explanation: *Þórrsøy* <*þórr* 'bull' +*øy* 'island' (Mac Cárthaigh 1966). From early Italian maps Westropp cites Dorrossey (1339), the earliest written form of Dursey. This brings the Old-Irish name *Inis Tarbna iar nÉre* into the equation. The most important reference to this name - and one that makes it a topographical point or landmark - occurs in a group of related ninth-century annals under the year 858: *Tuc Mael Sechlainn iarum giallu Muman o Belut Gabrain co Insi Tarbnai iar n-Ére, & o Dun Cermnai co h-Arainn n-Airthir* 'Mael Sechnaill took the hostages of Munster from Belut Gabráin [at Goresbridge, Co. Kilkenny] to Inis Tarbnai west of Ireland, and from Dún Cermna [Old Head of Kinsale] to Inishmore [Aran Islands]'. *Inis Tarbnai* is generally taken to be the Bull Rock, nearly three miles to the west of Dursey Island. In Irish it is called *An Tarbh* 'the bull', and sometimes *An Gheadach* 'the spotted cow'. Between the Bull Rock and Dursey are two other rocks known as *An Bhó* 'the cow' and *An Laogh* 'the calf'. For Dursey, the ancient name was *Baí*, *Inis Baoi* and later *Oileán Baoi* and it is marked *Boy* on the map of 1588 in the State Papers (Caulfield 1879, plate VI, opposite p. cii). However, *tarbnae* is a collective and a suitable descriptive of Dursey and the rocky islands near it, most of which bear the names of cattle. In fact, the plural *Dorsees*, *Dursyes*, *Dorses* is attested in written sources in English for the sixteenth, seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. In this case, again, there is a translation from Old Irish to Old Norse, and therefore evidence for bilingualism and close cultural contact. The Old-Norse place name Dursey may indicate a way-station not on the island itself (though this is possible) but on the adjoining mainland.

The next sites have to do with two locations in Bantry Bay, Bere Island, and further in, Whiddy Island. Lonehort harbour on Bere Island appears to be derived from *longphort* 'a ship-enclosure'. In addition, it has a relevant archaeological feature, a boat-naust of apparently Scandinavian type (Breen & Sheehan 1996, 5-6). But the evidence points to wider activities in the Bantry Bay area including deep-sea fishing. Whiddy has an Old-Norse etymology: *hvít-øy* 'white island'. The form on the map of 1588 is *Weidie*. The twelfth-century literary text *Acallam na senórach* (Stokes 1900, 21) has the following quatrain:

Iascach mara muiridi
a críchaib Baí is Béire
medbhán Faide fírghlaine
duileasc a cuanuibh Cléire.

Deep sea-fishing
from the regions of Dursey and Bere
laver of clean and fresh Whiddy
dulse from the harbours of Clear Island.

The Irish adjective *muiride* means 'deep-sea'. *Iascach mara* means 'sea-fishing', i.e. coastal fishing, *iascach mara muiride* 'deep-sea fishing'. There is little evidence that the Irish fished for deep-sea fish such as cod, ling etc. and indeed the Irish names for cod (*trosc*) and ling (*langa*) are borrowed from Old Norse. Thus, the literary evidence suggests that Hiberno-Scandinavians were engaged in deep-sea fishing in this area. Whiddy is a rare instance of an Old-Norse place name entering medieval Irish usage, and this it does certainly as early as the mid-twelfth century. It was possibly motivated by an Irish etymological interpretation of the place name as *Inis Faide* 'island of the cry, lamentation' in sense of the 'moaning of the waves'. Once again, one must postulate close cultural relationships between the Irish and the Hiberno-Scandinavians.

One might expect way-stations at Crookhaven, Skull, Cape Clear (Fastnet, off Cape Clear, is an Old-Norse name), Glandore or Clonakilty Bay, but the next site for which there is evidence is Kinsale. From fourteenth-century maps Westropp (1912–13, 260) cites *Andelforda* and identifies it with Kinsale. The harbour of *Endelford*, at Kinsale, is referred to in a patent roll of 1395. An impression from the seal of the sovereign of Kinsale reads: SIGILLVM.COMMVNE.KINSALE .DE.D'ENDILVORTH (Caulfield 1879, ii, xii). This first element is *Endil* or *Andel*, the second *fjǫrðr*, and the whole is Old Norse. The Old Head of Kinsale, known in Irish as *Dún Cermna*, had an Old-Norse name: the forms are *Oldernas* (in a grant of 28 August 1293), *Oldernast* and *Oldernase* (accounts of wards and escheats, 1300–1305), *Odinas* (Caulfield 1879, ix–x). The peninsula of Scilly, on the east shore of the inner harbour, may also bear an Old-Norse name (Diarmuid Ó Murchadha, pers. comm.). All this suggests that Kinsale was an important centre for Hiberno-Scandinavian shipping and trade and, perhaps, a significant settlement.

So was Cork and its harbour. Fota, also called Foatey, is a small but fertile and strategic island in Cork Harbour (221 acres). Recently, it been taken to be a Norse name, ending in *-øy* 'island', but no explanation of the

first element has been offered. The early modern forms of the name are Fotye, Foty, Fottie and Foaty (Ó Murchadha 1959, 57–62). The medieval forms are Fodri and Fodry. The first of these occurs in the 'Coppinger Register' in a grant by Matthew Ua Mongaig, bishop of Cloyne (r. c.1173x1177–92), the second in an inquisition of 22 October 1624, citing a thirteenth-century grant (Ó Buachalla 1959, 131–33). The first element is Old Norse *fótr* (in composition *fótar-*) 'foot' and the compound name means 'foot island'. It has an exact equivalent in Fotö, an island in Danafjord outside Göteborg in Sweden, the southernmost island of a small archipelago that stretches from Fotö northwards to Rörö. The medial *-r-* was lost later. Fota is so called because of its position: it lies downriver at the mouth of the Lee estuary and controls access to Cork Harbour, and thus to the Scandinavian town (Ó Corráin 1997, 52). There is another Hiberno-Scandinavian place name in Cork harbour: Dunkettle (parish of Caherlag, barony of Barrymore), on the north shore of the Lee estuary, where the Glashaboy river flows into the estuary. The occupiers of this strategic site may have been able to control traffic in and out of the town of Cork. The name, part-Irish, part-Norse, is derived from *Dún Caittil* 'fortress of Ketill'. Ketill is a well-known Old-Norse personal name that occurs in the Irish annals of the ninth century and in Old-Norse sources of the twelfth, and commonly in *Landnámabók*.

A third site of potential interest in Cork harbour is located in the townland of Ballincarroonig, on the north side of Whitegate Bay. A castle, annotated 'Longeforde', is marked in this location on a map dating to 1587 (Hayes-McCoy 1964, 25). The castle no longer stands, but Power has suggested that the name derives from *longphort* and that it survives at nearby Long Point (1994, 315). This is a low, narrow promontory, extending westwards into the harbour, on which there is a tradition – but no visible remains - of a burial ground. Could this promontory be the location of a *longphort* and, if so, could the burial tradition reflect the presence of an associated cemetery?

Eastwards from Cork there was a Viking settlement at Youghal in the middle of the ninth century. Its fleet was defeated and its *longphort* was sacked by the Déisi in 866. The same Déisi went further and killed Grimbeolu, leader of the Vikings of Cork, in 867. The fortress of the Cork Vikings had been sacked by Ólchobar, king of Munster, in 848, but they had returned. Did they also return to Youghal, one of the best harbours on the south coast, and use it as a way-station? We cannot, at present, tell.

Further east, there is evidence for a Hiberno-Scandinavian presence in Dungarvan harbour, on the north shore of the Helvick peninsula. The meaning of Helvick itself is not known, but the second element is certainly Old-Norse *vík* 'bay'. Helvick Head is known locally as *Ceann a' Bhathala*. Beyond the Head is an island that can be reached by wading at low tide. *'Bhathail'* may be from Old-Norse *vaðill* which means: (1) 'wading'; and (2) 'shallow water where fjords or straits may be crossed by wading on horseback' (Mac Cárthaigh 1965; for forms see *Cumann Logainmneacha* 1975, 22 §76A, 29 §46–49). Besides, there are two townlands in the Helvick peninsula, Ballynagaul Beg and Ballynagaul More (parish of Ringagonagh, in Irish *Rinn Ó gCuanach,* barony of Decies within Drum). In Irish these are *Baile na nGall Beag* and *Baile na nGall Mór*, meaning 'place of the foreigners', very probably Scandinavians. These three pieces of evidence point to a Hiberno-Scandinavian settlement, but one that is undated. From there, Waterford (*Veðrafjörðr*) and its territory of Gaultier (*Galltír* 'land of the Foreigners') is a comfortable distance. Swines Head in Gaultier may be *Sveinns høfdi* 'Sveinn's promontory', but further research is needed to prove or disprove this.

Sailing eastwards from Waterford, one encounters the Saltee Islands, lying about four miles off the nearest point in the mainland. The Great Saltee is about 130 acres in extent, the Little Saltee about 80 acres, and both are fertile. Saltee come from Old Norse *salt* 'salt' + *øy* 'island'. The Old-Irish name of the Great Saltee is *Éninis*, but it is long obsolete in Irish. Great Saltee, an early monastic site, suffered a Viking raid in 922 in which many Irish were slain and 'Abél the scribe was martyred by them' (Ó Murchadha 1998–2000). The Irish sources have nothing more to report about the Saltees, but it is reasonable to assume that Great Saltee was a Hiberno-Scandinavian way-station. And from Great Saltee to Hiberno-Scandinavian Wexford (*Ueigsfjörðr*) is a short haul.

Such sites must have played an important role in supporting and facilitating the trade and commerce that formed the raison d'être of the Hiberno-Scandinavian towns. In this regard it is tempting to regard the construction of House 1 at Beginish, that took place sometime after AD *c.*1050, as a development which was related in some way to what Hurley has termed 'the critical formative period' (1998, 175) of Munster's Hiberno-Scandinavian towns in the later eleventh century. It seems likely that some of the other suggested way-stations on Ireland's south and southwestern coastlines, noted above, were also occupied at this time.

One of the more interesting points to emerge from this reassessment of the Beginish excavations is how the material culture of the settlement and of its occupants remained identifiable as Scandinavian or Hiberno-Scandinavian throughout a period of time that probably exceeded a century and a half. This is evidenced by the presence and re-use of the rune-inscribed stone, the form of the houses and the general character of the finds. One might have expected that the Beginish settlers would have become archaeologically indistinguishable from the Irish that surrounded them, and with whom they presumably had frequent contact, over this length of time. However, this does not appear to have been the case. One explanation for this anomaly is that these people consciously used their material culture as a badge of

ethnic identity. This may have been a characteristic of the Hiberno-Scandinavians generally, and it has recently been proposed that the maintenance of their cultural identity by the inhabitants of Viking-age Dublin may have resulted from the adoption of a political strategy designed to maintain their distinctiveness and autonomy within the Irish political sphere (Ó Donnabháin & Halgrímsson 2001, 66-68, 79).

Afterword

If Beginish is but an example of its kind, then many other settlements of a similar character and purpose exist and should be sought for along the sea-routes that link Ireland's Viking-age towns. One of the major problems in this regard, however, is how to identify these settlements. Without the discovery of its rune-stone and of the sunken-floored house, how would Beginish have been identified as a Scandinavian or Hiberno-Scandinavian settlement? It is a striking fact that, with the exception of the rune-stone, O'Kelly - an excellent archaeologist - failed to recognise the distinctive character of the Beginish finds. It must be taken into account, however, that he had less relevant archaeological data available to him at this time than the scholars of today have. Thus, much of the comparanda mentioned in the present reassessment of the site had not yet been published, or even found, at the time of the Beginish excavation. By coincidence, the rotary whetstones from Iceland (Eldjárn 1956) as well as the cruciform-headed pins from Jarlshof (Hamilton 1956), were only fully published in the same year as the results of the Beginish excavations appeared.

Today, however, alongside the knowledge derived from the excavations of the Hiberno-Scandinavian settlements of Dublin and Waterford, Ireland has now got an extensive collection of artefacts of general Scandinavian character. As a result, it is now both possible and timely to re-assess relevant excavations, paying particular attention to their small finds. This revised interpretation of the Beginish excavations should result in the development of new perspectives for research on the Hiberno-Scandinavian impact on this part of Ireland. On the basis of the lessons from Beginish the authors suggest that future researchers on Scandinavian and Hiberno-Scandinavian activity along the west and south-west coasts of Ireland should adopt an interdisciplinary approach and focus on the terrestrial as well as the maritime aspects. This should include field-surveys in targeted areas, detailed studies of place names, analyses of the historical sources and consideration of archaeological distribution patterns. In particular, it should include reassessment of some of the older excavations as well as analyses of past sailing conditions and the landscape potential for shelter and landing-places.

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NOTES

1. One of the authors (SSH) discovered a hone of fine-grained sandstone in the vicinity of these houses during a visit to Beginish in January 2001. This is now in the National Museum of Ireland where it is registered as 2001:3.

2. The authors assume that Wallace's reference to a sunken-floored building on Church Island, Co. Kerry (Wallace 1992, 73 and bibliography), arises from his confusion of this site with the adjacent island of Beginish.

3. It is now preserved in the Cork Public Museum where it is registered as L286.

4. Arkeologisk Museum, Stavanger, Cat. no. 6782.

5. Stavanger Museum, Cat. no. ST.K. 04320.

6. The authors have not been able to examine this object.

7. It is interesting in this regard to note that O'Kelly produced the Beginish report some ten years before Lucas published his ground-breaking study proposing the case for a reappraisal of Irish-Scandinavian relations (Lucas 1966).

8. See footnote 2 above.

9. The Great Blasket stone referred to by Bradley was originally identified by the Norwegian scholar C. Marstrander in 1908 (Marstrander 1909, 129-131). It was subsequently referred to by Macalister in his publication of the Killaloe, Co. Clare, stone (Macalister 1917, 494) and this reference has been occasionally used by Irish scholars since then to refer to a rune stone on Great Blasket. However, these scholars do not seem to be aware that Marstrander subsequently withdrew his identification of the marks on the Blasket stone as runes (Marstrander 1930, 378). It is included neither in the work of Johnsen (1968) nor of Barnes, Hagland and Page (1997).

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