

The Socio-Political Networks of Sitric Silkenbeard

The Foreign Kings of Dublin – 980 to 1054

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Summary

This study sets out to examine Dublin between 980 and 1054; more particularly it assesses the role of socio-political networks in maintaining power in Ireland. Associations between the Irish kingdoms and the Hiberno-Scandinavian kingdom of Dublin are made apparent through military alliances, marriages, and the formation of overlord-client relations. Kinship was the fundamental institution upon which power was claimed and maintained in Ireland, but kings also formed larger political networks during their lives in order to serve their political ambitions. However, any claims to overlordship crumbled at the time of deaths, and Ireland was persistently thrown into political turmoil throughout the tenth and eleventh-centuries by the power-vacuums left in their wake. Irish history changed most drastically with the arrival of the Normans in the twelfth-century, but there are significant and important shifts that began in 980 during the reign of Glúniainn. Prior to 1054, the kingship of Dublin remained the reserve of the Uí Ímair dynasty. This paper proposes that the last successful king of this dynasty in Dublin was Sitric *Silkenbeard*, and that his success was rooted in his biological and ethnic relation to Ireland. While a ‘foreign’ king in title (rí Gall), Sitric the product of two centuries of convergence between Scandinavian settlers and the native inhabitants of the British Isles. Broadly, the eleventh-century has been understood as the period in which the interests of the Hiberno-Scandinavian elite were entirely fiscal, as they turned from raiders to traders. In particular, this has greatly minimized the political impact of the four kings who ruled during this period, most notably Sitric *Silkenbeard*.

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Oslo, 28 May 2017.

Introduction

The following paper intends to discuss the construction and usage of socio-political networks in Dublin during the period of 980 to 1054, in order to provide a more contextualized examination of the place of hybrid-Scandinavian kings in Irish politics at this time. Four Uí Ímair kings ruled in the Irish Sea region and made the kingdom of Dublin their principal seat of power during this period: Glúniarn (d. 989), Sitric *Silkenbeard* (d. 1042), Ívarr Haraldsson (d. 1054), and Echmarcach mac Ragnaill (d. 1064). As a ruler of Dublin, kings came to bear the Irish title ‘rí Gall’ (King of the Foreigners), which remained the reserve of the Scandinavian dynasty of Ívarr (henceforth referred to by its Irish equivalent ‘Uí Ímair’) until 1054. Prior to this date, any claims to the kingship of Dublin were through agnatic connections to the legacy of this family’s intervention and settlement in the British Isles during the ninth-century. Far more important than direct blood lineage, the mentality of belonging to the Uí Ímair collective ensured the rights for rulership over various kingdoms in the Irish Sea region, Dublin among them. Their reigns coincided with nearly a century of socio-political and economic change in Ireland wrought by the presence of Scandinavian settlements, which had been transformed into concentrated centres of economic and political power. By this period, inhabitants of these settlements and their leaders were more-often the products of marriages between individuals raised exclusively around the British Isles, but they remained distinct as foreigners because of the nature of their power.

By their Scandinavian lineage, these aforementioned kings gained power in the Irish Sea, but even as increasing interventions by Irish rulers threatened their power bases, connections to Irish bloodlines were necessary in order to ensure their positions. It is therefore argued that Sitric *Silkenbeard* was the last successful Uí Ímair king in Dublin because he was capable of utilising aspects from both halves of his ethnic identity, which had been forged by the political networks in which he was born, married into, and made. Sitric’s claim to Dublin was rooted in his paternal pedigree, but his political success was due to his position within a deep-rooted Irish network, principally from his maternal Leinster lineage. By comparison, his successor Echmarcach mac Ragnaill lacked appropriate kinship ties despite his efforts in Ireland, and was also an outsider to the long-reigning branch of the Uí Ímair dynasty that had been in power in Dublin since 917, of which Ívarr Haraldsson, Sitric *Silkenbeard* and Glúniarn originated.

During the tenth-century, the political aptitude of the King of Dublin, Óláfr *cúarán*, enabled the creation of an Irish-Scandinavian network that served to benefit the product of

these unions, his Hiberno-Scandinavian sons, Glúniairn and Sitric. Due to the length of Sitric's career (989/994-1036), and therefore wider availability of material, he has inevitably become the central figure of this dissertation. Though the events of his reign are more closely examined, Echmarcach and Ívarr Haraldsson are better remembered than Glúniairn, who remains principally considered for the beginning of his reign in 980 with the help of Máel Sechnaill II, and its violent end in 989. The reigns of Echmarcach mac Ragnaill (936-938 and 946-953) and Ívarr Haraldsson (938-946 and 952-954) created a competition that spanned to the kingdom of the Isles, not only because they both claimed inheritance through the Uí Ímair, but also because of Sitric's ambitions for expansion beyond Ireland. Ívarr and Echmarcach were ultimately unsuccessful because of the rise of Diarmait mac Máel na mBó, the King of Leinster, and his need to govern the wealth provided by Dublin's ports.

The use of 'Uí Ímair dynasty' to describe the collected rulers of the Irish Sea region and York, may be construed as an Irish perspective on the politics of hybrid-Scandinavians. The Irish political system was entirely based upon such dynasties, and intricate interchanges of authority often fluctuated between factions, such as the northern and southern Uí Néill or groups within the kingdom of Leinster. However, there is basis for an understanding that a larger collective persisted beyond the immediate ninth-century annals claims to 'Imhair'. A common sense of heritage and belonging at a group level created a distinctiveness that has been construed as ethnic division. The rapidly formed relationships following settlement ensured that by the mid tenth-century, there were a variety of biological identities that also existed within this dynasty. All four kings would have been aware of contemporary divisions, as evidenced by their title as king of the foreigners, but they would have also been aware of their place within more immediate kin groups and recognised the importance of these links. Large dynastic and small faction infighting manifested itself on multiple occasions throughout the period of study, causing Glúniairn's death, Sitric's abdication, and the rivalry between Echmarcach and Ívarr. By following the reigns and political connections of each king, it is possible to interpret convoluted concepts of identity, as well as to examine the growth of Ireland's Scandinavian towns and how they came to play a crucial role in Irish politics.

0.1 Historiography

The politics of Ireland have greatly impacted the ways in which the island's scholars approached the Viking Age. Nevertheless, modern scholars have also often failed to properly evaluate the Scandinavian presence in Ireland, often by reducing the period after 1014 to a footnote (though there are works seeking to rectify this situation, which are evaluated below).

There has been an expressed desire for an interdisciplinary approach across all historical periods, but the problem in Irish Sea studies resides primarily in the intersection of ancient and modern languages. It has therefore largely remained the reserve of far more advanced scholars with a mastery of linguistics. Furthermore, there has been a division between Scandinavian and Anglo-American scholarship concerning Ireland after the beginning of the twentieth-century that remained isolated until much more recently. Importantly, the Irish have dominated their narrative and it is by their efforts that the history of study regarding Viking Age Ireland may be divided into two broad categories: before and roughly after 1970.

Very little work was conducted prior to the nineteenth-century, and those that appeared were concerned with Ireland because of its mention in Icelandic texts. This trend continued with publications marked by the theoretical approach of classical antiquarianism, but an increase in archaeological finds, notably numismatic evidence, also fuelled much nineteenth century scholarship. Furthermore, criteria were determined by the 'The Royal Irish Academy', stipulating that there should be a presentation of reliable editions of medieval manuscripts, as well as the definition of reliable typology of objects in order to create a comprehensive chronology. Manuscript editions therefore continued to emerge with varying periods of resurgence, such as publication of the Irish annals, but much attention was also given to the saga narrative *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh* [CG] (*War of the Irish with the Foreigners*). This also coincided with an increasing interest of the battle of Clontarf, which would overshadow the conversation from the 1850s onwards. Major emerging trends in scholarship from this date onwards came to dominate and then influence the next century. The first trend, most apparent in Scandinavian scholarship, highlighted ethnic differences between the Danes and Norwegians, and how they impacted their political success. However, Scandinavian interest in Ireland seems to have declined by the 1960s, and only more recently has there been resurgence, though interest has always remained in the Celtic impact on Icelandic society. The second trend emerged from the disagreements between the Anglo-Irish Unionists and the Irish Nationalists. The latter believed that the late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century struggles for Irish independence were comparable to the battles of King Brian Bóruma against the 'foreign invaders', most importantly the battle of Clontarf. This increased the idea that 1014 was a decisive moment in Irish history, and publications until the late 1960s support this notion.

Largely because of discussions about the battle of Clontarf, revisionist scholarship arose in the late 1960s. Donnchadh Ó Corráin's 1972 work *Ireland before the Normans* was a major break with well-established opinions of the Viking invaders and Irish high kings

because it challenged the notion that Irish society remained unscathed by Viking raids and settlement existed sporadically throughout the twentieth century¹. This came in the wake of other articles, in addition to a rising interest in the Viking Age, fuelled by the beginning of excavations in 1962 Dublin. When Ó Corráin and his peers began to form new theories of chronology, seeking to better understand the social and cultural impact of the Scandinavian settlers in Ireland, they produced a wealth of material classified as ‘revisionist scholarship’. Reasoning that Ireland was already undergoing socio-political change before the beginning of the eighth-century allowed for the conclusion that the Viking impact was primarily economic. It directly argued against the past notion advocated as late as 1962 that there was undisrupted continuity until the Viking arrival, underlining changes in kingship before the eighth-century.² A more detailed examination of the battle of Clontarf will be provided in the second chapter of this thesis, but revisionist scholars concluded that the inhabitants and the elite of Dublin, and their ‘Scandinavian’ allies from Orkney and the Isles, were the mercenary pawns in an Irish power struggle. Poul Holm determined that scholarship up to 1986 persisted to marginalize Vikings or analyse them only as part of the Irish social fabric, rather than viewing their independent place in and contributions to Ireland.³ Arguably, this endured beyond the 1980s in many works because the availability of material has largely been by Irish scholars, and the revisionist impact has been most influential. Because of its dominance, particularly in defining the eleventh-century as the period of Dublin’s economic influence, while somehow simultaneously diminishing any agency of its rulers in favour of Irish authority, Sitric Silkenbeard has often been relegated to a footnote.

More recent academic works have begun to discuss the convoluted identities of Viking Age settlers. It is understood that ‘ethnicity’ describes the belonging of an individual to a social group sharing common cultural features. The difficulty lies in understanding those who inhabited more than one ethnic group, and to apply it to the study of how identity would have impacted political efforts. These discussions are related to studies proposing the existence of a Viking Age diaspora. Judith Jesch and others developed this theory through efforts to

¹ Donnchadh Ó Corráin, *Ireland before the Normans* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2012).

² Daniel A. Binchy’s articles: “Secular Institutions,” in *Early Irish Society - Irish Life and Culture* 8, ed M. Dillon, 52-56 (Dublin, 1954), and ““The passing of the old order”, in *Proceedings of the First International Congress of Celtic Studies, Dublin 1959*, Proceedings of the International Congress of Celtic Studies 1, ed. Ó Cuív, Brian, 119-132 (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1962) are both crucial works that were challenged in the 1970s. Donnchadh Ó Corráin’s article “Nationality and Kingship in Pre-Norman Ireland,” in *Historical Studies XI: Nationality and the Pursuit of national independence, papers read before the conference held at Trinity College Dublin, 23-31 May 1974*, ed. T.W. Moody (Belfast: Appletree Press, 1978), provides an excellent overview of revisionist scholarship theories.

³ Poul Holm, “The Slave Trade of Dublin, Ninth to Twelfth Centuries,” *Peritia* 5 (1986): 345

comprehend the complex patterns of contact caused by movement, which principally arose from the archaeological study of the commonalities and variances of material goods exchanged along the Scandinavian trade routes. It was concluded that there was a conscious maintenance of identifiable cultural and historical traditions from Scandinavia amongst migrant groups, but that over a long period of contact there emerged products of the fusion between Scandinavian and ‘native’ cultures. Terms such as Hiberno-Scandinavian, Cambro-Scandinavian, Anglo-Dane, and Norse-Gael, have been utilised to describe the products of this process. Nevertheless, what has been largely remained absent from scholarship is an examination of how these identities impact the politics of individuals such as Sitric, Echmarcach and Ívarr. Some scholars who have sought to redress this gap by studying the Uí Ímair, such as Clare Downham, but have often left Dublin in the eleventh-century relatively untouched. When speaking of ‘identity’ it is nearly impossible to make any conclusive statements, as it is important to note that the individual and their contemporaries, as well as scholars, are only capable of offering different interpretations. I therefore aim to ruminate upon some of these difficulties while considering how identity played a role in forming and maintaining political nodes, and how these network points allowed for the success of certain leaders.

Lastly, efforts to expand upon the eleventh and twelfth-centuries should be noted. Generally, they have concentrated their efforts into an examination of why this period should be considered a ‘Second Viking Age’. This includes, but is not limited to, publications by K. L. Maund, Seán Duffy, Benjamin Hudson and Colmán Etchingham. Particularly, Benjamin Hudson’s book, *Vikings Pirates and Christian Princes*, was the first to tackle a lengthy examination of the ruling dynasty of Dublin, but often takes for granted the historical value of various sources. This paper builds upon some of these past works, while also criticising approaches that have failed to comprehend the importance of a socio-political network of obligations, which extend beyond being purely reflective of the Scandinavian background of the Dublin kings.

The bulk of Viking Age Irish historiography thus concentrates upon the early settlement period, and examinations of the tenth-century are commonly concluded in 980 with the loss of Óláfr *cúarán* at the battle of Tara. When discussions turn to the subsequent period, material sets out to discuss the economic and political transformations with an understanding that the hybrid-Scandinavian communities remained closely linked to their Scandinavian heritage, and therefore would have formed relationships with active Scandinavian leaders in the region, such as Óláfr Tryggvason, Sveinn *Tjúguskegg*, Knut the Great, Magnús berfœttr,

etc. While important, such studies suffer from heavy biases towards understanding the role of Scandinavian lineage at the expense of understanding the impact of ‘native’ heritage upon their political careers. While it is crucial to remember that the Irish sources viewed the inhabitants of Scandinavian towns and their leaders as foreigners, it is not appropriate to ignore the impact of a multitude of connections, and how this impacted the reigns of Hiberno-Scandinavian kings’. In this thesis, I therefore consider Sitric in the greater Irish political landscape, and not as a Scandinavian king. Furthermore, I am critical of revisionist scholars’ minimalist conclusions, instead determining that economic interest was fundamentally tied to social and political actions, and that this lay at the root of Dublin’s authority and power as a kingdom long before 980.

0.2 Primary Sources

Principally this thesis utilises Irish source material, which survives in Latin, English and Irish, and covers from the period of genesis to A.D. 1616. Some textual sources are chronicles, such as the *Cogad Gáedel re Gallaib*, and some annalistic, such as the *Chronicon Scotorum*, the *Fragmentary Annals*, and the *annals of Tigernach, Ulster, Inisfallen, Loch Cé*, and the *Four Masters*. The “customary titles” for many sources, in particular the use of the word ‘annals’, originates from James Ussher and James Ware in the seventeenth-century⁴. Ireland was the most vigorous of the European literate class in compiling material from the annalistic genre.⁵ Importantly, there are two features to be considered when examining any primary source. The first is their quantitative quality, meaning the assessment of the information provided, and the second is their qualitative, meaning the assessment of their historical value and how any relevant information may have been distorted.⁶ Scholars heavily rely upon the annals because they sought to provide a chronological history, but more importantly because of their composition date (often in spite of a lack of manuscript evidence for their contemporariness). For example, the *Annals of Ulster* are treated as an indispensable resource despite editions chiefly utilising manuscripts dating to the fifteenth-century.⁷ Some conclusions have been drawn regarding what composition of material would have been contemporary, still the limitations of its historical value have been allowed. However, the *Annals of Tigernach* are less credible because of a gap of knowledge between 1003 and 1018,

⁴ Daniel P. McCarthy, *The Irish Annals: their genesis, evolution and history* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2008), 13

⁵ McCarthy, *The Irish Annals*, 7

⁶ David E. Thornton, *Kings, Chronologies and Genealogies: Studies in the political history of early medieval Ireland and Wales* (Oxford: Prosopographica et Genealogica 10, 2003), 5-6.

⁷ The oldest surviving fragment is a compiled manuscript written by Ruaidhrí Ó Luinín in the late 16th century.

despite offering unique information about the Kingdom of Dublin. The provenance of the annals is also important because it plays an active role in determining possible partialities. *The Annals of Inisfallen*, are overtly concerned with Munster, and the *Annals of Ulster* with the Uí Néill. Clare Downham summed up the general attitude towards these sources when she wrote: “Irish chronicles are considered by scholars to be largely accurate records, albeit partisan in their presentation of events.”⁸ In citations, the abbreviation ‘s.a’ is used to demark when the entry year is incorrectly marked, mainly in the *Annals of the Four Masters*. The *Annals of Ulster* are notably also a year behind, but have been corrected in editions, and therefore corrections in text are unnecessary.

The Irish chronicles are not the only genre of writing that should be considered when studying this period. Included are also the Irish law tracts, which offer important details regarding the ideals of rulership, though it has been determined that they are no longer entirely reflective of Irish political society after the eighth-century. Legal texts are linguistically dated to between the seventh and eighth centuries, though the oldest surviving manuscript witnesses are not until the twelfth century. Therefore, issues of corruption and error are to be expected, though most remain unidentifiable. Their political role in maintaining Gaelic separation from the Normans from the twelfth to seventeenth centuries had a major impact on how they were used in scholarship up to the 1960s. Additionally, the *Cogad Gáedel re Gallaib* was an important propagandist piece composed a century after Brian Bóruma’s death, at his descendants’ request. It favours the idea that the Dublin of the eleventh-century was a port for heathenism, and that its rulership was inherently the right of the Uí Briain. However, source comparison quickly casts a shadow of truth upon the work. Nevertheless, while secondary scholars have acknowledged its shortcomings, many still base their summary of the battle of Clontarf upon its account.

The struggle was more often in accessing the Irish manuscripts in which these texts are preserved, which has been predominantly difficult due to their fragmentary and fragile condition. Modern technology has allowed for ease of reading with provided microfilms, and more recently high-digitized images of folios (made available by the University of Oxford and the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies’ ISOS), but they remain problematic because they are mainly written in Middle Irish, with complicated abbreviations and few have a comprehensible dating apparatus. Around the mid-nineteenth century there were a large

⁸ Clare Downham, *Viking Kings of Britain and Ireland: The Dynasty of Ívarr to A.D. 1014* (Edinburgh: Dunedin Academic Press, 2007), 12

number of editions, but in the twentieth there have been far fewer publications⁹. Mainly these have not been critical editions, but rather eclectic and are consequently subject to editorial bias. The Corpus Electronic Texts (CELT) from the National University of Ireland - Cork, has been an invaluable resource in providing the well-translated published editions online for wider accessibility. Nevertheless, there remains much demand for improved editions with careful criticism.

Additional written sources used in this dissertation are from Wales, England or Iceland, and any necessary commentary regarding their composition and provenance will be mentioned at the time of their use. The former are not all contemporaneous, and include the *Brut y Tywysogion* and the Medieval Latin *Vita Griffini filii Conani* (Life of Gruffud ap Cynan). Other British Isles sources, such as the *Gesta Regum Anglorum* by William of Malmesbury, provide a much clearer understanding of tenth and eleventh-century Scandinavian activity in England. Old Norse sources are used mainly in order to illustrate cultural memory across lands that had made up the Viking Age diaspora, particularly the accounts of the battle of Clontarf in *Brennu-Njáls saga* and *Orkneyinga saga*. There is value in seeking to understand why legends, and the truths they seek to impart, are preserved.

Translations from Old English and Old Norse are my own, while Latin, Welsh and Irish translations have been consulted. When there are multiple annals entries providing the same information, only one is extract is provided, usually from the *Annals of Ulster*. Long extracts concerning the battle of Clontarf are generally omitted, unless there is crucial new information provided in one or multiple entries. Names are spelt with consistency, and usually in the Old Norse form. Some distinctions of names are made in order to simplify for the reader, for example, the spelling of Óláfr *cúarán* versus his grandson Olaf. Óláfr *cúarán* is also the combination of an Old Norse surname and an Irish byname. Furthermore, Sitric's name is the anglicised version of 'Sitriuc', the Irish cognate to the Old Norse 'Sigtryggr', and 'Silkenbeard' the anglicised Old Norse 'silkiskegg'. These choices are deliberate, because they represent the complex interpretations of the identities of those who bore these names by later chronicles and sagas.

The three chapters following the introduction are built in chronological order for ease of reading. Principal themes in each chapter examine facts in the construction and use of socio-political networks. The first is principally concerned with explaining the socio-political

⁹ McCarthy, *The Irish Annals*, 18-19

network created by Óláfr *cúarán* through marriages, and demonstrating the role it played in the reign of Sitric as well as that of his predecessor and half-brother Glúniainn. The second chapter sets out to examine the alliances of the years before and leading up to battle of Clontarf in 1014. The nature of overlordship is assessed, and it is determined that though there was direct Irish involvement in the rulership of Dublin during Sitric's reign, he was not a 'puppet' in the political machinations of Irish overlords. The final chapter then sets out to assess the end of Sitric's tenure as king, providing a thorough examination of his successors background, as well as the efforts they made to ensure their success in Ireland. The importance of socio-political networks is highlighted by the competition between Ívarr Haraldsson and Echmarcach mac Ragnaill, and the impact of kinship ties is determined.

Chapter 1: Dublin's Network Building until the battle of Clontarf

It is the intention of this chapter to examine the role of kin relations in Sitric's political network, providing the information necessary to make a more comprehensive understanding of the nature of Scandinavian rulership in Ireland. A hierarchical structure was in place in the Irish Sea amongst the ever increasingly hybrid-communities, with potentates deriving from the Uí Ímair dynasty forced to interact with the complex and evolving system of Irish kingship during the tenth-century. Resilient economic associations were strengthened by social relationships during the early settlement periods, but there remained an important distinction between the 'foreigners' and the Irish well into the twelfth-century. In order to understand Sitric's position in Dublin at the time of his ascension an examination of his forbearers' merits attention up to the battle of Clontarf in 1014. Events in this chapter however only go to 999, as discussions of the battle of Glen Máma and Clontarf are reserved for the second chapter. Discussions of marriage highlight the complex web of alliances woven by his father with Ireland and the invaluable socio-political network they created for his sons. Familial relations are justly used to explain why Sitric was capable of maintaining power despite major losses, but wrongfully interpreted to accord him little or no political agency. Therefore, in order to understand Sitric as a ruler it is essential to comprehend the powerful network that he was born into and married.

1.1 Dublin from 900 to 952

Dublin had grown in importance from its foundation in the early ninth-century, as a base camp for Scandinavians to a wealthy consolidated trade centre with hinterlands. It is by far the most well documented Scandinavian settlement in Ireland because it appears to have been foremost in trade, and its leaders were far more directly involved in regional and external politics during the early period. There were three principal towns with which this paper is now concerned: Limerick, Waterford, and Dublin. Each was instrumental in tenth-century political contentions, but more importantly, mainly between rival factions of the Uí Ímair dynasty. Both the Irish and the Scandinavian settlers had dynastic segmentation, which eventually led to the formation of military competitors. Dynastic feuds intensified after 873 and were a factor in the loss of Dublin to the Irish in 902.¹⁰ Carried out by a coalition of

¹⁰ AU 902.2: *‘Indarba n-gennti a h-Ere, .i. longport Atha Cliath o Mael Findia m. Flandacain co feraibh Bregh 7 o Cerball m. Muiricain co Laignibh co farcabsat drecht mar dia longaibh co n-erlasat leth-marba iarna n-guin 7 a m-brisiuth’* [The heathens were driven from Ireland, i.e. from the fortress of Áth Cliath,

Leinster and Brega, Dublin was taken, but the exiles were most likely only the elite as archaeological evidence points to continued town occupation.¹¹ Despite their connections to Scandinavia, evidence suggests they remained in the Irish Sea region as exiles and their immediate descendants held ambitions to retake Dublin, most likely because it was now a vital part of a trade network. Returning in 914 with a large fleet, they harried and fought the Irish until Sitric's grandfather, Sigtryggr *cáech* retook Dublin in 917.¹² The preceding absence of Uí Ímair leaders in Dublin during the early tenth-century may have allowed for Limerick's economic growth, consequently they became their major political rival in the 920s and 930s.¹³ The dynastic struggle centred on Guðrøðr Uí Ímair of Dublin and jarl Þórir/Þormod Helgason of Limerick. At the heart of the conflict to gain greater influence in Ireland and York, each created shifting alliances with Irish and English kingdoms that were crucial for their prosperity.¹⁴ Simultaneously, the Scandinavian settlements underwent an intensification of the urbanisation process, growing increasingly entrenched in Irish politics. Limerick remained interested in Scottish Isles and the Isle of Man, but only Dublin's leaders remained concerned with gaining power in Northumbria.

Sitric *Silkenbeard* never made any recorded claim for York, nor did it become Dublin's most important economic trade partner despite its prominent position in a trade network and its historical association with the rulers of Dublin.¹⁵ Multiple family members of Sitric, including his father, were once kings of Jórvík, but his grandfather, Sigtryggr *cáech*, was most successful, ruling in Northumbria until his death in 927 and reclaiming Dublin for his dynasty around 916-917. The efforts of Sigtryggr *cáech*'s successors varied in England because of the Anglo-Saxons, and in Ireland mainly because they faced issues in retaining Dublin against the force of Scandinavian Limerick. Famously in 937 England, Óláfr Guðrøðsson, son of Sigtryggr *cáech*, allied with Constantine II of Scotland and Owen I of Strathclyde against Æthelstan, ultimately losing at the Battle of Brunanburh¹⁶. By

by Mael Finnia son of Flannacán with the men of Brega and by Cerball son of Muiricán, with the Laigin; and they abandoned a good number of their ships, and escaped half dead after they had been wounded and broken].

¹¹ Linzi Simpson, "The first phase of Viking activity in Ireland: archaeological evidence from Dublin," in *The Viking Age: Ireland and the West, Papers from the Proceedings of the Fifteenth Viking Congress Cork, 18-27 August 2005*, ed. John Sheehan et al. (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2010), 420-421.

¹² AU 917.4: 'Sitriuc h. Imair do tuidecht i n-Ath Cliath' [Sitriuc grandson of Ímar entered Áth Cliath].

¹³ Clare Downham, "Viking Settlement in Ireland before 1014," in *Celtic Norse Relationships in the Irish Sea in the Middle-Ages 800-1200*, ed. Jón Viðar Sigurðsson and Timothy Bolton (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 12.

¹⁴ Holm, "The Slave Trade of Dublin", 319.

¹⁵ Valante, *The Vikings in Ireland*, 126-127; Benjamin Hudson, *Irish Sea Studies: 900-1200* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2006), 23.

¹⁶ *Willelmi Malmesbiriensis, Monachi Gesta Regum Anglorum atque Historia Novella*, ed. Thomas Duffy Hardy (London: Sumptibus Societatis, 1840), 207-208; William of Malmesbury, *Chronicle of the kings of England*.

comparison, Óláfr was victorious in Ireland, where he successfully captured the King of Limerick and asserted Dublin's superiority. Interest was not lost in York however, as Óláfr Guðrøðsson successfully gained the kingship of Northumbria in 939, a year after King Æthelstan's death. He died in 941, and his cousin Óláfr *cúarán* was named as his successor. Óláfr *kváran* Sigtryggsson, i.e. Óláfr *cúarán*, was the son of Sigtryggr *cáech* and possibly King Æthelstan of England's sister, an unnamed West Saxon princess. William of Malmesbury, an early to mid-twelfth century English historian, wrote of his parents' union: '*primogenitum Ethelstann habuit ex Egwinna illustri fœmina; et filiam, cujus nomen scriptum non in promptu habeo: hanc ipse frater Sihtricio Northanhimbrorum regi nuptum dedit.*'¹⁷ He was allegedly born around 927, but that would mean he was only fourteen when he became the leader in York, an unlikely but not impossible accomplishment. In Ireland, the sons of Sigtryggr *cáech* and Gofraid (Guðrøðr) reached some agreement for peace, and the 'turf wars' between Waterford, Limerick, and Dublin from 914 to 934 were settled in the period of Olaf *cúarán*'s rulership. By 941, Óláfr *cúarán* controlled York, and by extension Dublin through his cousin Blákári, and his brother, Haraldr Sigtryggsson, also controlled Limerick. Nevertheless, it is obvious from past and subsequent events that the Uí Ímair may have claimed heritage to Ívarr, but they were not a unified coalition.

The Irish seemed to have perceived that this dynasty fragmented and fighting as it was, was still a unified threat against their own ambitions. In the early 940s, the northern Uí Néill overking Muirchertach na Cochall Craicinn attacked both Dublin and the Hebrides in an effort to cripple the Uí Ímair's powerbase or trade network.¹⁸ The involvement of Óláfr Guðrøðsson and Óláfr *cúarán* in Northumbria came at the expense of their power in Ireland. Their departures in 939 and 940 allowed the overkings of Leinster, a neighbouring kingdom, to challenge Dublin's dominance and force the delegate Blákári to go on the offensive in 942. Despite his efforts, Dublin was sacked in 944 by an alliance of Congalach *cnogba*, the overking of Brega and the Southern Uí Néill, and Leinster's king, Braen son of Máel Mórda mac Muirecán.¹⁹ Blákári was then removed from power by Óláfr *cúarán* in 945 upon his

From the earliest period to the reign of King Stephen, ed. & trans. John Allen Giles (London: H.G. Bohn, 1847), 129-130.

¹⁷ *Willelmi Malmesbiriensis, Monachi Gesta Regum Anglorum*, 197; William of Malmesbury, *Chronicle of the kings of England*, 124: [By Egwina, an illustrious lady, he had Athelstan, his first-born, and a daughter, whose name I cannot particularise, but her brother gave her in marriage to Sihtric, king of Northumbrians].

¹⁸ Downham, *Viking Kings of Britain and Ireland*, 44.

¹⁹ AFM s.a. 942.12 [=944] + CS 944 provide graphic accounts of the slaughter, while AU 944.3 simply states: '*Conghalach m. Mhail Mithidh 7 Broen m. Mael Mordhai, ri Laighen, do arcaín Atha Cliath co tucsat seotu 7 maine 7 brait moir*' [Congalach son of Mael Mithig and Braen son of Mael Mórda, king of Laigin, plundered Áth Cliath, and took away valuables, and treasure, and much booty], and the AI 944.3 provides an even shorter

return to Ireland, and later killed in 948 by King Congalach.²⁰ Óláfr *cúarán*'s return was the consequence of his failure to retain York, as King Edmund of the English ousted him and his cousin Blákári's brother Rögnvaldr Guðrøðsson, in 944.²¹ Alex Woolf believes that it was the beginning of a rivalry between Rögnvaldr and Óláfr *cúarán* that ultimately led to the downfall of their position in Northumbria.²² However, Poul Holm more convincingly suggests that the loss of important bases, such as Strangford Lough and Anagassan, crushed the possibility of the Uí Ímair truly regaining York long before 944/5.²³ Leadership of Dublin passed back and forth between the cousins of the Uí Ímair over the following years until 952, when Óláfr *cúarán* was finally forced to remain in Dublin after losing York for a second time; no other pretensions would be made for its control by his direct descendants. They were preoccupied with the more immediate geographical politics of the Irish Sea however. While dynastic issues plagued Dublin's leaders, Irish kings and overkings were also actively working against Scandinavian towns and each other in efforts for supremacy. Fighting was an integral part of a king's status and it was treated more as an obligation than as a sometimes-necessary part of their profession. Peace was fleeting for kings as their constructed alliances may disintegrate, and royal authority may not be absolute even within their own kingdoms. More often alliances were made and died with individuals, and old grudges may be forgotten in struggles against a new opponent. After their return in 917, the kings of the towns were embroiled in such conflicts, particularly Óláfr *cúarán*.

1.2 The Many Alliances of Óláfr *cúarán*

In the following section, an evaluation of Óláfr *cúarán*'s network is provided with discussions about the nature of marriage. The main alliances on record with the kingdom of Dublin during the reign of Óláfr *cúarán* were armed engagements alongside Irish kings for the political benefit of their kingdoms and persons, but the nature of such arrangements will be examined in Chapter 2. Importantly, there were a number of marriages that linked the kingdoms of Dublin with its sometimes allies/occasional enemies, the kingdoms of Ailech (Northern Uí Néill), Brega, and Leinster. The product of these unions had a greater impact

entry: '*Orgain Áth Cliath do h-Uíib Neill 7 Laignib*' [the plundering of Áth Cliath by the Uí Néill and the Laigin].

²⁰ AU 948.1: '*Blocair m. Gofrith, ri Gall, do marbad la Conghalach m. Mael Mithidh*' [Blacair son of Gothfrith, king of the foreigners, was killed by Congalach son of Mael Mithig].

²¹ *Willelmi Malmesbiriensis, Monachi Gesta Regum Anglorum*, 226; William of Malmesbury, *Chronicle of the kings of England*, 141.

²² Alex Woolf, "Amlaib Cuarán and the Gael, 941-981," in *Medieval Dublin III*, ed. Seán Duffy (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2002), 37.

²³ Holm, "The Slave Trade of Dublin", 329.

upon political networks than the marriages themselves, because neither alliances nor marriages were binding during this period. The role of noble women is also explored because of the central role Gormflaith, Óláfr *cúarán*'s second wife and Sitric's mother, occupied in the politics of his reign.

Rapidly a network of obligations was established between the Scandinavian settlers and the Irish, as the former became involved in not only the economy of Ireland, but also in shaping regional politics. Harold Mytum wrote that the 'Vikings' initially came to Ireland at an economic disadvantage because they were not part of the Irish kin system, which had long ensured the prosperity of the elite and the free farmers to make legitimate claims to land and rank.²⁴ Consequently, at first they created brief military alliances, but nevertheless quickly grew entrenched in the socio-politics of Ireland. Notably, the settlements were intrinsically transformed by the renewed attention of the Scandinavians after the return of the Uí Ímair in 914, and the retaking of Dublin in 917. However, immediately after these victories the Uí Ímair were more preoccupied with their turf wars and with gaining power in Northumbria. Consequently, their political alliances within Ireland would have suffered. In particular, after Óláfr *cúarán*'s reign in Dublin began anew in 952, there was a noticeable effort to forge relationships most probably with the foresight that the product of these unions could be beneficial for both parties. The dates of his two marriages to Irish princesses indicate that the presence of a strong political leader in Dublin, intent on gaining and maintaining his power, greatly impacted the view Irish kings held of the town's leadership. Simply put, their permanence was indisputable and therefore they became crucial allies for future political and economic endeavours. Long-term contribution to the local economy, uninterrupted even when the leadership was expelled in 902, had assured Dublin's economic importance. Gift-exchange for silver, which was imported by the Scandinavians, for cattle, slaves, or pledges of alliance grew increasingly common from the late ninth-century onwards between elite persons. These arrangements greatly furthered the number of Scandinavian goods that found their way into the higher levels of Irish society because they fostered greater trade. Consequently, through both their control of the flow of wealth through Dublin, in addition to their increased involvement in political machinations, Dublin became a crucial ally. If the kingdom of Dublin had been weak, the Irish would not have sought after or agreed to an alliance. Marriages were not standard in elite circles if there was no advantage.

²⁴ Harold Mytum, "The Vikings and Ireland: Ethnicity, Identity, and Cultural Change," in *The Norse Colonization of the North Atlantic Volume 5*, ed. James H. Barrett (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), 114.

Hiberno-Scandinavian towns left few if any material or literary record of the politics within the towns and hinterlands, but left no record of laws concerning private matters. We are therefore only able to make some conclusions regarding the nature of such relationships, though none are entirely decisive. It is clear from other examples across the British Isles that elite or royal marriages were made in accordance with the solidification of politics between networks, a structure that changed often. However, in Ireland divorce and separation if they no longer suited the political climate, or were otherwise an unsuitable match, appear to have been acceptable during this period, regardless of religion.²⁵ Marriage seems to be preferred over fosterage, though it was an important practice in Celtic and Germanic society. In fosterage, a child of superior birth was commonly raised in an inferior household, in order to create deep loyal attachments.²⁶ However, the motivation of Irish fosterage was to provide the thorough education necessary for a child to successfully accomplish tasks assigned to their social rank and gender. The inability of ‘foreigners’ to provide the proper instruction for a boy to even become a petty king in a small Irish kingdom may therefore have been a deterrent. Religion may have also been an issue, in addition to language, which would have been a barrier in the creation of alliances, though arguably more easily surmountable by children placed in foster families, than adults joined in marriage. Evidently the issue was not insurmountable, as they quickly formed alliances and married the Irish because it was politically imperative. As an example, in the mid ninth-century the *Fragmentary Annals* note that another Óláfr of Dublin married the daughter of his ally and Máel Sechnaill I’s rival Áed Finnliath, to solidify a political and military alliance. But in 867, Óláfr is also said to have married another woman, King Cináed of the Picts’, daughter.²⁷ It is possible he divorced his first wife, or that he simply took another, as polygamy was not uncommon. Their counterparts, the Irish Kings, could be expected to not only have one wife but also concubines.²⁸ The story of the relationship between Irish and Scandinavian people from the time of the earliest settlements to the arrival of the Normans therefore follows a pattern of

²⁵ Donnchadh Ó Corráin, “Marriage in Early Ireland,” in *Marriage in Medieval Ireland*, ed. Art Crossgrove (Dublin: College Press, 1985), 23-24. (Twelfth-century church reformers found Irish marital customs to be barbaric and old, suggesting there was continuity of some practices dictated in the eight-century legal tracts. Furthermore, these legal tracts were written much later, and may have been influenced by the intervening centuries customs.)

²⁶ Edel Bhreathanach, *Ireland in the Medieval World, AD 400-1000: Landscape, kingship and religion* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2014), 90-91.

²⁷ FA s.a. 292 [=862] *K. u. Aodh mc. Neill 7 a chliamhain, .i. Amlaibh (ingean Aodha ro bhaoi ag Amhlaoibh) go slóghaibh móra Gaoidhiol 7 Lochlannach leo go magh Midhe, 7 a ionnradh léo, 7 saorclanna iomdha do mharbhadh leo.* [Áed son of Niall and his son-in-law Amlaib (Áed’s daughter was Amlaib’s wife), went with great armies of Irish and Norwegians to the plain of Mide, and they plundered it and killed many freemen].

²⁸ Bhreathanach, *Ireland in the Medieval World*, 83.

power dynamics. Whenever the Dublin's rulership was assertive, Irish kings would have considered it imperative to bind their families together in the wake of agreements to oppose rival groups.

As foreigners attempting to solidify their authority and hold on to new territory, Scandinavians benefitted greatly from the political acknowledgement of their equality with the Irish elite status through marriage alliances. In the tenth-century Óláfr *cúarán* was married twice, each forming a part of the complicated web of networks that connected Dublin to Ireland's politics. The rise of Domnall Uí Néill, son of Muirchertach *na Cochall Craicenn*, began according to the *Annals of Ulster* in 956, and ended in 980 the same year he abdicated, moved to a monastery, and died. One of his greatest rivals, Óláfr *cúarán*, had a similar end; he too was forced to abdicate in 980, retired to the monastery of Iona, and died that same year.²⁹ Domnall's ascension to power followed a well-established exchange between the northern and southern Uí Néill dynasty's partition of the title of king of Ireland. Though Domnall continued his predecessor's (Congalach *cnogba*) incessant fight against Dublin, attempts to settle it were made through the marriage of Óláfr *cúarán* to his sister.³⁰ Shortly after Domnall came to power in 956, it is assumed that Óláfr *cúarán* would have married his sister Dúnflaith, the daughter of Muirchertach *na Cochall Craicinn*. She had been married to another man until 952, the year of his death and three years after the birth of her son Máel Sechnaill II.³¹ Dúnflaith and Óláfr *cúarán* had a son, Glúniarn (ON. Járnké), who became the ruler of Dublin in 980 (d. 989). Their union was not a binding agreement to keep the peace and they persisted to fight continuously. Óláfr *cúarán*'s next alliance was calculated and born of a similar effort as his first to join with an old rival. Dublin had not been a friend to Leinster, however Domnall Uí Néill was provoked in 968 to act against both, and consequently forced an alliance between the two.³² Óláfr *cúarán* subsequently married one of the Leinster princesses, Gormflaith, in the late 960s. He also sought out a formalised alliance

²⁹ AU 980.2 *Domhnall H. Neill, ardri Erenn, post penitentiam i n-Ard Macha obit* [Domnall ua Néill, over-king of Ireland, died after penance in Ard Macha]; AT 980.6 *Amlaim mac Sitriuca, aird-righ ar Gallaib Atha Cliath, do dul co h-Í a n-aithrige 7 a n-ailithri iarsin cath mortuus est.* [Amhlaioimh son of Sitric, high-king over the Foreigners of Dublin, went to Iona in repentance and in pilgrimage after the battle, and died.]

³⁰ The animosity between Domnall's family and the Uí Ímair was not only political, but also personal. A previous king of Dublin, a cousin and rival of Óláfr *Cuarán*, had killed Dunflaith's father in 941.

³¹ 'The Ban-Shenchus [part 2]', ed. & trans. Maragaret E. Dobbs (Revue Celtique 48, 1931): 188. '*Dunlaith ingen Murcheartaig m. Neill, mathair Mael Eachlaind (ob. 1022) m. Domnaill rig Ering 7 Gluin Iaraid (ob. 988) m. Amlaib ri Gall*' [Dunflaith daughter of Muirchertach son of Niall, mother of Máel Sechnaill (d. 1022) son of Domnall, King of Ireland and Glúniarn (d. 988) son of Óláfr, King of the Foreigners].

³² AU 968.3: '*Slogad la Domnall H. Neill co Laighniu co ros-indir o Berba siar co fairce, co tuc boromha morlais 7 co tarat forbaiss for Gallu 7 Laighniu co cenn da mis*' [Domnall ua Néill led an army to Laigin and plundered them from Berba westwards to the sea, taking a great spoil in cows, and he beleaguered the foreigners and the Laigin for two months.]

by marrying his daughter, Ragnhild, to the son of Brega's overking, Domnall mac Congalach.³³

Women of the period are always discussed in context to their relationships with men: their fathers, brothers, sons, or husbands. Gormflaith is no exception, the daughter of the king of Leinster, Murchad mac Bran Fionn who reigned from 966 to 972, and the sister of Máel Mórda, who ruled Leinster from 1003 to 1014. She was the princess consort to three kings and the mother of Sitric Amlaíbsson, King of the Foreigners, and Donnchadh, King of Munster. She was born around 960, but her son, Sitric, was born in 970, a natural feat nearly impossible for a 10 year old. It should therefore be assumed that these dates are a rather rough estimate.³⁴ Muireann Ní Brolcháin suggested that Gormflaith's union with Óláfr *cúarán* was encouraged by her bilingualism in Irish and Norse, acquired through her mother, *Scirrdech banamas*. The latter name indicates that she was a converted slave or servant, who Ní Brolcháin understands to have been taken on an Irish raiding party from a Hiberno-Scandinavian settlement.³⁵ She uses this to explain why Gormflaith would have married such an old man, however the importance of solidifying an alliance between Leinster and Dublin is sufficient to explain why it was necessary and this conclusion simply solidifies the connection of Gormflaith to Dublin, which endured beyond the death of her husband. It appears that she remained married to Óláfr *cúarán* and gave birth to at least one other known child - a girl, until the former's abdication in 980. Thereafter she remained in Ireland, either in her home kingdom of Leinster, or more doubtfully in Dublin where her son's half-brother now reigned. Her first marriage to Óláfr *cúarán* therefore formed ties between the kingdoms, however it is incorrect to assume that an alliance with Gormflaith would have created peace with all of Leinster. Ireland may have had larger principal kingdoms during this period, but each was divided into territories with ruling factions. Therefore, when Óláfr *cúarán* married Gormflaith, he wed the Uí Fáeláin branch of the Uí Dúnlainge. Throughout the tenth-century and in the first half of the eleventh, power transferred in Leinster between branches in an ordered cycle: Uí Muiredaig-Uí Dúncada-Uí Fáeláin. When Dublin attacked the king of Leinster in 978 at the battle of Bithlann, the Uí Muiredaig had been in control since 972;

³³ 'The Ban-Shenchus', 188: '*Radnailt ingen Amlaib, mathair Muirchertaig (ob. 994) hUi Congalaig*' [Radnailt (=Ragnhild) daughter of Amlaib (=Óláfr), mother of Muirchertaig son of Congalach].

³⁴ Fosterage customs seem to indicate that a girl was considered prepared for marriage at the end of her 'foster period', which began around the age of [7] and ended around [14] - Bhreathnach, *Ireland in the Medieval World*, 84.

³⁵ Muireann Ní Brolcháin, "Who was Gormflaith's Mother? A detective story," in *Lost and Found II: Rediscovering Ireland's Past*, ed. Joe Fenwick (Dublin: Wordwell, 2009), 89.

afterwards power passed to the Uí Dunchada.³⁶ The Dublin connection to the Uí Fáeláin would be instrumental to Óláfr's son Sitric.

It was the principal duty of a woman to protect any of her sons' claims to their paternal inheritance, but they were also important conduits of power by which men could claim further authority. Gormflaith's second marriage to Máel Sechnaill II, King of Mide and Tara, is highly contested, though her third and final to Brian Bóruma, King of Munster, is well attested to. The suggestion that she was married to Máel Sechnaill II has been widely disputed because it mainly arises from a posthumous poem in the *Lebar na Núachongbála* (Book of Leinster), composed sometime between 1150 and 1200.³⁷ In the *Annals of the Four Masters* alone she is also called the mother of Conchobhar (d.1030), son of Máel Sechnaill II, but this is not mentioned in the *Banshenchas*, a more trustworthy and contemporaneous twelfth-century catalogue of Ireland's famous women. Glúniain and Sitric's reigns were intrinsically tied to Máel Sechnaill II; he was Glúniain's half brother by Dúnflaith, but situational evidence makes it possible to understand that the connection between Sitric and Máel Sechnaill II persisted because of the latter's relationship with Sitric's mother, sister or both. Gormflaith may have simply been his concubine or companion for a time, but in the *Annals of Clonmacnoise* (an admittedly more troublesome chronicle because of its later dating), her daughter by Óláfr *cúarán*, Máel Muire ingen Amlaíb, is styled as the Queen of Ireland, and therefore it is implied that she was married to Máel Sechnaill II.³⁸ The role of the King's connection to Gormflaith and/or Máel Muire would have maintained ties between Dublin and the kingdom of Mide, who also needed Dublin's wealth and position in its efforts against the King of Munster, Brian Bóruma. He was to be her third and final husband. Old at the time of his marriage around 1000, Brian and Gormflaith divorced or separated before 1014. Nevertheless, she is called 'Ingen Murcha[da] m. Find, rigan Muman, moritur' At the time of her death in 1030³⁹. This is understood by her role alongside Sitric and her brother Máel Mórda at the battle of Clontarf. They had one known son, Donnchadh, who became his

³⁶ AU 978.3: '*Cath Bithlainde for Laighnib ria n-Gallaibh Atha Cliath dú i torchair ri Laigin, .i. Ughaire m. Tuathail, 7 alii multi*' [The battle of Bithlann was won over the Laigin by the foreigners of Áth Cliath, and in it fell the king of Laigin, i.e. Úgáire son of Tuathal, and many other].

³⁷ See also: AFM s.a. 1030.21: '*Tri léimeanna ro ling Gormlaith/ní lingfedh ben co bráth/léim i n-Ath Cliath, léim i t-Teamhraigh/léim i c-Caisel carn-maigh ós cach*' [Gormlaith took three leaps/Which a woman shall never take again/A leap at Ath-Cliath, a leap at Teamhair/A leap into Caisael of the goblets over all]

³⁸ *Annals of Clonmacnoise, being annals of Ireland from the earliest period to A.D. 1408*, ed. Denins Murphy (Dublin: Dublin University Press, 1896), 170 - s.a. 1014 (=1021): Maylemary daughter of Awley of Dublin Queen of Ireland, and wife to Moyleseachlin died.

³⁹ AI 1030.4: [Daughter of Murchad son of Finn, Queen of Munster, dies.]; More information is provided in AT 1030.15: '*Gormlaith ingen Murchadha meic Floind, máthair Sitriuca meic Amlaim, rig Gall, 7 Dondchada meic Briain, rig Muman, mortua est*' [Gormlaith daughter of Murchadh son of Fland, mother of Sitric son of Olaf, king of the Foreigners, and of Donnchadh son of Brian, king of Munster, died].

father's heir after the deaths of his elder half-brothers. Gormflaith was ultimately most important as a mother, but she chose her kingdom of origin, Leinster, over her husband and sons', and therefore appears to have kept her in close contact with Dublin, rather than Munster⁴⁰.

Importantly, Gormflaith's relationship with her son Sitric was the most crucial connection in the political network that sustained his reign through to 1022, the time of Máel Sechnaill II's death. Overlooked in favour of their sons or husbands, the role of elite women deserves further scrutiny. Máel Sechnaill II's dynasty, the Uí Néill, often married their predecessors' wives as a symbolic gesture with multiple political returns. Marriage elevated a woman's status, but she also retained the sovereignty of her husband's kingship even after his death, and therefore was an attractive prospect for future alliances.⁴¹ There were a number of factors that helped to construct notions of a king's prestige, most notably the association of honour with the guardianship and ownership of women. This is exemplified in the large number of female slaves owned during the Viking Age, as they were emblematic of a man's military superiority and wealth, and sexual access was controlled in order to demonstrate masculinity.⁴² Similarly, women in elite marriages were a highly developed statement of gender identity. They provided a safeguard for royal lineage and it would have been their responsibility to bear legitimate sons. When Brian Bóruma married Gormflaith, it was a political declaration that the kingdoms of Leinster and Munster were to be bound. She was also the mother of the king of Dublin and therefore was an even greater political benefit. If she had additionally had a relationship with Máel Sechnaill II, Brian's marriage to Gormflaith was also clear demonstration of the King's assertion of his authority over the King of Tara and Mide. Therefore, unlike slave women, free women of elite standing were not stripped of their immediate or acquired kin, but rather played a crucial role in transposing them onto their husbands. Nevertheless, their role is not recorded as particularly active in the realm of politics. When Gormflaith is an independent political agent, she is construed as rather villainous by later accounts. Some of the most famous accounts of her character are from the *Cogad Gáedel re Gallaib* (The War of the Irish with the Foreigners) and *Brennu-Njáls saga*. Mainly these focus on her character, and her provocation of her son Sitric and brother Máel

⁴⁰ Shannon Lewis-Simpson, "Viking-Age queens and the formation of identity", 219-220; Ní Brolcháin, "Who was Gormflaith's Mother?", 90.

⁴¹ Bhreathnach, *Ireland in the Medieval World*, 83.

⁴² David Wyatt, "Slavery, Power and Cultural Identity in the Irish Sea Region, 1066-1171," in *Celtic Norse Relationships in the Irish Sea in the Middle-Ages 800-1200*, ed. Jón Viðar Sigurðsson and Timothy Bolton (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 99.

Mórda to fight against her ex-husband, Brian Bóruma⁴³. Gormflaith, like her contemporaries, is however best remembered for her children.

Women are firstly remembered in the chronicles and genealogies for their descendants, and their marriages mentioned in their son's naming. An understanding of Dúnflaith and Gormflaith's marriages and the products of these unions introduce enough information to understand the formation of a complex political network that greatly impacted the reigns of their sons. These women moved between courts and would have adhered to their customs, but undoubtedly would have expressed facets of their own upbringing - religion, traditions, and customs. For example, naming practices amongst the Uí Ímair are generally understood to be indicative of a greater sense of coalition; Óláfr, Guðrøðr, Rögnvaldr, Ívarr and Sigtryggr, were all popular names amongst the recorded men operating within the Irish Sea during this period. Names were of great importance, though there has been no extensive study undertaken into the practice of Gaelic-Norse name giving, more specifically into the combination of first and by-names.⁴⁴ Sitric's name is from the Old Norse 'Sigtryggr', and his byname *Silkenbeard* (or *Silkbeard*) is from the Old Norse *silkiskegg*, a description accorded to him in *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu*⁴⁵. His full-sister Máel Muire carries an Irish name used for both men and women, with no corresponding Old Norse equivalent. The relationships between elite Irish and Scandinavians of the British Isles were bridged through marriages, but the impact of women is rarely considered in regards to the construction of their children's identities. It is possible to suggest that if Sitric's mother raised him in Dublin, he would have been bilingual, learning Irish and Old Norse from a young age. It is certain that he retained close relations with Leinster during his reign, and these may have been assured for some time by the presence and influence of his mother. Similarly, Glúniarn could have maintained a relationship with his mother, Dúnflaith, and her family, especially with her other son, Máel Sechnaill II. The role of their father is unknown and obscured by a lack of source material, but it is safe to assume that they would have been principally raised around Dublin, and therefore exposed to the Old Norse language, as well as other facets of the town's now

⁴³ James Henthorn Todd (ed.), *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh: The War of the Gaedhil with the Gaill; or, The Invasion of Ireland by Danes and other Norsemen. Rerum Britannicarum Medii Aevi Scriptores 48* (London, 1867), 143; "Brennu-Njáls saga", in *Íslensk fornrit 12*, ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1954), 440.

⁴⁴ Downham, *Viking Kings of Britain and Ireland*, 3; Henrik Williams, "Name borrowing among the Vikings," in *Viking and Norse in the North Atlantic: Selected Papers from the Proceedings of the Fourteenth Viking Congress, Tórshavn, 19-30 July 2001*, ed. Andras Mortensen 7 Simun Arge (Tórshavn: Foroya Fróðskaparfelag, 2005), 340.

⁴⁵ *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu*, chapter 8: *Þá réð fyrir Írlandi Sigtryggur konungur silkiskegg, son Ólafs kvarans og Kormlaðar drottningar*. [Then (at that time) ruled King Sitric Silkbeard, son of Óláfr cúarán and Queen Gormflaith, in Ireland.]

Hiberno-Scandinavian culture. Both archaeological and textual source material reveal that within these towns elite persons and residents had developed hybrid identities, featuring elements of Scandinavian heritage apparent through enduring traits in material culture and language, but that they were also the product of irrevocable transformations by varying degrees of cultural and ethnic blending with native populations. It is important to note these ‘native’ peoples were neither isolated nor unified, and use of the term Irish may be somewhat misleading. While Ireland had shared traditions, as evidenced in law tracts, the application and practice of a theory is always far more intricate.

1.3 Glúniairn & the early reign of Sitric Silkenbeard – 980-999

In the years following the forced removal of Óláfr *cúarán* from Dublin, particularly during the reign of Sitric, it is possible to see that the fight for control of Dublin by his dynastic branch was viewed not only as a struggle for authority, but also for inheritance. When Máel Sechnaill forced him out in 980, the immediate benefactors of his political networking were his sons.⁴⁶ The involvement of Dublin in the power struggles of Irish kings during the tenth-century persisted into the eleventh, but they were distinctively different because of the outcomes of marriages between the Irish and Dublin’s ruling faction. While the marriages themselves were not an insurance against instability, the children of these unions created a new level of complexity in networking, because they were examples of Hiberno-Scandinavian hybridity. Kin was also not an assurance of peace, but it was an agent of great influence. Importantly, while Ireland was capable of largely combining political fragmentation with cultural unity, individual *túath* (a tribal people, or kingdom) or a grouping of them probably held some linguistic, religious and social customs that differed from their neighbours.⁴⁷ Therefore, Sitric and Glúniairn may not have viewed their maternal lineage as being merely ‘Irish’. Born into complex networks, typical of the elite class in Ireland, they nevertheless ruled Dublin as *rí Gall*. This title is reflective of the way they and the people they ruled were regarded. Nevertheless, they were closely linked to some of the most important Irish political figures of the period by blood or by marriage.

Glúniairn and Sitric may have come to power with the help of an Irish king, Máel Sechnaill II, but it was their position as sons of Óláfr *cúarán* and therefore members of the

⁴⁶ AU 980.1: [The battle of Temair was won by Máel Sechnaill son of Domnall against the foreigners of Áth Cliath and the Isles, and a very great slaughter was inflicted on the foreigners therein, and foreign power ejected from Ireland as a result. There fell therein Ragnall son of Amlaíb, the son of the king of the foreigners, and Conamal, son of a tributary king of the foreigners, and many others].

⁴⁷ Francis J. Byrne, *Irish Kings and High Kings* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001), 8-9.

ruling dynastic branch of Uí Ímair that gave them access to this position. Óláfr *cúarán* sowed the own seeds for his destruction when he killed two possible candidates for the high kingship, Muirchertach son of Domnall Uí Néill, and Congalach son of Domnall, in 977, leaving the position open for Máel Sechnaill II, his stepson by Dúnflaith, to claim.⁴⁸ Later accounts detail how in 975 Máel Sechnaill II began his reign by attacking Dublin.⁴⁹ Old family ties meant very little against political ambition. It is highly likely Máel Sechnaill II saw the economic and political advantage of having his half-brother, Glúniainn, as the leader of Dublin. He was part of the southern branch of Uí Néill, a family that held exclusive rights, until the late tenth-century to the title of King of Ireland, otherwise referred to as the kingship of Tara.⁵⁰ Though more of a formal title than a representation of political power, this period saw increased efforts by kings to use this title in order to assert even greater authority. The success of 980 was important for Máel Sechnaill II's efforts, as he was thereafter in control or in alliance with some of the wealthiest regions in Ireland. Máel Mórda of Leinster, Óláfr *cúarán*'s brother-in-law, aided Máel Sechnaill II's victory, illustrating that shifting alliances were neither uncommon nor unexpected. Interestingly, the foreigners (probably referencing Dublin rather than another Hiberno-Scandinavian town) captured and then killed Máel Mórda's brother Bran, son of Murchad King of Leinster, in 980.⁵¹ Glúniainn and Máel Sechnaill II appear to have held a successful relationship, and they joined forces in 983 against Waterford and Leinster.⁵² Their relationship is not recorded as economically exploitive, though a tie to Dublin would have been especially beneficial for the Irish king's political campaigns against the growing threat of Brian Bóruma, who had consolidated his power over Munster by 982. Ultimately Glúniainn ruled for less than a decade because he was murdered in 989. By all accounts his own people killed him, though some annals provide further details: a slave or servant committed the murder whose name was Colbain, and

⁴⁸ AU 977.1: 'Muirchertach m. Domnaill H. Neill 7 Congalach m. Domnaill, da righdomna Erenn, do marbad la Amhlaim m. Sitriuca' [Muirchertach son of Domnaill ua Néill and Congalach son of Domnall, two heirs designate of Ireland, were killed by Amlaib son of Sitriuc].

⁴⁹ CS 975: 'Cedna fecht Maoilsechlainn meic Domnaill o Ath Cliath dar bris cois an Gaill' [The first expedition of Máel Sechnaill son of Domnall to Áth Cliath, in which he broke the foreigner's leg].

⁵⁰ Seán Duffy, "Ireland, c.1000- c.1100," in *A Companion to the Early Middle Ages: Britain and Ireland c. 500- c. 1100*, ed. Pauline Stafford (London: Wiley-Blackweek, 2009), 286.

⁵¹ AU 980. 8: 'Broen m. ri Laigen, do ergabhail do Ghallaib 7 a marbad iarum' [Braen son of Murchad, king of Laigin, was taken prisoner by the foreigners and afterwards put to death].

⁵² AU 983.2: 'Cath Temrach ria Mael Sechnaill m. n-Domnaill for Gallaibh Atho Cliath 7 na n-Indsedh i r-roladh derg-ar Gall 7 nert Gall a h-Erinn, dú i torchair Ragnall m. Amhlaim m. rig Gall, 7 Conamhal m. airri Gall, 7 alii multi' [The battle of Temair was won by Mael Sechnaill son of Domnall against the foreigners of Áth Cliath and the Isles, and very great slaughter was inflicted on the foreigners therein, and foreign power ejected from Ireland as a result. There fell therein Ragnall son of Amlaib, the son of the king of the foreigners, and Conamal, son of a tributary king of the foreigners, and many others]; see also: AFM 979.6 + AI 980.4 + AT 980.3 + CS 983.

Glúniarn died at his hand during a drunken brawl.⁵³ Benjamin Hudson considers that Máel Sechnaill II's swift and violent response to his half-brother's death that same year indicates that the murder was indicative of something greater than a personal act. Rather, the assassination was an example of factional infighting within Dublin, and the removal of Glúniarn from power was therefore an effort to also remove Máel Sechnaill II's influence.⁵⁴ However, Hudson fails to elaborate further on a crucial point about the kingship of Dublin: who was eligible to rule. This is probably due to a lack of any material available capable of constructing such knowledge. Nevertheless, it is clear that at this time Glúniarn and Sitric came to power because their predecessors had consolidated power in Dublin against other Scandinavian factions, and that their father's long reign had established some stability for his immediate descendants. However, his relationship to Máel Sechnaill II, present at birth but cultivated during his lifetime, must have had a significant impact upon not only his rise to power, but also his ability to govern. Perhaps he was too Irish or too interested in helping their political betterment.

The end of Óláfr *cúarán*'s reign is generally understood to be the beginning of the decline of Uí Ímair power in Dublin, but his son Sitric was arguably just as involved and challenged as his father had been by Irish power, as well as opposed by other members of the same dynasty. In the 960s, Óláfr *cúarán* battled against the sons of Óláfr Guðrøðsson. Similarly, the beginning of Glúniarn and Sitric's reigns were marked by struggle against Waterford, ruled by Ívarr from roughly 969 to 1000. Ívarr political ambitions may have kept Sitric from coming to power in 989, though it is possible he was never a contender to succeed Glúniarn. The passing of Óláfr *cúarán*'s crown to his son and then on to Sitric adheres not to primogeniture, but is still representative of the period's agnatic practices in Irish and Uí Ímair political society.⁵⁵ He had two older brothers who died in similar circumstances at battles fought against Brian Bóruma. Haraldr died at the head of Dublin's contingent at the Battle of Glen Máma in 999, and Dubgall was the first of the *'foreigners'* to die on the battlefield of Clontarf in 1014.⁵⁶ Sitric was only around 19 years old at the time of his brother Glúniarn's

⁵³ AFM s.a. 988.14 [=989] provides all this information; AU 989.3 provides all but the name of the killer; CS 989 and AT 989.1 never state that he was drunk; AI 989.3 records only that he was killed by his own people

⁵⁴ Benjamin Hudson, *Viking Pirates and Christian Princes: Dynasty, Religion and Empire in the North Atlantic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 86.

⁵⁵ Byrne, *Irish Kings and High Kings*, 37.

⁵⁶ AU 998.8: *'Slogad la Brian, ri Caisil, co Gleann Mamma co tangadur Gaill Atha Cliath dia fhuabairt co Laignibh imaille friu, co remaidh forro 7 coro ladh a n-ár im Aralt m. Amlaimh'* [Brian, king of Caisel, led an army to Glenn Máma and the foreigners of Áth Cliath, accompanied by the Laigin, came to attack him. And they were defeated and a slaughter was inflicted on them, including Aralt son of Amlaib]

AU 1014.2: *'Sloghud la Brian m. Cenneitigh m. Lorcain, la righ n-Ereenn, 7 la Mael Sechlainn m. Domnaill, la righ Temhrach co h-Ath Cliath. Laighin uile do leir i tinol ar a cinn 7 Gaill Atha Cliath (...)aidhis iarum*

death, but there have been suggestions that he may have risen to power with the help of Máel Sechnaill II, who acted as a kingmaker.⁵⁷ Why he helped Sitric is uncertain, though it may be proposed that he retained a vested interest in the wealth from Dublin, wanted to reduce the threat of the foreigners, and may also have known Sitric personally, not only through Glúniainn but also through the women of his family. As already mentioned, Sitric's mother, Gormflaith, may have had some relation with the king, and her daughter was married to Máel Sechnaill sometime in the 990s. Close ties with Dublin helped to bolster Máel Sechnaill II's strong claims to his position as King of Tara, and were especially beneficial in a period of extreme political contention. However, if Máel Sechnaill's role in Glúniainn's life had been the cause of the latter's ruination, Sitric's association with the King, as well as his close ties with the Kingdom of Leinster, were actually his greatest political tool.

I propose that Sitric finally consolidated his power in 995, and held on to the position by utilising his ties to the Irish to better Dublin's socio-political position. His first association was with Máel Sechnaill II, who had exploited Dublin's economy since 980.⁵⁸ Furthermore, in 989 he attacked Dublin in a moment reckoning for his half-brother's death. He also discernably valued the assurance of a direct line to Dublin's wealth, and it can be suggested by his subsequent action that Máel Sechnaill II had exploited Glúniainn's position for his own economic betterment and after his half-brother's death found it necessary to force its continuation. This is exhibited by his demand that an ounce of gold be paid from every garden on Christmas Eve evermore.⁵⁹ Rapid changes in rulership meant that Máel Sechnaill II was unable to impose his overlordship over the town, and therefore when he returned in 995, he found it necessary to rob the city of its material wealth, as well as its symbolic treasure: the ring of Þórr and the sword of Carlus.⁶⁰ He played an indisputable role in the reigns of Óláfr

for Gallu 7 for Laighniu i tosaigh corus-dileghait uile do leir. In quo bello cecidit ex adhuersa caterua Gallorum Mael Mordha m. Murchada riLaigen, 7 Domnall m. Fergaile ri na Fortuath: cecidit uero a Gallis Dubghall m. Amlaim' [Brian son of Ceinnétig son of Lorcán, king of Ireland, and Mael Sechnaill son of Domnall, king of Temair, led an army to Áth Cliath. All the Laigin were assembled to meet him, and the foreigners of Áth Cliath (...) There fell on the side of the foreign troop in this battle Mael Mórda son of Murchad, king of Laigin, and Domnall son of Fergal, king of the Forthuatha, and of the foreigners there fell Dubgall son of Amlaíb].

⁵⁷ Howard B. Clarke, "King Sitriuc Silkenbeard: a great survivor," in *The Vikings in Ireland and Beyond: Before and after the battle of Clontarf*, ed. Howard B. Clarke and Ruth Johnson (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2015), 257-8.

⁵⁸ AFM 979.6 [=980]; AT 980.4

⁵⁹ AT 989.2; CS 989; Only AFM s.a. 988.11 [989]

⁶⁰ AT 995.5: '*Fail Tomair 7 claidim Carlusa do breith do Mael Sechnaill mac Domnaill ar eicin o Gallaib Atha Cliath* [Tomar's ring and Carlus' sword were forcibly taken by Maelseachnaill, son of Domhnall, from the Foreigner's of Dublin]; CS 995: *Fail Tomair et claidebh Carlusa do breith do Maoilseclainn mac Domnaill ar écin o Gallaibh Ata Cliath'* [Tomar's ring and the sword of Carlus were taken by Mael Sechnaill son of Domnall from the foreigners of Áth Cliath by force].

cúarán's sons by acting as a 'kingmaker' but this does not indicate that the Irish were now in full control of Dublin's politics. Therefore, though Sitric's relationship to him may have helped him to power and appeased tensions, he also seemed to hold him in contempt. If the King of Dublin was under the overlordship of Máel Sechnaill II, his efforts after 995 indicate that he was concerned with demonstrating his independence. Sitric's maternal association with Leinster helped him to destabilise Waterford. The annals fail to correlate on one date for multiple events but Sitric may or may not have been in power since 989, and at some point gained and lost Dublin between 993 and 994. His opponent, Ívarr of Waterford, placed his son Rögnvaldr as its ruler. After his departure, the annals note that a son of Amlaíb, i.e. Óláfr *cúarán*, travelled to Leinster where he slew Gillacele, the heir to Leinster in 994.⁶¹ This may have been Sitric acting on behalf of his mother's kin; these actions would have helped to better politically position his uncle, which ultimately had great benefit upon Sitric's labours. Leinster was directly involved in efforts to remove Waterford from power in Dublin. In 995, a man of Leinster murdered Rögnvaldr (Raghnaill), son of Ívarr, who was also expelled from Dublin.⁶² In 996, the Leinstermen killed another of Ívarr's sons, Doonnabhán, and in 1000 Ívarr finally died.⁶³ Then in 999 Sitric and his uncle Máel Mórda held Donnchadh son of Domnall, King of Leinster, prisoner; after which Máel Mórda was made king.⁶⁴ Evidently, Leinster acted to the political betterment of Dublin, and the relationship was made mutually beneficial by assurances of peace between the kingdoms through kinship ties and military alliances.

1.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, an examination of the tenth-century was provided to demonstrate that networks in Ireland were first and foremost about kin alliances. However, marriages and relations could be ignored or put aside if they longer served political ambitions. Óláfr *cúarán*'s reign establishes that he held a significant enough position alongside his contemporaries to exact enough influence to become a greater socio-political agent in Ireland.

Howard B. Clarke and Benjamin Hudson both have suggested that the sword of Carlus and the ring of Þórr were symbolic pagan artefacts representing the kingship of Dublin, and were therefore indicative of Sitric's religious affiliation, but I find this to be a weak argument. More convincingly, highlighting their seizure was a deliberate Irish attempt meant to demonstrate how the end of Dublin's independence was somehow assured under Máel Sechnaill II.

See: Clarke, "King Sitriuc Silkenbeard", 258; Hudson, *Viking Pirates and Christian Princes*, 87

⁶¹ AFM 993.8/9; AU 994.6/7; AT 995.1/2.

⁶² AFM s.a. 994.10 = 995 (specifies: *Raghnaill do mharbhadh do Laighnibh, .i. do mhac Murchadha mic Finn* [Raghnaill was slain by the Leinstermen, i.e. by the son of Murchadh, son of Finn]); AT 995.2.

⁶³ AT 996.4; AT 1000.2; AU 1000.3.

⁶⁴ AU 993.3; AT 991.1

He interacted with the Irish by a system of obligations that had been established by his forbearers, by forming military alliances, but also sought out marriages with two of his main opponents. As a result, his sons were born into a network that would be both of value and a hindrance to their chance of success or effectiveness. The increasing number of marriages into families throughout the Irish Sea ensured that the fights for control were not only for authority, but also inheritance. Sitric *Silkenbeard* received the kingship because of his paternal lineage, but some sense of belonging from his mother's background, as well as his own upbringing in Ireland, must have played a role in determining many of his political machinations. His association with Máel Sechnaill should not undermine that he was an independent political figure, as demonstrated in his political relations to Leinster. In the following chapter an examination of the networks surrounding Sitric in action is provided to demonstrate that he was not the lackey of Irish overlords.

Chapter 2: Sitric ‘the Puppet’ Silkenbeard’s Networks in Action

In this chapter, an examination of Sitric’s political networks in action will provide an understanding of the role of both kin and military allies in the battle of Clontarf (April 23 1014), as well as in the years immediately following. Contextualisation of alliances establishes that the understanding of Sitric as a puppet king with little power is a misconception. The battle of Clontarf exhibits that though he had multiple connections to Brian Bóruma, his stepfather and father-in-law, other nodes in his socio-political network were stronger and more valuable for his political ambitions. There was a deep-rooted maternal link with Leinster, which may have been sustained by the presence of Sitric’s mother alongside her son in Dublin, rather than with her son by Brian Bóruma, Donnchadh. Furthermore, Sitric and Leinster were accompanied by external allies at the battle: Orkney and the Kingdom of the Isles. The Jarl of Orkney, Sigurðr *digri*’s presence at Clontarf is explained by an alliance built by mutual economic interest, shared experiences, and friendship ties, while the Isles is explained by dynastic connections, precedent for cooperation, and pressure exercised by Orkney. Afterward, the remainder of Sitric’s reign in Ireland is examined, with attention to how his socio-political network

2.1 Sitric’s Socio-Political Network Before Clontarf

The beginning of Sitric’s reign trailed the arrival of multiple Scandinavian leaders of some prestige to the British Isles, seeking out their fortunes, economic and socio-political, but they ultimately had little impact upon his political efforts because of differing ambitions. Any raiding activities alongside Scandinavian forces by hybrid-Scandinavian rulers in the British Isles were for economic advancement, but they also served to be a show of dominance against native kings that may be a threat to their authority. In 1013, the changing dynamics in different kingdoms throughout the British Isles, and renewed Scandinavian activity under the leadership of men like Sveinn *Tjúguskegg* (Forkbeard), meant that Scandinavian supremacy must have seemed assured in Britain and Scotland and that the overlordship of Dublin by high-kings would end thanks to an alliance between Jarl Sigurðr of Orkney and King Sitric *Silkenbeard* of Dublin.⁶⁵ However, there is little evidence that all three figures ever considered themselves to be part of a collation aimed at ‘Scandinavian’ dominance in Britain and Ireland, or that Sigurðr and Sitric would have benefitted from such an alliance. Sitric was

⁶⁵ Poul Holm, “The Naval Power of Norse Dublin,” in *Clerics, Kings and Vikings: Essays on medieval Ireland in honour of Donnchadh Ó Corráin*, ed. Emer Purcell, Paul MacCotter, Julianne Nyhan, and John Sheehan (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2015), 67.

a king of Dublin and operated for the betterment of Dublin. Though his paternal network allowed him access to the means by which he could operate alongside the Scandinavians, naval power, he was not necessarily concerned in furthering their interests. In fact this would have been a threat to him as a king of a Hiberno-Scandinavian town. Importantly, it is necessary to consider that Sitric was called *rí Gall*, king of the foreigners, but he was neither an Irish nor a Scandinavian king.

Irish kings consolidated their power by acquiring control over a larger number of kings, as Scandinavian settlers were forced to directly contend with this system of Irish governance. Concepts of kingship in Irish law passed mainly out of practice by the eighth century, but certain features of the legal tracts remain clearly discernible in contemporary practice.⁶⁶ Most significantly, what endured was a system of tribute and power, which stipulated that control over a large number of subordinate kings increased a ruler's honour.⁶⁷ During Brian Bóruma's rise to power he continuously fought to gain authority through military endeavours, consolidating his authority with demands for tributary payments and hostages, and demonstrated his position by making annual circuits of Ireland with their armies.⁶⁸ Sitric not only faced Máel Sechnaill's involvement in Dublin but also Brian's nearly forty-year effort to assert his supremacy in Ireland. They both plundered Dublin, Máel Sechnaill on more than one occasion. The appropriation of the town's treasure, and then ultimately allowing the ruler to maintain his position, are further acts of subordination. The Irish kings did not redistribute power in the kingdoms in order to assure that there were no insurgences. Interestingly, plundering is more often used to describe the actions of Scandinavians in early Viking Age Ireland, but by the tenth-century is also used to describe the activities of Irish kings separate from the foreigners. For example, in 1013 Brian Bóruma's son Murchad, raided in Leinster and “(...) *coro oirc in tir co Gleann da Locha 7 co Cill Maignenn 7 coor loisc in tir uile 7 co ruc gabala móra 7 brait diarmhidhe.*”⁶⁹ This event is related to the uprisings of Leinster and Dublin against Brian prior to Clontarf, and may therefore be an act of meant to reassert his position in Dublin and Ireland.

Brian Bóruma, King of Munster ultimately proved that membership of the Uí Neill family was unnecessary to claim the title of king of Ireland. Brian's efforts brought him against Máel Sechnaill II, but they were eventually forced to come to terms. Significantly,

⁶⁶ Francis J. Byrne, *Irish kings and High Kings*, 27

⁶⁷ *ibid*, 31; Bart Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000), 25.

⁶⁸ Clarke, “King Sitriuc Silkenbeard”, 266

⁶⁹ AU 1013.7: [(...) plundered the land to Glenn dá Locha and Cell Maignenn, burned the whole country, and took great spoils and countless captives].

they combined their efforts in 998 when they took hostages from Dublin. On this occasion, the *Annals of Ulster* record: “*Slogad la Mael Sechlainn 7 la Brian co tucsat giallu Gall fri sobus do Gaidhelaib.*”⁷⁰ The surrendering of human-hostages was a symbolic act of accepting subordinate status, referred to as *giall* in annals. However, it is not only used exclusively in discussions of Irish-Foreigner relationships, as it was already a formalised practice in Irish politics when the first raids occurred in the eight-century. A contemporary example during Sitric’s reign is from 1002, when Brian took hostages from two rival kingdoms: “*Slogad la Brian co Ath Luain co ruc giallu Connacht & Midhe.*”⁷¹ By handing over hostages in 1000, Sitric, like other Irish rulers, was forced to publically acknowledge Brian’s overlordship. For kings seeking to grow their power, *giall* was thus a form of political control, yet in spite of that petty-kings could still seek to free themselves of overlordship. Unsuccessful at maintaining the peace after 998, a coalition of Munster and Mide was formed to oppose the combined efforts of Dublin and Leinster at the battle of Glen Máma in 999. After Sitric and Máel Mórda’s defeat, Brian entered Dublin and plundered the town.⁷² The ‘foreigners’, meaning Sitric and probably his elite followers, were only allowed to return once they handed over further hostages.⁷³ Yet again, the *Annals of Ulster* note later in 1000 that the foreigners and Leinstermen aimed a raiding party of horsemen at Brian, but Máel Sechnaill routed them.⁷⁴ Brian was married to Sitric’s mother Gormflaith around this period, though it may have been before the battle of Glen Máma. Afterwards, Sitric was also married to Brian’s daughter, whose name only survives in the Welsh material: Sláine.⁷⁵ This forged deeper kin bonds between Dublin, Leinster and Munster, which Brian must have hoped would weaken the close connection between Máel Mórda and Sitric.

Interestingly, in the years between 1001 and 1013, Sitric’s foreigners appear only in three annals entries. The first explains Sitric expedition into Ulster in 1002, where he took

⁷⁰ AU 998.1: [Máel Sechnaill and Brian made an expedition and took the hostages of the foreigners to ensure good behaviour towards the Irish].

⁷¹ AU 1002.1: [Brian brought an army to Áth Luain and took the hostages of the Connachta and the men of Mide].

⁷² AI 999.4; AFM *s.a.* 998.11 [= 999]; AT 999.3; AU 998.8; CS 999

⁷³ AT 1000.3; AU 1000.4

⁷⁴ AU 1000.7 *Slogad la Brian co Ferta Nime i Maigh Bregh. Do-lotar Gaill 7 Laigin crech marcach rempu i Magh Bregh conus-taraidh Mael Sechlainn, 7 pene omnes occisi sunt. Do-luidh Brian tra fora chulu cen chath ce(n) indriudh, cogente Domino.* [Brian made a hosting to Ferta Nime in Mag Breg. [The foreigners and the Laigin, with a raiding party of horsemen, came before them into Mag Breg, and Mael Sechnaill came upon them, and they were nearly all killed. Brian then retreated without giving battle or making incursion—by the Lord's insistence.]

⁷⁵ Vita Griffini Filii Conani – *Preterea Slani mater Auloed regis filia erat Riyeni regis Innen, quae Hyberniae duas partes continebat.* [Furthermore, Slani [Sláine], mother of king Olaf, was daughter of Ryen, king of Innen (Munster), which contained two fifths of Ireland.] *Vita Griffini Filii Conani: The Medieval Latin Life of Gruffud ap Cynan*, ed. & trans. Paul Russell (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2005), 57.

captives in an act of retribution for their refusal to help him against Brian the year prior.⁷⁶ The second in 1005 from the *Annals of the Four Masters* states that Dublin was burned by the men of Brega in secrecy, and the last in the *Annals of Inisfallen* from 1006, which states that the men of Munster, Connacht, Leinster, Mide and Dublin made a circuit of north Ireland.⁷⁷ Brian led and ordered many expeditions up to 1014, yet there are no more general mentions of foreigners or his supposed subordinates accompanying the King. There are two possible conclusions as to why; the first proposes that they were still recovering from Brian's actions in 1000, and possibly also Brega's in 1004, though their participation in 1006 would indicate otherwise. The entries are from generally trustworthy sources, though they may have been later redacted to demonstrate that the Uí Briain, Brian's descendants, had a long-standing claim to Dublin. The second proposes that Sitric and Dublin simply did not assist in Brian's military efforts for supremacy, despite the significant size of their naval power. It is possible that Brian did not require Sitric's ships or men because he possessed enough his own, acquired from his seizure of Limerick and later Waterford.⁷⁸ However, the Northern Uí Néill, the Cenél nEógain, was Brian's greatest opponent between 1000 and 1011.⁷⁹ The King was eventually triumphant over the powerful northern lords because he believed, and proved, that by utilising the waterways in Ireland and asserting himself in pitched land battles he would be able to assert hegemony over numerous Irish kingdoms. In general, Brian's successes can be explained by his exploitation of the weaknesses throughout multiple kingdoms caused by the fractioning of kin groups, as well as the victories of his descendants in solidifying his

⁷⁶ AFM s.a. 1001 [=1002]; AT 1002

Clarke suggests this was at the request of Brian Bóruma who used Sitric's personal vendetta to his political advantage. This can neither be proved nor disproved, as it is speculative.

⁷⁷ AFM 1004.11 [=1005]: *Ath Cliath do loscadh lá Deiscert Bregh h-í taidhe* [Ath-cliath was burned by the people of South Breagha, by secrecy.];

AI 1006.2: *Brian co feraib Muman 7 co Laignib 7 fir Midi 7 Mael Sechnaill 7 Connachta 7 Gaill Atha Cliath 7 fir h-Erend huile óthá Sliab Fuait fades co Ath Luain, 7 techta doib co Ess Ruaid co n-dechatar taris fathuaid co r-ralsat cuairdd tuaiscirt h-Erend eter Conall 7 Eogan 7 Ultu 7 Airgiallu* [Brian, together with the men of Mumu, the Laigin, the men of Mide, Mael Sechnaill, the Connachta, the foreigners of Áth Cliath, and the men of the whole of Ireland south of Sliab Fuait [came] to Áth Luain, went to Es Ruaid, proceeded across it northwards, and made a circuit of the north of Ireland including Cenél Conaill, Cenél Eógain, Ulaid, and Airgialla].

⁷⁸ AU 1011.3: *'Brian 7 Mael Sechlainn iterum in clas[s]I sua oc Enach Duib'* [Brian and Máel Sechnaill were again in their naval camp at Enach Duib].

⁷⁹ See for example the AU and the battles between the north and Brian:

AU 1004.7: *'Slogad la Brian co Tracht nEothaile do dhul timcell coro tairmisc Cenel nEogain'* [An army was led by Brian to Trácht Eothaile to make a circuit of Ireland, but the Cenél Eógain prevented him].

AU 1007.7: *'Slogad la Brian co Cenel Eogain, .i. co Dun Droma i toebh Aird Macha, co tuc H. Crichiden, comarba Finnen Muigi Bile ro-boí I n-etirecht o Ultaib i Cenel Eogain'* [Brian led an expedition to Cenél Eógain, i.e. to Dún Droma, beside Ard Macha, and took away ua Crichidéin, successor of Finnén of Mag Bile, who was a pledge in Cenél Eógain on behalf of the Ulaid].

dynasty's position in Ireland.⁸⁰ Nevertheless, Brian successfully became the King of Ireland, by title and practice.

The efforts of Sitric in 1013 to seek out further alliances in order to oppose Brian thus appear to be derived from the hard lessons he learnt at the battle of Glen Máma in 999. Ambitions and efforts to un-seat Brian were extensive in 1013, as attested to in the multiple entries in the annals. Notably, in 1013, Sitric attacked Cork, but he lost to the local king and his son and nephew were killed.⁸¹ That same year he also sent a naval expedition to Munster, battled against the Southern Uí Néill incursion into the Fine Gall (Dublin's northern hinterland), and would have been glad to hear of the death of his enemy, Gilla Mochonna, the overking of Southern Brega. By crippling Brian's budding naval ambitions, Sitric grounded the king and was subsequently forced to act solely on land. In retaliation, Brian attacked Leinster and Máel Sechnaill ravaged the territory of the foreigners, but a coalition of Leinster and Dublin's forces killed the latter's men, including his son Flann.⁸² Primed, the battle of Clontarf seemed inevitable in 1014, but first Sitric travelled on the sea to seek out alliances.

2.2 The Battle of Clontarf

No better example exists to illustrate the important role of socio-political networks than the battle of Clontarf in 1014. Both sides used kin alliances, while Brian further relied on his position as overlord, and Sitric upon the links forged by exchange, to form the two offensive lines. Sitric, alongside his King Máel Mórda of Leinster, as well as forces from the kingdom of the Isles, and Orkney under the leadership of Jarl Sigurðr, opposed the contested forces of Brian, which mainly included the men of the kingdoms he had subdued, notably Mide and Connacht. Brian had a tepid overlordship over the king of Tara and Mide, Máel Sechnaill II, who may or may not have fought alongside him at the battle.⁸³ The multiple elite casualties have been of the key features leading to the event's popularization in subsequent centuries. On Good Friday April 23rd 1014, under the raven-banner of Jarl Sigurðr, the combined forces of Orkney, Leinster, and Dublin formed a shield-wall to oppose Brian's collected forces. Fighting is recorded to have lasted all day, though this primarily draws from

⁸⁰ Ó Corráin, *Ireland before the Normans*, 128-129; Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, *Brian Boru: Ireland's Greatest King?* (Stroud: Tempus, 2007), 46.

⁸¹ Clarke, "King Sitriuc Silkenbeard", 260

⁸² Irish attacks: AU 1013.12; AI 1013.2; AFM s.a. 1012.17 [=1013]

Dublin's attack: AFM s.a. 1012.8 [=1013]; CS 1013

⁸³ AU 1014.2: '*Sloghud la Brian m. Cenneitigh m. Lorcain, la righ n-Erenn, 7 la Mael Sechlainn m. Domnaill, la righ Temhrach co h-Ath Cliath*' [Brian son of Ceinnétig son of Lorcán, king of Ireland, and Mael Sechnaill son of Domnall, king of Temair, led an army to Áth Cliath] and Todd (ed.), *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh*, 154-155.

the (often fanciful) account of the *Cogad Gáedel re Gallaib*.⁸⁴ At the end, multiple Irish and Scandinavian leaders were dead, including Brian Bóruma, and Sitric *Silkenbeard* remained in Dublin forced to eventually contend with his old nemesis Máel Sechnaill. Regardless of the brutal aftermath Sitric stayed king, a feat that should not be diminished in conclusions of the events after 1014. The Irish annals all mention the battle in lengthy passages, and the *Annals of Loch Cé* notably start chronicling in 1014. However, Irish sources were not alone in noting how important this battle was, though there is some confliction concerning the victor.⁸⁵ For example, the *Brut y Tywysogion* provides a lengthy passage about Sitric's hiring of mercenaries, and an account of the great slaughter at which Brian and his son, as well as the leader of the ships and Máel Mórda were killed.⁸⁶ Additionally, *Brennu-Njáls Saga* has number of passages, as well as a long song detailing Sitric's victory and the Irish's inability to ever recover, though the saga elsewhere praises the good Christian King Brian.⁸⁷ The battle of Clontarf was an important moment because it was, according to traditional scholarship, the end of the Viking Age in Ireland. This paper cannot therefore ignore the importance of an event discussed with such attention in primary and secondary sources.

Perceptions of the battle play a crucial role in explaining its understanding. In particular, it was the Old Norse sources that impacted how Sitric was treated by nineteenth and twentieth-century Irish scholarship, when they were used to demonstrate the 'Viking' perspective. This approach ignored that influence of alliances with Dublin's kings, nevertheless leaving a lasting impression in need of revision. In *Brennu-Njáls saga* he is goaded by his mother to fight and is therefore forced to desperately seek out the help of Jarl Sigurðr: "*Kormloð eggjaði mjök Sigtrygg, son sinn, at drepa Brján konung. Sendi hon hann því til Sigurðar jarls at biðja hann liðs. Kom Sigtryggr fyrir jól til Orkneyja.*" Then during the battle of Clontarf he fights but then flees before Ospak, an ally of Brian from the Isles: "*Óspakr hafði gengit of allan fylkingararminn; var hann orðinn sárr mjök, en látit sonu Brjáns* (sína) báða aðr. Sigtryggr konungr flýði fyrir honum.*"⁸⁸ Contemporary evidence,

⁸⁴ Todd, *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh*, 190-191

⁸⁵ For more extensive summaries of the battle's events, suggested readings include: Darren McGettigan, *The Battle of Clontarf: Good Friday 1014* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2013); Clare Downham, "Clontarf in the Wider World," *History of Ireland*, 22.2 (2014); Máire ni Mhaonaigh, *Brian Boru: Ireland's Greatest King?*; A.J. Goedheer, "Irish and Norse Traditions about the Battle of Clontarf," (Haarlem: Tjeenk Willink, 1938).

⁸⁶ Reverend John Williams ab Ithel (ed. and trans.), *Brut y tywysogion or the Chronicle of Princes* (London: Longman, Green, Longman and Roberts, 1860), 34-35.

⁸⁷ "Brennu-Njáls Saga", 440-441: 'Hann var allra konunga bezt at sér' [He was of all kings best in nature].

A connection has long been drawn between this saga and the hypothetical Brjáns saga. For further information see: Benjamin Hudson, "Brjáns Saga," *Medieval Ævum* 71.2 (2002): 241-268.

⁸⁸ "Brennu-Njáls Saga", 442: [Kormlada (Gormflaicht) egged on her son Sigtrygg (Sitric) very much to kill King Brian, and she now sent him to Earl Sigurd to ask for help. Came Sitric to Orkneys before Yule].

both skaldic and runic, demonstrates the importance of a warrior ideal. Skaldic verse in particular emphasises a strict culture of warrior conditioning by reinforcing concepts of a honourable death: the belief that one should die rather than run from a battle.⁸⁹ Honour and masculinity were intrinsically tied to women and war in Western warrior culture.⁹⁰ Comparably, the *Cogad Gáedel re Gallaib*, an Irish propaganda piece, has portrayed Sitric as a rather destitute character with no stomach for war. He strikes his wife Sláine, daughter of Brian, during the battle of Clontarf.⁹¹ His absence from the battlefield and the violent action against a woman, rather than her father the king he is opposing, demonstrates a failure of Sitric's character. As propaganda for Brian Bóruma's descendants, the *Cogad Gáedel re Gallaib* effectively harms the notion that a fit ruler for Dublin would have been a member of the Uí Ímair dynasty in many ways, but most importantly by questioning Sitric's masculinity. Later texts could have had ample reasons to portray Sitric as less than a warrior. The first praises Jarl Sigurðr as the commander and hero of their forces, while *Brennu-Njáls saga* is highly flattering of Brian's character, and the *Cogad Gáedel re Gallaib* helped to justify suppression of the Hiberno-Scandinavians by Brian's descendants in the early twelfth-century. It is entirely possible that middle aged Sitric now lacked the stomach for battle, even though he had fought and participated in several raids. It is also possible that he could have turned back to Dublin with his forces when the battle was not going in his favour, returning to prepare Dublin for the inevitable siege. To further complicate matters, the event rapidly gained themes of Brian's Christian martyrdom because it occurred on Good Friday and Brian died in prayer.⁹²

Traditionally, scholarship has approached the Battle of Clontarf in 1014 as a defining moment in the creation of a Viking-free Irish state, though more recently the trend has been to accept this date as the beginning of a shift in Irish politics that would explain social and economic changes in the following century. The continued rulership of Hiberno-Scandinavian towns in Ireland, raiding in the Irish Sea, and the creation of alliances throughout the eleventh-century, demonstrate the persistent presence of active political figures from hybrid-

"Brennu-Njáls Saga", 451-452: [Ospak had gone over all the wing of the army; he had become very wounded, but killed both Brian's* (his) sons before. King Sitric fled before him]. Although the manuscripts vary as to who's sons are slain, the fact that Sitric fled remains unchanged.

⁸⁹ Judith Jesch, "The Warrior Ideal in the Late Viking-Age," in *The Viking Age: Ireland and the West, Proceedings from the fifteenth Viking Congress - Cork*, ed. John Sheehan and Donnchadh Ó Corráin (Dublin: Four Courts Press: 2010), 165.

⁹⁰ Wyatt, "Slavery, Power and Cultural Identity in the Irish Sea Region", 99-100.

⁹¹ Todd (ed.), *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh*, 192-193.

⁹² Seán Duffy, "Ireland, c.1000- c.1100," in *A Companion to the Early Middle Ages: Britain and Ireland c. 500- c. 1100*, ed. Pauline Stafford (London: Wiley-Blackweek, 2009), 289.

Scandinavian communities. The success of the Uí Ímair was directly linked to an inability of ‘Scotland’ and Ireland to form individual collective resistance against even a politically and socially fragmented dynasty in the tenth-century. Therefore, Brian Bóruma’s popularity arose from a much wider portrayal of the ‘Vikings’ as the bringers of a Dark Age to Ireland, as well as a desire to construct national heroes capable of ending Scandinavian tyranny – the Irish comparable to Alfred the Great.⁹³ Discussions also centred around the purpose of Clontarf, debating if it was an example of the Irish struggle against foreigners, or a fight between Irish kingdoms for supremacy, who only used Scandinavian mercenaries and allies. Regarding the former, in the early twentieth century Eoin MacNeill, a nationalist, became one of the main proponents suggesting that Old Norse material regarded the event as a contest between Irishmen and Norsemen for Ireland, and ultimately it should be seen as such.⁹⁴ By comparison, Dutch scholar A. J. Goedheer concluded that Clontarf was much more legend than truth, but that the battle was a struggle between Irishmen (Leinster and Munster) with assistance from Dublin and Orkney. In late 1960s ‘revisionist’ scholarship sustained Goedheer’s view that the battle was an example of internal Irish struggles.⁹⁵ In the years since, publications pertaining to this period in the Irish Sea are forced to at least mention Clontarf, and many have also sought to provide new arguments about its cause and effects. For example, Máire Ní Mhaonaigh believes that it was truly an opposition between Brian’s high kingship and Dublin, while Séan Duffy reasserts the idea that Irish and Norse primary source material demonstrate that this was not a traditional fight between Irish kingdoms, but rather representative of a much larger struggle of different factions within Ireland for supremacy. I would similarly argue that the fight involved various groups within Ireland, but add that a constructed and cultivated political network by the Hiberno-Scandinavian King Sitric also introduced additional factions, each with personal motivations to fight. Therefore, rather than be an effort of Sitric *Silkenbeard* to simply remove the direct overlordship of Brian Bóruma, Sitric should be treated equally to his contemporaries, and Clontarf should be seen as an assertion of greater political hegemony, just like his Leinster ally.

⁹³ Some earlier scholars had gone against this notion, such as J.J.A. Worsaae of Denmark, who claimed with no trepidation that there was no departure of ‘Vikings’ after the battle of Clontarf in 1014

J.J.A. Worsaae, *An account of the Danes and Norwegians in England, Scotland, and Ireland* (London: John Murray, 1852), 342.

⁹⁴ Holm, “Between apathy and antipathy,” 158-159.

⁹⁵ Donnchadh Ó Corráin, *Ireland before the Normans*, 130; Goedheer, “Irish and Norse Traditions”.

2.3 The allies of Sitric Silkenbeard

Principally, Sitric had three main allies, though the *Annals of Loch Cé* and the *Cogad Gáedel re Gallaib* like to exaggerate the forces Brian's army defeated. Leinster and Dublin's connection has already largely been established, but the participation of men from the 'Isles', as well as from Orkney is important to further examine.

Undeniably Sitric's connection to Leinster, originating from his maternal lineage, accorded him familiarity with the cultural and common traditions of the kingdom. Donnchadh Ó Corráin concluded that Ireland, though fragmented into political polities, possessed a wider sense of 'natio' or socio-political and economic unity, that was maintained and later deliberately employed by the elite and learned classes.⁹⁶ Though nationalistic, it is indisputable that the Irish understood themselves to be a collective separate from the inhabitants of Dublin who they continued to call foreigner - *gall*. However, a sense of distinctiveness does not equate to actual separation, and the Irish visibly engaged in similar political alliances with the foreigners as they did with their Irish counterparts. While the marriage between Gormflaith and Óláfr *cúarán* was important in the formalisation of an alliance, ultimately Sitric's cooperation with his uncle for their fight against Brian was most instrumental during his lifetime. This is attested to in the efforts of Leinster (described in section 1.3) to upset the position of Waterford in Dublin, in addition to Sitric's involvement in the killing of the old king of Leinster so that his uncle, Máel Mórda may rule. Additionally, two great battles, Glen Máma (999) and Clontarf (1014) were the most notable large-scale collaborations between the two kingdoms. The Welsh source, *Brut y tywysogion*, most likely influenced by Irish material, states that Dublin and Leinster were in an equal union, and that Sitric hired additional forces.⁹⁷ This demonstrates that the battle was viewed as a combined effort of the two kingdoms to upset Brian's position. By comparison, the *Annals of Loch Cé* make out that Brian Bóruma had to fight an international coalition of men not only from the Irish Sea, but also from France, Cornwall, and England.⁹⁸ This account of the events is paralleled in the *Cogad Gáedel re Gallaib*, both seeking to augment Brian's power at the

⁹⁶ Donnchadh Ó Corráin, "Nationality and Kingship in Pre-Norman Ireland", in T.W. Moody Historical Studies XI: Nationality and the Pursuit of national independence, papers read before the conference held at Trinity College Dublin, 23-31 May 1974 (Belfast: Appletree Press, 1978).

⁹⁷ *Brut y tywysogion*, Williams ab Ithel (ed. & trans.): s.a. 1013 [=1014] '*Ac yna y kyffroes Brian brenhin holl Iwerdon, a Múrchath y vab a Iliaús o brenhined ereill yn erbyn Dulyl, y lle ydoed Sitruc vab Abloec yn vrenhin. Ac yn eu herbyn y deuth góyr Largines, a Mael Mordag yn brenhin arnadunt, ac ymaruoll aorugant yn erbyn Brian vrenhin*' [And then Brian, king of all Ireland, and his son Mwrchath, and many other kings, were stirred up against Dublin, where Sitruc, son of Abloec, was king. And against them came the men of Leinster, headed by their king Mael Mordav; and they confederated against Brian].

⁹⁸ ALC 1014.3 – a lengthy description

expense of his opponents. The agnatic claims of Máel Mórda and Sitric allowed them access to positions of power within their respective kingdoms, but ultimately they benefitted most from their network of obligations to each other, which were reinvigorated during joint military engagements. Their connection thus did not stem only from their kin relation, though Sitric's ethnic background was a factor of influence upon the forging of this network point.

The role of Sitric's convoluted ancestry (Irish, Scandinavian, Anglo-Saxon, etc.), as well as the interactions that brought Dublin's elite into contact with others, would have impacted his politics. His background was not necessarily correlated with the dominant cultural or ethnic identity of the people he governed, though this is not uncommon in kingdoms during this period. Life in elite courts suggests that individuals would have been familiar or comfortable with a variety of cultures. For example, Edith of Wessex, an Anglo-Dane, was taught Irish from a young age, probably because her father kept Irish slaves.⁹⁹ Similarly, Emma of Normandy was married to Æthelred II and then later to King Knut of Denmark and England. By the mid-tenth century all the elite leaders of Scandinavian settlements in the British Isles were born in the region, and many were the product of alliances between kingdoms of different ethnic and biological origins. On-going contacts therefore helped to cultivate a competitive imitations and transformation of material goods that were sustained through a network of royals who transferred their cultural values between elite courts. Lesley Abrams supposed that the degree to which divisions were stressed depended upon the individual and whether they found it desirable or necessary to express a part of their identity.¹⁰⁰ More commonly Sitric is understood as being a Scandinavian king. Consequently, this has affected the way scholars have approached his association with important figures, such as Óláfr Tryggvason of Norway, King Knut, as well as Jarl Sigurðr of Orkney. Cultures are not strictly defined or unchangeable, and in the early Viking Age the multitude of interactions between 'Scandinavians' and 'native inhabitants' was therefore extremely convoluted.

Nevertheless, scholars have sought out an understanding of how closely linked settler populations originating from a Scandinavian 'homeland' were, even after they were born and raised in the 'new land', as well as in what ways this was continued and transformed.¹⁰¹ This

⁹⁹ Catherine Swift, "Taxes, Trade and Trespass: the Hiberno-Norse context of the Dál Cais empire in Lebor na cert," in *Lebor na Cert: Reassessment*, ed. Kevin Murray (London: Irish Texts Society, 2013), 49.

¹⁰⁰ Lesley Abrams, "Diaspora and Identity in the Viking Age," *Early Medieval Europe* 20(1): 2012, 21. Abrams, "Diaspora and Identity", 21.

¹⁰¹ Ann Zanette Tsigaridas Glørstad, "Homeland – Strange Land – New Land. Material and Theoretical Aspects of Defining Norse Identity in the Viking Age," in *Celtic Norse Relationships in the Irish Sea in the Middle-Ages 800-1200*, ed. Jón Viðar Sigurðsson and Timothy Bolton (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 151.

has led to various explanations as to why the kingdoms of the Isles and Orkney would have joined Sitric at the battle of Clontarf. Classically, it was an understanding of ‘Viking’ cooperation, and while this theory is dismissive of local diversity, it does still hold some value in discussions of economic motivations. Mary A. Valante believes that the battle would have been an important event for Irish and Scandinavians across the North Atlantic, because of an interest to assure the maintenance of a lucrative Norse trade network.¹⁰² Similarly, Clare Downham echoes the idea that a ‘trade diaspora’ or ‘merchant network’ existed because of shared experiences in hybrid-identities, and that alliances were drawn accordingly (any Scandinavian forces fighting with Brian were hired mercenaries).¹⁰³ Diaspora theory proposes that during the Viking Age communities from Scandinavia moved and yet retained traditions, such as political practices and language, as well as a sense of their ‘homeland’, and were therefore more likely to maintain interactions.¹⁰⁴ However, this cannot lead to the assumption that all Scandinavian exodus communities would have participated in each other’s political machinations. Importantly, in the case of Clontarf, any alliances were called upon from among the communities of the British Isles, not only because of a similar linguistic background or a sense of a homeland, but because of political-economic interests. For example, though Ireland was important to Iceland’s trade, as evidenced by written sources and archaeological finds, there was no noted contingent of Icelanders participating in the battle. Furthermore, no other Hiberno-Scandinavian town joined the fray. By 1013, Brian exercised varying degrees of authority over all territories in Ireland, including Hiberno-Scandinavian towns. They may have actually benefitted from Brian’s overlordship because fighting between neighbouring kingdoms settled under his authority, and he required a great number of goods in order to fuel his fortresses and armies. Additionally, the Hiberno-Scandinavian centres were locked in competition for economic dominance, each contending for trade resources. As a result, it was no accident that the only ‘Scandinavian’ alliances in Ireland from the second half of the tenth-century onwards were between Dublin and the Scottish Isles.¹⁰⁵

The makeup of the Kingdom of the Isles is rather ambiguous, but is commonly understood to refer to the Isle of Man and the “Outer Zone” of the Scottish Hebrides. Evidence from the latter (Islay, the Outer Hebrides, Skye, West Mull, Coll and Tiree),

¹⁰² Valante, *The Vikings in Ireland*, 116.

¹⁰³ Clare Downham, “Coastal Communities and Diaspora Identities in Viking Age Ireland,” in *Maritime Societies of the Viking and Medieval World*, ed. J. Barratt and S. J. Gibbons (Leeds: Maney, 2015), 369 & 374.

¹⁰⁴ Judith Jesch, “Myth and Cultural Memory in the Viking Diaspora,” *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 4 (2008): 22, and *The Viking Age Diaspora* (London: Routledge, 2015), 55-56.

¹⁰⁵ Valante, *The Vikings in Ireland*, 112-113

suggests that a strong Scandinavian force remained culturally distinct from the existing population, in contrast to the “Inner Zone” of the mainland (Arran, Bute and East Mull), where Gaelic was commonly adopted and only some aspects of Scandinavian culture were maintained.¹⁰⁶ The importance of this area in the early settlement period has long been suggested, though a lack of much archaeological material and source accounts makes it difficult subject of discussion.¹⁰⁷ While contested, it is generally concluded that when the elite were exiled from Dublin in 902 they remained in the Irish Sea region around this area.¹⁰⁸ However, by the second half of the tenth-century the rulers of Man and the Isles represented factions of the Uí Ímair dynasty that had been excluded from rulership in Northumbria or Ireland. These were the immediate descendants of Óláfr Guðrøðsson, and they rivalled Óláfr *cúarán* and his descendants for power on the sea. Though peace appears to have been reached within Ireland during the reign of Óláfr *cúarán*, persistent fighting between the King of Dublin and his nephews, Magnus and Guðrøðr Haraldsson of the Isles, demonstrates that the Uí Ímair were not a united collective. Increased raiding in Wales and Ireland, as well as potential gained territory in Galloway improved the position of the Uí Ímair faction in the isles at the expense of Dublin’s branch.¹⁰⁹ However, due to their position multiple kings threatened the independence of the Isles, including Sveinn *Tjúguskegg* (Forkbeard) and Æthelred of England, but also possibly Brian Bóruma.¹¹⁰ The latter recognised early in his political career that the control of waterways in and around Ireland was crucial to any acquisition of ‘high’ kingship. Brian may have acquired a fleet from his seizure of Limerick and control of Waterford. He is noted to that may have been used to assert some influence over the Isle of Man and/or Anglesey.¹¹¹ However, there is no contemporary Irish evidence that he was ever able to assert control in the region and Seán Duffy’s study of the independent links between Ireland and Scotland during this period reveals that in Welsh and Scottish

¹⁰⁶ Alex Woolf, “The Age of Sea-Kings: 900-1300,” in *The Argyll Book*, ed. Donald Omand (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2004), 100; Clare Downham, “The Break up of the Dál Riata and the rise of the Gallgoídil,” in *The Vikings in Ireland and Beyond: Before and after the battle of Clontarf*, ed. Howard B. Clarke and Ruth Johnson (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2015), 192-3; David Griffiths, *Vikings of the Irish Sea: Conflict and Assimilation, 790-1050* (Stroud: The History Press, 2010), 38-47.

¹⁰⁷ Clare Downham, “The Break up of Dál Riata and the rise of the Gallgoídil”, 193.

¹⁰⁸ For further information of these activities, publications by Alex Woolf, *From Pictland to Alba, 789-1070*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007); Clare Downham, *Viking Kings of Britain and Ireland*; Benjamin Hudson, *Viking Pirates and Christian Princes*

¹⁰⁹ Colmán Etchingham, "North Wales, Ireland and the Isles: the Insular Viking Zone" *Peritia* 15: 145; Woolf, “The Age of the Sea-Kings”, 99.

¹¹⁰ Clare Downham, “The Break up of Dál Riata and the rise of the Gallgoídil,” 197.

¹¹¹ Seán Duffy, “Ireland c.1000-c.1100”, 290.

sources there is little information about Brian's activities.¹¹² Nevertheless, there is some connection between the Isles and Ireland before Clontarf, and it is not only with Dublin. Precedent for their involvement in Irish politics is demonstrated in their participation in 980 when they were part of the defeated forces of Óláfr *cúarán* at the battle of Tara, and in 984, when they fought beside Brian Bóruma and Waterford against Dublin and Máel Sechnaill.¹¹³ Additionally, the death of King Rögnvaldr (Ragnall) of the Isles in Munster in 1005 may reveal some link.¹¹⁴

The Isles greatest opposition, however, was the Jarl of Orkney, Sigurðr *digri*, and his retainer Gilli. They plundered the region for four years from 985 to 989, and took control of the Hebrides in 990. These actions are attested to in a number of sources, including *Okrneyinga saga*, *Brennu-Njáls Saga*, as well as the *Annals of Ulster*. Though with some differentiation, the sagas and the *Annals of Ulster* agree that ultimately Guðroðr Haraldsson lost power over the Isles, and though it was regained partially by his son Rögnvaldr, the latter died in 1005 and Sigurðr was able to reinforce Gilli's position in the area, thereby ensuring his own. He did not control the kingdom of the isles directly, rather another of Guðroðr's sons, Lagmann, may have held the official rulership. However, Lagmann is likely to have died in or shortly before 1014, and his son Óláfr is chronicled to have died at the battle of Clontarf.¹¹⁵ As previously mentioned, there is a major gap in historical knowledge concerning the rulership of the kingdom of the isles during this period. Discussion of Echmarcach mac Ragnaill's ancestry in section 3.2 further examines some of these complications, but it is enough to presently resolve that multiple rulers of this region were closely linked to Dublin by their similar agnatic claims, in addition to similar, though distinct, experiences that shaped their hybrid identities.

Therefore, the kingdom of the Isles did not join for one singular reason, but rather may have held multiple motivations. They were commonly involved in struggles of the Dubliners because of their Uí Ímair connection to Ireland and not out of loyalties of kinship because of political ambition. Furthermore, there were multiple influences of authority being imposed upon the Isles, some they would have been able to oppose (Brian Bóruma), and others they

¹¹² Seán Duffy, "Ireland and Scotland, 1014-1169: contacts and caveats," in *Seanchas: Essays Presented to Francis J. Byrne*, ed. Alfred P. Smyth (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000).

¹¹³ Only the *Annals of Ulster* mention the Isles - AU 980.1: '*Cath temrac ria Mael Sechnaill m. n-Domnaill for Gallaibh Atho Clioth 7 na n-Indsedh*' [The battle of Temair was won by Mael Sechnaill son of Domnall against the foreigners of Áth Cliath and the Isles]

¹¹⁴ CS 1005: '*Raghnaill mac Gotfrit meic Arailt ri na Indsi moritur*' [Ragnall son of Gotfrith son of Aralt, king of Inse Gall, dies]; Downham, "Clontarf in the Wider World", 23

¹¹⁵ AU 1014.2 '*In quo bello cecidit ex aduersa caterua Gallorum (...) Amlaim m. Laghmaind*' [There fell on the side of the foreign troop in this battle (...) Amlaib son of Lagmann].

were forced to contend with (Orkney). Much information is unknown in contemporary sources, mainly because the Irish annals rarely look outside of their own coastlines (the main exception being the political affairs of Moray in Scotland). The Old Norse material, *Brennu-Njáls saga* and *Orkneyinga saga* provide further evidence, though it is open to criticisms because of the later composition dates, as well as its bias. Forced by the lack of material, reconstruction of the situation in the Isles and Orkney during this period has been mainly speculation.

Though the role of kin and hierarchy in Ireland plays a considerable role in the assertion of authority, they could be ignored if they did not suit political ambition. Kin relationships also required cultivation, and consequently they and other alliances forged and maintained during a person's lifetime were instrumental to their success. As demonstrated in Ireland, these relationships were made through marriages, independent military alliances, and the assertion of overlordship. However, the interaction between the Hiberno-Scandinavian king of Dublin and the Jarl of Orkney in the early eleventh-century is a more convoluted intersection of the socio-political cultures. Consequently, Orkney's participation in Clontarf is more ambiguous than the Isles despite multiple explanations in Old Norse and Irish accounts. *Brennu-Njáls saga* states that Sitric had to promise the Jarl the hand of his mother in marriage, as well as the kingship of Ireland in exchange for his support.¹¹⁶ Meanwhile, academics have supposed a variety of explanations, including the aforementioned 'economically motivated conclusions'. Seán Duffy also argued that the Jarl's participation stemmed from connections to his Irish mother and Scottish wife.¹¹⁷ *Orkneyinga saga* states that his mother was the daughter of a king of Osraige, a kingdom that alternated loyalties between the Munster and Leinster.¹¹⁸ Sigurðr's marriage to the granddaughter of a princess of Leinster and daughter of the king of Scotland, Máel Coluim II (ruled 1005 to 1034), brought the Jarl closer to the feud between the house of Moray and Brian Bóruma.¹¹⁹ This may permit for an explanation of why he was familiar with the politics and people, but is unconvincing as an argument of why he would join. Maternal claims to Irish power would have been scarcely

¹¹⁶ "Brennu-Njáls saga", 444: 'Mælti hann þat til, at eiga móður hans ok vera síðan konungr í Írlandi, ef þeir fellði Brján' [He said that (he must have), to marry his (Sitric's) mother and after be king in Ireland, if they felled Brian].

¹¹⁷ Sean Duffy, c.1000-c.1100, 289-290.

¹¹⁸ Gudbrand Vigfusson (ed.), "Orkneyinga Saga," in *Icelandic Sagas and Other Historical Documents Relating to the Settlements and Descents of the Northmen on the British Isles* Volume I, (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1887-1894), 14 - Chapter 11 - '(...) hann átti Eðnu, dóttur Kjarvals Íra-konungs; þeirra son var Sigurðr digri' [(...) she was called Eithne, daughter of Cerball mac Dúnlainge; their son was Sigdr dr digri (the stout)].

¹¹⁹ Seán Duffy, Ireland, c.1000-c.1100, 289.

credible. Rather, it supports the notion that elite marriages in the British Isles acted as promoters of cross-cultural political and economic interaction. Nevertheless, Jarl Sigurðr was in contact with one important figure in Ireland, Sitric.

When Sitric set out to establish another link in his political network, he may have sought a more formalised alliance of obligation with Jarl Sigurðr. The nature of such a relationship is difficult to comprehend, because it is impossible to know without further written source material if they would have been familiar with Scandinavian oaths of friendship, or would entered into a relationship akin to the Irish or Scottish client and lord, where one is subordinate. Contact between the courts was assured through trade and Jarl Sigurðr Irish Sea activity during the period, but most likely eased by common language and possibly also by shared varying degrees of hybrid-Scandinavian culture and traditions. The nature of overlordship has already been examined in this chapter between Sitric and the Kings of Ireland, Brian Bóruma and Máel Sechnaill. If such a relationship existed, between the King of Dublin and the Jarl, Sitric asking Sigurðr to fight could have been a display of his dominance, but the Norse and Irish accounts are clearer that it was a woeful request for help. In the wider Scandinavian society (including Iceland) the establishment of formal friendships was a tool of early medieval politics, which was utilised to forge crucial connections between kings, chiefs and their people. This was solidified through the exchange of feasts, gift giving, and protection for the support of chief or king's if a struggle arose. Similarly, such practices in Norway formed friendships that were instrumental to early political consolidation.¹²⁰ Oaths of friendship could also serve the foreign interests of a king, though they ultimately demanded the subordination of one ruler to another.¹²¹ As in Scandinavia and Iceland, surplus was mainly rendered through gift giving carried out through a chief's hospitality at feasts in Orkney. During the early eleventh-century, the isles had widely dispersed farms and there is little evidence for any fixed political centres. However, chiefs, such as Jarl Sigurðr, lived at a large settlement; he most probably resided at Birsay, a small defendable tidal island.¹²² At this place, feasting occurred, as evidenced in *Brennu-Njáls saga*, when Sitric was present at the court of the Jarl for Christmas in 1013¹²³. *Orkneyinga saga* states quickly that Sigurðr went to Ireland in support of King Sitric *Silkenbeard*, but later elaborates further about the battle

¹²⁰ Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, *Viking Friendship: The Social Bond in Iceland and Norway, c. 900-1300* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2017).

¹²¹ Sigurðsson, *Viking Friendship*, 62-63

¹²² McGettigan, *The Battle of Clontarf*, 84.

¹²³ "Brennu-Njáls saga", 440-445.

itself.¹²⁴ It is speculative therefore to assume that the relationship between Sitric and Sigurðr could have been a friendship or something like the practices of overlordship in the British Isles. They could very well have been equal partners in their efforts. Ultimately however, though not a massive distance to travel, arguments that the Jarl Sigurðr would have gone from Orkney to Dublin because of his ancestry or because Sitric promised him the kingship of Ireland are far less compelling than the proposal that they formed an alliance with obligations to each other. This does not downplay that Sigurðr was most likely motivated by his economic ambitions in the Irish Sea to oust Brian.

2.4 After the Battle

In the aftermath of Clontarf it is generally assumed that Sitric's position was maintained because of his connection to the reinstated high king, Máel Sechnaill, and that only Brian Bóruma's death saved Dublin from its annexation. However, while networks were crucial to the successes of Sitric's reign, it would be negligent to assume he did not possess any agency and was the puppet of Irish kings. The battle of Clontarf may have been an important marker in his reign, but Sitric continued to rule for twenty-two years. After Clontarf, Sitric's reign can be divided into two phases: failure (1014-1028) and success (1028-1036). An examination of the events during both, as well as an understanding of the wider struggle of Irish kings to fill the position of High-King after 1022, serves to illustrate the importance of political networking.

Remaining true to his sustained political network after Clontarf, Sitric stayed closely attached to the politics of his old ally, the faction of Uí Fáeláin of Leinster. Máel Mórda died at Clontarf, and the kingship reverted to the next faction in line, the Uí Muiredaig, but the kingdom was held until 1016 by the forces of Máel Sechnaill and King Flaithbertach of Cenél nEógain. Additionally, rather than pass on the position from the Uí Muiredaig to the Uí Dúinchada in 1016, the kingship reverted to the Uí Fáeláin with Bran son of Máel Mórda. However, Sitric blinded the new king of Leinster, his cousin two years later in 1018.¹²⁵ As an immediate neighbour to Dublin and a familial connection to Sitric, it may be proposed that his involvement in Leinster politics was not misplaced. By comparison, he was incapable of

¹²⁴ Vigfusson (ed.), "Orkneyinga Saga," 16: Chapter 13 – '(...) *fór Sigurðr jarl til Írlands til liðs með Sigtryggi konungi silkiskegg (...) En er Sigurðr jarl kom til Írlands, hældu þeir Sigtryggr konúgr her þei til móts við Brján Íra-konúgr, ok varð fundr þeirra Föstudaginn langa*' [Travelled Jarl Sigurdr to Ireland to help King Sitric Silkenbeard (...) When Jarl Sigurdr came to Ireland, King Sitric and his army went to meet with King Brjan of the Irish, and their meeting lasted all Friday].

¹²⁵ AFM 1017.5 [=1018]; ALC 1018.1; AU 1018.2; CS 1018

By comparison: AI 1018.4 states that Sitric's son Olaf committed the murder: '*Bróen mac Muil Mórdai, ri Laigen, do dallad la Amlaib*' [Braen son of Mael Morda, king of Laigin, was blinded by Amlaib]

involving himself in the matters of Munster because he lacked the long-standing connection his mother had assured, and because Tadc and Donnchadh, Brian's two remaining sons were now preoccupied with their own dynastic issue. Donnchadh was his maternal half-brother and the preferred choice of Brian Bóruma to inherit Munster, but his half-brother Tadc, son of Echrad and Brian, quickly went on the offensive in 1014.¹²⁶ Máel Sechnaill had taken back the title of 'King of Ireland' with the support of the Northern Uí Néill king, Flaithbertach, and the fortunes of the Dál Cais, Brian's family rapidly declined after the middle of the eleventh-century. In reality, historical memory should record Máel Sechnaill as the true winner of the Battle of Clontarf. In 1015, he finally recaptured the town and demanded tributary payments, asserting his overlordship and unlike past occasions, burned Dublin's fortified settlement (dún).¹²⁷

Sitric *Silkenbeard* was in shifting alliances with Irish kings right from the early days of his reign and did not change following his loss at Clontarf. However, he was met with little success in the 1020s because he had lost the instrumental alliances that had strengthened his political position. Máel Sechnaill died in 1022 at the age of 73, the 43rd year of his reign as the king of Mide, marking the beginning of a new era in Sitric's reign. Howard B. Clarke stated that from 1014 to 1028, Sitric and the Hiberno-Scandinavians of Dublin were at the mercy of Irish political players and that following the king's death in 1022 they were vulnerable to the demands of the many figures competing for the high kingship of Ireland.¹²⁸ In 1018 or 1019, Sitric's forces plundered Kells, a main monastery in Mide, once more demonstrating that if Máel Sechnaill was his overlord Sitric intended to amend the situation.¹²⁹ In 1023, his forces took a prince of Brega, Donnchadh Ua Duinn, prisoner, despite the promise of safe conduct for negotiations, and he was sold across the sea.¹³⁰ Then in 1025 he handed over hostages to the northern Uí Néill king, Flaithbertach, and then again

¹²⁶ AU 1014.1; McGettigan, *The Battle of Clontarf*, 111.

¹²⁷ AFM 1014; CS 1015: 'Shuaighedh la Maelsechlainn 7 la h. Nell 7 la h. Maoldoraidh co Ath Cliath coro loisgsiot in dun 7 gach a raibhe bn dtin amach do thaighibh et co ndeachadar iaromh i nUibh Cheinnselaigh' [An army was led by Mael Sechnaill and by ua Néill and by ua Maeldoraidh to Áth Cliath and they burned the fortress and all the houses surrounding the fortress and they went thereafter in Uí Cheinnselaigh].

¹²⁸ Clarke, "King Sitriuc Silkenbeard", 262.

¹²⁹ AT 1019.3 *Orgain Chenandsa o Sitriuc mac Amlaim co n-Gallaib Atha cliath co rucsat bruit diaimidi 7 cor' marbad daíne imdha andsin* [The plundering of Kells by Sitric son Olaf, with the Foreigners of Dublin, and they carried off innumerable captives, and many people were killed there]; also: AFM *s.a.* 1017. [=1018] and CS 1019

¹³⁰ AU 1023.3: 'Donnchad H. Duinn, ri Breghe, do ghabail do Ghallaib ina n-airiucht fein 7 a breith dar muir' [Donnchad ua Duinn, king of Brega, was taken prisoner by the foreigners in their own assembly and was taken overseas].

in 1026 to Donnchadh the son of Brian, his half-brother.¹³¹ In that same year, Niall mac Eochada of Ulaid raided Dublin. As a result of this last event, Sitric sought out a military alliance with Brega. In 1027, Olaf, son of Sitric and Sláine, raided Mide with King Donnchadh of Brega and then fought a battle at Lickblaw where the Brega king was slain. In 1029, the new king of Brega then captured his son Olaf for ransom, demanding an enormous sum. Clarke's statement is therefore true, though it is harsh to omit that Sitric faced similar setbacks and successes to other Irish kings, as each were clinging to their positions in the face of others violent declarations for overlordship.

The battle of Clontarf had destroyed several connections on Sitric's network and he struggled to regain control. However, in 1028 his fortune began to turn and for some time afterwards he enjoyed success. Sitric's reign was secure enough in Dublin that he left for Rome on a pilgrimage later in 1028. However, the fragile peace he and the king of Brega had established quickly disintegrated because of their sons fighting. The consequence of this event was the ransoming in 1029, but Sitric endured. In 1031 he plundered Ardraccan in Mide, killing 200 men by burning them inside a church, and taking the remainder prisoner.¹³² Then in 1032 Sitric won against a coalition of three Irish kingdoms at the Boyne-estuary, though his foes were admittedly only three minor Irish dynasties of Mide and of the Northern Uí Néill.¹³³ In 1035 he returned to Ardraccan, but on this occasion provoked his half-brother Conchobar, son of Gormflaith and Máel Sechnaill, into retaliation at Swords, a church in Sitric's territory. That same year, Sitric killed Rögnvaldr (Ragnall) Uí Ímair, the king of Waterford, in Dublin.¹³⁴ This would prove to be a significant event in the breakdown of his power in 1036.

Sitric endured in Dublin because he had utilised his Irish connections to stabilise his position as its ruler up to 1014, and afterwards was both hindered and helped by the chaos in the aftermath of Brian Bóruma and Máel Sechnaill's death. As eligibility for the high kingship in Ireland was based on an individual ability to impose authority upon other kingdoms, after Clontarf and more specifically after Máel Sechnaill's death in 1022, all kings

¹³¹ AU 1025.4: '*Shuagad la Flaithbertach H. Neill, i m-Bregaibh 7 i nGallaib co tuc giallu Gaidhel* {folio 7 column H56vb} *o Ghallaib*' [An army was led by Flaithbertach ua Néill into Brega and among the foreigners, and he took the hostages of the Irish from the foreigners].

AU 1026.1: '*Slogad la mc. m-Briain i Midhe 7 i m-Bregu 7 co Gollu 7 co Laighniu 7 co h-Osraigiu co ruc a n-giallu*' [Brian's son led an expedition into Mide and Brega, and against the foreigners and the Laigin and the Osraige, and took hostages from them].

¹³² AT 1031.6: '*Crech la Sitriuc ar Ard m-Breacan, co ruc bruid 7 bai ass*' [A raid by Sitric on Ardraccan, and he took out of it captives and kine].

¹³³ AFM 1032.10; ALC 1032.7; AU 1032.7: '*Maidm Inbir Boinne ria Sitriuc m. Amhlaim for Conaillib 7 for Uib Dorrthainn 7 for Uib Mheith i r-raladh a n-ár*' [The defeat of the Boron estuary was inflicted by Sitriuc son of Amlaib on the Conaille and the Uí Dorrthain and the Uí Méith, in which they were slaughtered].

¹³⁴ AFM 1035.4; ALC 1035.6; AU 1035.6

were forced to deal with an unstable political environment. Irish high kings were entitled to the highest of ‘honour-prices’, not because they inherited a title, but through the enlistment and maintenance of the largest number of kingdoms and noble families to/under their rulership, utilising these allegiances to bolster their armies when necessary.¹³⁵ Despite the subordinate status of all kingdoms that came under Brian’s rulership, Sitric is somehow treated as more inferior to his Irish counterparts. This general conclusion is shared in multiple, though not all, secondary sources up to more current publications. It derives from the perspective of the minimalist approach developed by revisionist Irish scholars, which understands the position of foreigner kings in Ireland during this period to be inconsequential in comparison to the Irish. Though they are critical of overtly nationalistic tones, particularly past praises for Brian Bóruma, scholars such as Donnchadh Ó Corráin believe that Sitric was the pettiest of Ireland’s petty kings.¹³⁶ Evidently, by the eleventh-century, the ‘foreigners’ were not attempting to gain major territory in Ireland or to consolidate kings under their authority, but they achieved some dominance thanks to the wealth of Dublin and the military engagements they won. It is worth considering the nature of the power they held, and to re-examine

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has sought to further stress the importance of socio-political networks in the maintenance and exercise of power. It has aimed to demonstrate that the involvement of Irish kings in Dublin’s rulership was not limited to the demand of tribute: hostages and booty. Sitric’s associations with Máel Sechnaill and Brian Bóruma were both crucial to his network, but there is a common misconception that his relationship and surrender of tribute to both would have cost him his position as a political agent. In the efforts to assert authority over Ireland, Brian Bóruma mainly created relationships of overlordship, which did not endure beyond his death because pledges were made to an individual rather than to a position, title, or dynasty. Brian’s son(s) therefore lacked the ability after his death at the battle of Clontarf to consolidate power over the vast amounts of land he had acquired. Furthermore, he sought out marriage alliances with Leinster and Dublin because both posed independent threats to his

¹³⁵ Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession*, 98-99.

¹³⁶ Donnchadh Ó Corráin, “Dublin came very definitely into Irish hands in the eleventh century, and became so defenceless that it was hard put to defend itself against the petty kings of Brega.” [Ireland before the Normans, 105.]

Howard B. Clarke, though critical of Sitric, is not quite as scathing. He writes: “Sitriuc Silkenbeard was for the most part a small-time operator in this unstable environment. From time to time he engaged in disputes with his near neighbors north and south. His kingdom was smaller territorially than is sometimes supposed and its military capacity quite limited.” [“King Sitriuc Silkenbeard”, 266.]

ambitions. Once more, marriages during this period were not made with small inconsequential kingdoms with little influence, or with their puppet kings. The networks throughout Ireland were first and foremost in the eleventh-century, based on kinship ties. The number of connections Sitric had formed within Ireland had been instrumental up to 1014, but also sustained him after 1022 when Máel Sechnaill died and many adversaries arose. Through marriages, Dublin became less of a 'foreign' polity, and the length of his reign would have a great impact upon his successors. Ultimately, Sitric may have benefitted most from the death of some of his allies at Clontarf, as Dublin's economic holdings grew during his reign. After 1014, with Jarl Sigurðr gone and his son unable to assert hegemony over the Isles until 1035, the sea lay practically open to Sitric's ambitions.

Chapter 3: The Last Networks of the Uí Ímair in Dublin - 1054

This final chapter sets out to detail the last years of Sitric *Silkenbeard* and to examine his immediate successors: Echmarcach mac Ragnaill and Ívarr Haraldsson. This covers the events from 1036 - the year of Sitric's forced abdication, to 1054 - the year Diarmait mac Máel na mBó seizes Dublin for his Irish dynasty. By comparing the successful reign of Sitric to Echmarcach and Ívarr's short fragmented rules, the sustained importance of kin networks is discussed. This is accomplished by further establishing that agnatic claims to the Uí Ímair, and more importantly to the branch descendant from Óláfr *cúarán*, persisted to play an important role in claims to rulership. Nevertheless, Irish connections were far more vital after 1036 in determining the success of a king, because the lengthy reign of Sitric and his father had ensured that the kingdom of Dublin was no longer a foreign Scandinavian settlement. Furthermore, the overlordships of Máel Sechnaill and Brian Bóruma had set a precedent for the relationship between Irish kings and Dublin, so that Echmarcach and Ívarr were forced to contend with Donnchadh mac Briain and Diarmait mac Máel na mBó respectively. After 1054, the Uí Ímair continued to operate in the Irish Sea and laid claim to Dublin on more than one occasion, but the town was irrevocably altered by its annexation in to the kingdom of Leinster.

3.1 *Sitric Silkenbeard and Irish Sea Ambitions*

Sitric did not seek out territory in the Irish Sea because he failed to consolidate power in Ireland. Rather, Dublin's efforts were made possible because he had a firm grasp upon his kingdom, which is demonstrated best by the very length of his reign. The deaths at Clontarf, particularly Brian Bóruma's, destroyed multiple political networks that had made Munster successful. Additionally, after Máel Sechnaill's death in 1022, the Uí Néill lost their claim to the kingship of Tara. The first to hold the title and to exact the kind of political authority that had been held by Brian Bóruma was the King of Leinster, Diarmait mac Máel na mBó (d. 1072). Sitric did not exact much power beyond the borders of his kingdom in Ireland, never claiming major territories for Dublin, but Irish kings after Brian found it near impossible to do so as well. The breakdown of his socio-political network at Clontarf and in the ensuing years cost Sitric greatly. However, his position was bettered slightly in the early 1030s, possibly because of an alliance with King Knut of England, but more likely because there was no king powerful enough in Ireland to assert and keep overlordship. Even Brian Boruma had been incapable of consolidating his power for more than a year. Furthermore, the length of Sitric's

reign acted as a political and economic stabilising agent, which should not be underestimated. Nevertheless, in 1036, a rival branch of the Uí Ímair dynasty removed him from power in Dublin.

As an active political agent in the Irish Sea, Sitric may have come into contact with King Knut or his retainers, after he took control of England in 1016. Knut's interest in Wales, Ireland, and Scotland are often diminished or ignored.¹³⁷ However, Benjamin Hudson has been the most adamant advocate that the English and Danish king was involved in Sitric's Irish Sea ambitions. Knut's determined presence in the British Isles was solidified when he married Emma of Normandy in 1017, the widow of King Æthelred II. She, like other elite women, carried political pedigree through her ancestry, as well as through her marriage to a previous ruler of England. As king, Knut set out to create a large political network across the areas he ruled and with their neighbours, efficiently inhabiting the variety of cultural traditions amongst the English and Scandinavians he held authority over.

A relationship between Knut and Sitric appears natural to Irish Sea historians because they shared a common 'Scandinavian' identity. However, as previously reasoned, Sitric was not entirely 'Scandinavian' because his paternal ancestry was the convoluted result of his dynasty's British Isle ambitions. Sitric and Knut both could have stressed or under-communicated facets of their self-conscious ethnic identities, or used an awareness of another's, in order to suit their political and economic aspirations.¹³⁸ It is arguably evident that Sitric would have spoken or at the very least understood Old Norse, based on the knowledge that the town's inhabitants maintained the language well into the twelfth-century, as well as the cultural memory maintained in Norse saga material about the King of Dublin. For example, though *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu* has a much later composition date, the skald for which the saga is named recites a prepared poem that would have required the Sitric's familiarity with the language and the genre. The King fails to provide the appropriate gift, overzealously offering a ship, but his question of the language and knowledge is not denied or diminished.¹³⁹ The ability to communicate in a common language could have eased interaction, and the need of both to interact may have led to the formation of a relationship with obligations. As previously stated in Chapter 2, early medieval friendships were important political institutions formed by the duty to give, receive, and reciprocate. It is more likely that

¹³⁷ Timothy Bolton, *Cnut the Great* (New Haven: Yale, 2017), 122; Bolton, *The Empire of Cnut the Great: Conquest and the Consolidation of Power in Northern Europe in the Early Eleventh Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 126-130.

¹³⁸ Glørstad, "Homeland – Strange Land – New Land", 152-153.

¹³⁹ "Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu," in *Borgfirðinga sögur*, Íslenzk Fornrit 3, ed. Sigurður Nordal and Guðni Jónsson (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1938), 74-76.

Sitric formed a friendship along the Scandinavian practices with Knut than with Jarl Sigurðr, simply because there is evidence of Knut's practice of friendships oaths in *Óláfs saga helga* (*Heimskringla II*) - however, it remains mainly in the realm of conjecture.¹⁴⁰ If they did have such a relationship, it would have provided protection and security for Sitric beyond the Irish Sea region after a period of serious unrest. Hudson echoed that the relationship would have been one of lord and subordinate, but he failed to contextualise this statement within the wider 'Scandinavian' world Knut inhabited. Sitric may have therefore consciously used a part of his identity in his later reign, in order to gain some economic advantage over the Irish.

Record of Anglo-Saxon and Welsh relations during Knut's reign remain almost non-existent. Though the activities of Hiberno-Scandinavians and the Irish can be gleaned in certain accounts, one major issue has arisen from the way they were viewed in the Welsh material, as some interpret discussions of the Irish to also mean Hiberno-Scandinavian.¹⁴¹ In the *Brut y Tywysogion*, notable activities of external forces mainly increase only in the 1040s, but records in the 1030s indicate that it was a period of Welsh political upheaval.¹⁴² It is in this period that Dublin began a campaign in the region, and established or grew the colony on Anglesey. The Isle of Anglesey in North Wales is importantly along one of the main trade routes between Dublin and Chester, and thus would have been economically beneficial to control. The English and Dublin trade connection was well established from the earliest periods of Dublin's development, and was strengthened during the eleventh century because of the increasing localisation of trade.¹⁴³ In particular, the efforts of the Uí Ímair in tenth-century Northumbria strengthened ties by establishing links with towns in western England, near the Welsh kingdoms, as evidenced by hoard finds.¹⁴⁴ In this region, late tenth and eleventh-century finds in towns such as Chester, as well as Whithorn in the southwest region of Scotland, demonstrate varying degrees of the intersection between Scandinavian, hybrid-Scandinavian and British Isles cultures.¹⁴⁵ Though Chester was a small royal *burh*, it was a key node on the trade network of Sitric and his successors. Archaeological remains indicate that the dies for coins of Dublin during his reign were manufactured in the town of Chester.

¹⁴⁰ 'Heimskringla II' in Íslenzk fornrit 27, 227 & 234-35; Sigurðsson, *Viking Friendship*, 62-63.

¹⁴¹ Hudson, "Ostmen Irish and Welsh" criticises Kathleen Maund, *Ireland, Wales, and England in the Eleventh-century* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1991).

¹⁴² Rv. John Williams ab Ithel (ed. & trans.), *Brut y tywysogion*, 38-41.

¹⁴³ Mary Valante, "Viking Kings and Irish fleets during Dublin's Viking Age," in *Dublin and the Medieval World* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2009), 75.

¹⁴⁴ Griffiths, *Vikings of the Irish Sea*, 101-102 + 109; Valante, *The Vikings in Ireland*, 126-127.

¹⁴⁵ Olwyn Owens, "Scotland's Viking 'Towns': a contradiction in terms?" in *Viking and Norse in the North Atlantic: Selected Papers from the Fourteenth Viking Congress, Tórshavn*, ed. Andras Mortensen and Símun V. Arge (Tórshavn: Foroya Fróðskaparfelag, 2005), 304-306.

Sitric commemorated his return to power in 995 with the introduction of coinage inscribed with *Sihtric rex Dyflinn* (Sitric, king of Dublin), an imitation of the English coins of Æthelred II.¹⁴⁶ Some years later in the 1030s, the die for the coin imitating Knut's quatrefoil issue was manufactured in England - probably also Chester - and inscribed with the legend *Sihtric rex Irum* (Sitric, king of the Irish).¹⁴⁷ The decline of coins' value after 1036 further indicates that the length of his reign, despite the turmoil, was an economic stabilising agent.

Knut could have arguably foreseen some benefit in Sitric's efforts in Wales and valued Welsh preoccupation with the Irish Sea, rather than on his English borders. Such a partnership would have been mutually advantageous, but a joint effort is only recorded in the entry for 1030 in the *Annals of Tigernach*: '*Orguin Bretan o Saxanaib 7 o Gallaib Atha Cliath.*'¹⁴⁸ This settlement does not represent the last attempts of Sitric to act as an independent king, because that downplays the late tenth and early eleventh century increased interactions between Wales and Ireland. Two large periods of descent by the Hiberno-Scandinavians and Scandinavians occurred in the 980s and the 1030s because internal struggles between factions in Wales permitted for the region's exploitation. Interest was principally economic. Anglesey had fertile lands, capable of helping to produce the vast amounts of food the expanding town of Dublin required. However, there could have also been some Welsh goods exchanged - for example, Welsh horses may have been valuable commodities, as evidenced by the ransoming of Sitric's son Olaf in 1029 to the King of Brega: "*Amhlaim m. Sitriuc, ri Gall, do erghabhail do Mathgamain H. Riagain, ri Bregh, co fargaibh da .c. dec bo & .ui. xx. ech m-Bretnach.*"¹⁴⁹ This implies that Dublin was a port for livestock from abroad, and that it may also have developed a horse market.¹⁵⁰ Some of the numbers are likely an exaggeration, but there is record of Sitric and Leinster leading a mounted force against Máel Sechnaill in 1000.¹⁵¹

As he was ransomed in 1029 and preoccupied with the multiple raids on Dublin in the decade prior, Olaf probably only became active in Wales after this date. In the *Vita Griffini filii Conani* (*The Life of Gruffudd ap Cynan*), the colony established on Anglesey is named

¹⁴⁶ Hudson, *Irish Sea Studies: 900-1200*, 28-29.

¹⁴⁷ Griffiths, *Vikings of the Irish Sea*, 102; Hudson, *Viking Pirates and Christian Princes*, 120.

¹⁴⁸ AT 1030.11 [Plundering of Wales by the English and the Foreigners of Dublin.]

¹⁴⁹ AU 1029.6 [Amlaíb son of Sitriuc, king of the foreigners, was held prisoner by Mathgamain ua Riacaín, king of Brega, and as his ransom he gave up 1,200 cows and six score Welsh horses (...)]; see also AFM 1029.6; AT 1029.1; CS 1029.

¹⁵⁰ Hudson, *Viking Pirates and Christian Princes*, 111-112.

¹⁵¹ AU 1000.7: '*Do-lotar Gaill 7 Laigin crech marcach rempu i Magh Bregh conus-taraidh Mael Sechlainn*' [The foreigners and the Laigin, with a raiding party of horsemen, came before them into Mag Breg, and Mael Sechnaill came upon them].

after its ruler, Olaf Sigtryggsson: Castell Avleod.¹⁵² Sitric had a number of children by Sláine and at least one other woman, but he did not create any new notable kin alliances after this marriage. It was habitual to lose more than one adult child in efforts against enemies. For example, the *Annals of Tigernach* reveal that his nephew Sitric, son of Glúniarn (his long-dead half brother) killed his son Godfrey in 1036.¹⁵³ By this time he had already lost three sons, and his remaining immediate descendant, one daughter, was a nun and also died in 1042.¹⁵⁴ Furthermore, he never seems to have sought out the political network his father had modelled within Ireland. He formed no other marriages with a prominent woman than Sláine, and his sons are never recorded as married anyone of distinction, maybe because marriages to Irish princesses are more often chronicled when they are to a king or produce children of some renown. The exception may be his son Olaf, though the account only survives in Welsh sources. These materials suggest that Sitric's dynasty was rapidly connected with that of Iago ab Idwal ap Meurig of Gwynedd in north Wales. While Sitric had two sons, Olaf/Oleif who died in 1013, and Olaf son of Sláine, who died in 1034, it is the latter that fathered a daughter named Ragnailt ingen Amlaíb (Ragnhildr Olafsdóttir). She in turn married the exiled Welsh prince, Cynan son of the aforementioned Iago and bore a son, Gruffudd ap Cynan.¹⁵⁵ The *Vita* emphasises important familial connections instrumental in the construction of royal pedigree, though it tends to exaggerate considerably. For example, Olaf is called by many titles otherwise unattributed to his person: “[...] *Auloedi Regis Dubliniae, et quintae partis Hybernie, Insulae Mannae, qui e Scotia genus ducebat. Aliarum complurium insularum rex etiam habebatur ut Daniae, Galovidae, Arennae, Monae et Venedotiae*”.¹⁵⁶ It further connects the Welsh King to the kingdom of Leinster through his maternal grandmother, Máel Corcaig, daughter of Dúnlaing son of Tuáthal, King of Leinster (1014-1016).¹⁵⁷ Confirmation

¹⁵² Paul Russell (ed. and trans.), *Vita Griffini filii Conani (VGC): The Medieval Latin Life of Gruffudd ap Cynan* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2005), 54-55. ‘(...) *Monae et Venedotiae, ubi eius castellum (dictum Castellum Auloed) fossa et muro quam munitissimum construxit, cuius rudera apparent, et vocabatur Castellum Auloedi, quamcis Cambrice appelletur Bon y Dom*’ [(...) and of Gwynedd, where he built his castle (called the castle of Olaf) which is as strong as possible with its ditch ramparts, parts of which are still visible, and used to be called Castle of Olaf, though in Welsh it is called Bon y Dom].

¹⁵³ AT 1036.9: ‘*Gofraidh mac Sitriuca do marbad do mac Gluin Iaraind a m-Bretnaib*’ [Gofraidh son of Sitric was killed in Wales by the son of Iron-knee].

¹⁵⁴ AFM 1034.13; AU 1034.2; AT 1034.2; CS 1034

¹⁵⁵ Russell, VGC, 52-53. ‘*Eitus pater Cynannus erat rex Venedocie, mater vero Racvella filia Avloedi regis Dublinensis civitatis, ac quitaie partis Hybernie*’ [His father, Cynan was king of Gwynedd, his mother Ragnell, daughter of Olaf, king of Dublin and of a fifth part of Ireland].

¹⁵⁶ Russell, VGC, 54-55. [Olaf, king of Dublin and of a fifth part of Ireland, of the Isle of Man, who derived his ancestry from Scotland. He is also considered to be the king of several other islands in as much as he was regarded as king of Denmark, of Galloway, of Arran, of Anglesey and of Gwynedd].

¹⁵⁷ Russell, VGC, 56-57. ‘*siquidem Ragnel, mater Gruffini, filia erat praenobilis faeminae, Vaelcorcre, filiae Dunlugi, qui natus etiam erat Tethel regis Laginae, quintae scilicet partis Hyberniae*’ [Ragnell, the mother of

of this last alliance is obscured by a lack of information about the Dúnlaing, who only ruled for two brief years during a period of decided overlordship in Leinster by Máel Sechnaill (1014-1016). Sitric was an old man when he abdicated; he had been middle-aged at the battle of Clontarf, and only young in comparison to the aged King Brian. After his abdication, there was a new generation of political players operating in the Irish Sea. The creation of a socio-political connection with Knut remains ambiguous, but it could not have helped Sitric against the efforts of Echmarcach mac Ragnaill in 1036 because Knut died in 1035. Importantly, the expansion of Dublin's ambitions into the Irish Sea and its contact with Wales demonstrates the growth of an politico-economic network across kingdoms.

3.2. Who was Echmarcach mac Ragnaill?

Echmarcach ruled the town only in two brief periods from 1036 to 1038, and then from 1046 to 1052, compared to the 41 years of uninterrupted rulership by Sitric. Ultimately, new enemies and tepid alliances were not the destruction of Sitric *Silkenbeard*, but rather an old rivalry with Waterford severely weakened his position, and Echmarcach's arrival finally crushed his hold on Dublin. In 1035 Ragnall (ON. Rögnvaldr), grandson of Ívarr, the man who had expelled Sitric from Dublin in 994, was executed by the Dublin King's order.¹⁵⁸ Echmarcach's connection to Waterford is argued in relation to these events, as he takes Dublin from Sitric only shortly afterwards. However, this feud may have little to do with Echmarcach's motivations, and simply may have played a role in destabilising Sitric.

It is the former's ambiguous background that complicates the construction of a narrative. 'Echmarcach' is a Gaelic name, while his surname, mac Ragnaill, derives from the Old Norse Rögnvaldr. He was the product of the broad exchange between Scandinavian and Gaelic peoples, and thus the hybrid result of the fusion of culture and bloodlines. His specific parentage, however, is rather obscured. In the mid-nineteenth-century, Irish historian J. H. Todd first introduced the concept of an Uí Ímair dynasty based on evidence in both Icelandic and Irish sagas. In his constructed genealogies, included in his edition of the *Cogad Gáedel re Gallaib*, Todd proposed that Echmarcach's father was Rögnvaldr (Ragnall), son of Óláfr *cúarán*.¹⁵⁹ However, dating complicates this proposal and so it is easily dismissible. It has also been proposed that he was descendant of the Waterford faction, either from the father or

Gruffudd, was the daughter of an extremely noble woman, Vailcorcre, daughter of Dunlang, who was also the son of Tethel, king of Leinster, a fifth part of Ireland].

¹⁵⁸ AFM 1035.3 and ALC 1035.5 both state the same information as AU 1035.5: '*Ragnall H. h-Imhair, ri Puirt Lairgi, do marbad i n-Ath Cliath la Sitriuc m. Amlaim*' [Ragnall ua hÍmair, king of Port Láirce, was killed in Áth Cliath by Sitriuc son of Amlaib].

¹⁵⁹ Todd, *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh*, 267 n.2.

son (Ragnall mac Ímair, who died in 1018, or his son by the same name, who died in 1035).¹⁶⁰ However, it is most plausible that Echmarcach's family resided in the kingdom of the Isles, and that his father was king Ragnall mac Gofraid, who died around 1004/5.¹⁶¹ The lack of clear source material detailing who ruled in the Isles around the turn of the millennium can be used to explain the ambiguity surrounding Echmarcach. This gap demonstrates that increased interest of players from the region meant that no one would have been able to gain the succession.¹⁶² However, the Isles are further obscured by a lack of knowledge concerning the kingdom's boundaries. It is generally assumed that around the mid-eleventh century, the period of Echmarcach's main activity, it included the Isle of Man, the Hebrides and Galloway. This understanding is largely derived from entries into various annals at the time of Echmarcach's death. He is recorded as the *rex innaren* in the *Marianus Scotus Chronicon*, but simply as *rí Gall* (King of the Foreigners) in two Irish Annals.¹⁶³ Regarding the former, it may refer to 'Innarenn' meaning the Rhinns, an area of Galloway, though it could also be a poor rendering of the Latin *rex insularum*, meaning 'King of the Isles'.¹⁶⁴ Galloway is absent from the record from 830 until 1034, when it is mentioned at the time of a Scottish king's death, Suibhne mac Cináeda¹⁶⁵. He is called *rí gallgoídil*, 'rí' meaning king, and *Gall-goídil* meaning foreigner-Gaels, which developed in to the modern word 'Galloway'. The term reflects the perception of the cultural or biological identities of the inhabitants of the region, and likely emerged as a way to designate the boundaries of a Norse-Gaelic kingdom.¹⁶⁶

Years before Echmarcach gained the kingship of Dublin, he appears to have entered his family into marriage alliances with the descendants of Brian Bóruma, the Uí Briain. His sister Cacht married Donnchadh, son of Brian and Gormflaith, in 1032. The *Banshenchas* then records that Echmarcach's daughter, Mór, was married to Tadc (d. 1086), son of Toirdelbach Uí Briain (d. 1086)¹⁶⁷. However, this was a blunder on Echmarcach's part, because ultimately the Uí Briain would not come to a position of considerable power until

¹⁶⁰ Woolf, *From Pictland to Alba*, 246; Etchingham, "North Wales, Ireland and the Isles", 158; Hudson, *Viking Pirates and Christian Princes*, 129; Duffy, "Irishmen and Islemen in the Kingdom of Dublin and Man," 96-97.

¹⁶¹ Hudson, *Viking Pirates and Christian Princes*, 129; Etchingham, "North Wales, Ireland and the Isles," 181-182;

¹⁶² See above; Downham, "Clontarf in the Wider World", 25

¹⁶³ AI, 1064.7; AU 1064; Georg Waitz (ed.) "Mariani Scotti Chronicon", in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores* [in folio] V (Hanover, 1844), 599 (s.a. [1065])

¹⁶⁴ Downham, *Viking Kings of Britain and Ireland*, 171; Etchingham, "North Wales, Ireland and the Isles: the Insular Viking Zone," 160; Hudson, *Viking Pirates and Christian Kings*, 129-130.

¹⁶⁵ AU 1034.10: 'Suibne m. Cinaedha, ri Gall-Gaidhel, mortuus est' [Suibne son of Cinaed, king of the Gallgaedil, died.]

¹⁶⁶ Woolf, "The Age of Sea Kings", 96-97.

¹⁶⁷ 'The Ban-Shenchas', 229. 'Mor ingen Eachmarcaig m. Ragnaill rig Gall, mathair Donchada 7 Amlaim (ob. 1096) 7 Domnaill mic Taidg hUí Briain, 7 Be Bind.' [Mór daughter of King of the Foreigners Echmarcach mac Ragnaill, mother of Donnchadh and Amlaim (ob. 1096) and Domnaill son of Tadc Uí Briain, and Be Bind].

much later in the century. Donnchadh is recorded at his death in the *Annals of Ulster* as the deposed overking of Munster, a noticeable decline from his father's eulogy as the *righ nEreinn* (King of Ireland)¹⁶⁸. His wife Cacht is remembered at her death in 1054 as the Queen of Ireland however, though only in the *Annals of Tigernach*¹⁶⁹. The struggling Uí Briain dynasty in the 1030s had been weakened by the wars between the multitudes of kings vying for positions of greater overlordship during the previous decade. Donnchadh must have viewed an alliance with Echmarcach, the usurper of the disliked half-brother, as a potential ally in his collusions. Howard B. Clarke proposed that Sitric was forced to abdicate because of his brother's lasting need for vengeance for Clontarf, and that he used his relation to Echmarcach to his advantage.¹⁷⁰ This is speculative, and diminishes the role of the Uí Ímair in Irish politics. Previous examples of political networking demonstrate that alliances were principally founded upon an understanding that the relationship would be beneficial for both parties. Through his two reigns in Dublin, Echmarcach seems to have sustained his relationship to the Uí Briain. He unmistakably understood the importance of networking, and the Uí Briain hoped that after the rise Leinster in the early 1040s, Echmarcach would be able to weaken their control over Dublin, thereby crippling their economic advantage.

If we accept the theory that Ragnall mac Gofraid of the Isles was his father, then the most logical conclusion as to why he sought the kingship of Dublin is that Echmarcach chafed at the expanding power of kings. This includes Dublin, but he may also have been under pressure in Galloway from the brother of King Malcolm of the Scots, as well as King Knut. Echmarcach is most probably the 'Iehmarc' of the two other kings forced to recognise the overlordship of Knut in 1031, following the Scottish conquest of the long coveted Lothian region¹⁷¹. The [D] version of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (latter half of the eleventh-century, composed by several hands) refers only to the submission of one Scottish king, though the [E] version (transcribed at various dates between 1121-1154) records the following: "*Her for Cnut cyn to Rome. 7 þy ilcan geare he for to Scotlande. Þ Scotta cyng him to beah Mælcolm. 7 twegen oðre cyningas, Mælbæpe 7 Iehmarc.*"¹⁷² Knut was not Echmarcach's only political

¹⁶⁸ AU 1064.4: 'Donnchadh m. Briain airdri Muman ^b do athrigadh ^b do ec I Roim ina ailitri' [Donncha son of Brian, overking of Mumu, was deposed and died in Rome on pilgrimage.]

¹⁶⁹ AT 1054.4: 'Cacht ingen Ragnaill, rigan Ereinn, d'éc' [Cacht daughter of Ragnaill, King of Ireland, dies.] Hudson, *Viking Pirates and Christian Princes*, 134

¹⁷⁰ Clarke, "King Sitriuc Silkenbeard", 264.

¹⁷¹ Hudson, *Viking Pirates and Christian Princes*, 132.

¹⁷² Charles Plummer & John Earle (ed.), *Two of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles Parallel with supplementary extracts from the others*, Volume 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1892), 157 & 159: 1031: [Here King Knut fared to Rome. And at the same year he fared into Scotland; and Malcolm king of Scots submitted to him and two other kings, Mælbæth and Iehmar]

opponent in the region however. Malcolm, King of the Scots, may have resided in the area of Islay and Arran (the Inner Hebridean zone). It is possible that he was the brother to Suibhne mac Cináeda, the Scottish king mentioned in the *Annals of Ulster* as the King of the Foreigners in 1034.¹⁷³ Echmarcach was probably coming to power in the 1030s and may have been the successor of Suibhne.

The rulership of the Isles between 1014 and 1031 is open to much interpretation. Hudson suggests that Norwegian kings grew more directly interested in the region, more specifically St. Olaf sent a rival, Hákon Eiriksson to the Hebrides¹⁷⁴. Hákon was the nephew of Knut, and was appointed regent to Norway around 1028, but he died at sea in 1030 off the shores of Orkney¹⁷⁵. Echmarcach could have felt more confident after Knut's death to oppose Sitric, but this depends on how close the Danish and Hiberno-Scandinavian king's relationship was. What is more likely is that he was motivated by the removal of a younger opponent more involved on the eastern seaboard of the Irish Sea, when Olaf, Sitric's son, was killed in 1034. Sitric's Irish Sea ambitions may have provoked challenge because of his territory of control or influence, in Echmarcach's own lands. Dublin was populous not only in Ireland, but also throughout the north Atlantic, and its influence stretched across the Irish channel, though the degree to which it was dominant is open to debate.

3.3 The Rivalry of Ívarr Haraldsson and Echmarcach - 1036-1052

In order to understand why Echmarcach and Ívarr Haraldsson struggled and ultimately failed to reign for more than two short intermittent periods, it is imperative to not only compare networks, but to also consider the evolving nature of Irish kingship. By utilising his Uí Ímair connection to claim the position of king of Dublin, and his socio-political network of Irish kin and military allies, Sitric *Silkenbeard* had successfully maintained power for at least 41 years. By comparison, Echmarcach mac Ragnaill's failure was his inability to create a proper network by allying himself with current powers. However, both he and his competitor Ívarr reigned during a period of political centralisation in Ireland. Since the eight-century, overlords had broken the independent legal position of small Irish kingdoms, and Dublin in the late tenth-century became prey to this political practice.¹⁷⁶ Dynastic feuding persisted within kingdoms, but the economic impact of the Hiberno-Scandinavian towns was felt

¹⁷³ AU 1034.10: 'Suibne m. Cinaedha ri Gall-Gaidhel, mortuus est' [Suibne son of Cinaed, king of the Gallgaedil, died].

¹⁷⁴ Hudson, *Viking Pirates and Christian Princes*, 129-130.

¹⁷⁵ *ibid* 131; Woolf, *Pictland to Alba*, 246.

¹⁷⁶ Ó Corráin, *Ireland before the Normans*, 29.

during the second half of the eleventh-century, as kings sought out the wealth and resources they provided. Finally, with no contenders for the kingship of Dublin with ties to the Uí Ímair and close links with an Irish kingdom after 1054, it was predictable that the chain of inheritance was to be broken.

Echmarcach arrived in Dublin in 1036, but is only recorded twice as being active in Ireland before he was replaced by Ívarr Haraldsson. The *annals of Tigernach* are the only record stating that Ívarr took Dublin in 1038.¹⁷⁷ He was the nephew of Sitric *Silkenbeard* by his half brother Harald Ólafsson, who had died in 999 at the battle of Glen Máma. He did not take Dublin for his uncle, who only died in 1042, but rather used his kinship ties with the Uí Ímair faction of Óláfr *cúarán* ruling in Dublin to claim his inheritance. In 1038, Echmarcach may have found it difficult to keep control within the Irish Sea region in general, as Jarl Þórfinnr Sigurðarson of Orkney was once more actively seeking out domination¹⁷⁸. An association between Ívarr and Knut's son, Haraldr, has also been suggested, but there is little basis for this conclusion¹⁷⁹. Even if Harald *Harefoot* Knútsson and Ívarr were in contact and some intention of an alliance had been proposed, the latter would have been of little use because he had barely consolidated his own power by 1038, and furthermore died in 1040. Ívarr's socio-political network was therefore superior to Echmarcach's in two specific ways: he was part of dynasty of Óláfr *cúarán*, and he was in an alliance with the right Irish kingdom - Leinster, which became most successful after Diarmait mac Máel na mBó consolidated his power in the early 1040s.

Ívarr actively continued Dublin's concerted efforts in Ireland and Wales, the latter best evidenced in the Welsh sources, and the former in the multiple incursions against Ulaid in Irish sources. The power of Dublin's kings depended heavily on the ability to protect economic interests, and therefore upon its navy. Poul Holm estimated, based on contemporary accounts and comparable figures in England, that Dublin would have had at least forty permanent ships in their royal fleet during the eleventh century, but that there would have been many other vessels intended for commerce grounded in their harbour¹⁸⁰. The Irish kingdom of Ulaid had never allowed any permanent Scandinavian settlement, and consequently they lacked access to the prosperous trade routes and their goods. They were thus entirely dependent on hiring ships from other kingdoms and towns to protect themselves

¹⁷⁷ AT 1038.1: '*IMar tar éis Eachmarcaigh, 7 Reachru do argain do Gallaib*' [Ímar succeeded Echmarcach and Rechru was plundered by the Foreigners.]

¹⁷⁸ Hudson, *Viking Pirates and Christian Princes*, 135.

¹⁷⁹ *ibid*, 136.

¹⁸⁰ Holm, *The Naval Power of Norse Dublin*, 72.

until in the mid-tenth century when they began to develop a fleet¹⁸¹. Though Sitric did not face economic competition with Ulaid's shipbuilding during his reign, he was forced to contend with their considerable force in 1022 during a naval battle at open sea. A rare occurrence, the battle took place between the foreigners of Dublin and Niall son of Eochaid, king of Ulaid, at which time Dublin was defeated and prisoners taken¹⁸². King Niall also later led a raid in 1026 on the Fine Gall, Dublin's northern hinterland. Ulaid remained a major problem for Dublin during the reign of Ívarr, as evidenced by the multiple incursions recorded in the Irish annals during his reign. Their rivalry seems to have been centred for some time on a fight for Rathlin Island, and may possibly also have been connected to Dublin's efforts against Echmarcach's Irish Sea hold in the Hebrides¹⁸³. In 1038 Ívarr led an attack on Rechru, which refers to modern-day Rathlin.¹⁸⁴ Then in 1044, he burned 'Scrine Padraig', a shrine to St. Patrick, and in 1045 he invaded Rathlin again and slaughtered the Ulaid.¹⁸⁵ The same Irish king, Niall mac Eochaid (d. 1063), who had fought against Sitric's Dublin still ruled, and led another attack on the hinterland, in 1045.¹⁸⁶ Notably, the *Annals of Tigernach*, which survives in a fourteenth-century manuscript, are the only source for these events, except for one entry in the eleventh or twelfth-century *Annals of Inisfallen* about the slaughter at Rathlin.¹⁸⁷ No record explains how or why Echmarcach ousted the weakened Ívarr from Dublin in 1046.

Echmarcach ruled more successfully in his second term, keeping power for six years before succumbing to the combined pressure of Ívarr Haraldsson and Diarmait mac Máel na mBó, the King of Leinster. Diarmait originated from a new faction within Leinster that broke with the traditional chain of allocation, but he successfully consolidated major power at the expense of other Irish kings and lords independence, and became the first after Brian Bóruma to not only claim the title of King of Ireland but to also function as high king in practice. He also was an active Irish Sea figure, expanding his control beyond the coastlines of Ireland.

¹⁸¹ Byrne, *Irish Kings and High Kings*, 268-72.

¹⁸² AU 1022.4: 'Muircomhrac forsind fharce eter Gallu Atha Cliath 7 Niall m. Eochada, ri Ulad, coro muidh forsna Gallu 7 coro ladh a n-derg-ar 7 coro dairthea archena' [A naval combat in the open sea between the foreigners of Áth Cliath and Niall son of Eochaid, king of Ulaid, and the foreigners were defeated and a great number of them slaughtered, and prisoners were also taken].

¹⁸³ Hudson, *Viking Pirates and Christian Princes*, 135.

¹⁸⁴ AFM 1038.13; AT 1038.1

¹⁸⁵ AT 1044.4: 'Loscad Scrine Padraic la mac n-Arailt' [The burning of St Patrick's Skreen by the son of Harald.]

AT 1045.3: 'Ár Ulad i Reachraind im Regnall h-ua n-Eochadha la h-Imar mac Arailt' [A slaughter in Rathlin of the Ulaid including Ragnall Ó hEochadha, by Ímar son of Harald].

¹⁸⁶ AT 1045.11: 'Sluaiged la mac n-Eochadha 7 la Mael Sechlainn co Gallaib, coro loiscset Sord 7 Fine Gall' [A hosting by Mac Eochadha and Maolseachlainn as far as the Foreigners, and they burned Swords and Fingal].

¹⁸⁷ AI 1045.5: 'Regnall h-Ua Eochada, rigdamna Ulad, do marbad do Gallaib Átha Cliath i r-Rechain, .ccc. do mathib Ulad imme' [Ragnall Ua hEochada, royal heir of Ulaid, was slain by the foreigners of Áth Cliath in Rechru, together with three hundred nobles around him].

Irish or hybrid-Scandinavian activity in Wales is mainly missing in the record between 1030 and 1035, and between 1035 and 1039 completely absent.¹⁸⁸ However, when the Irish annals also begin to take note of the kingdom of Gwynedd (North Wales), there is an increase of raids by the Irish and Scandinavians recorded. Importantly, the Gwynedd dynasty of Cynan ab Iago was already tied to Dublin through Sitric's granddaughter's marriage, but Diarmait would ultimately be the one to strengthen the relationship with Ragnhild and Cynan's son, Gruffudd. At the time of his death, the annals of *Tigernach* record that he was '*ri Breatan & Índsi Gall & Atha Cliath & Leithi Mogha Nuadhad*.'¹⁸⁹ While it may be propaganda, his reference as '*ri Breaten*' (King of the Britons) suggests at the very least some influence. Similarly, the *Vita Griffini filii Conani* demonstrates partiality towards the Leinster dynasty rather than to the dynasty of Brian Bóruma, the Uí Briain. Muirchertach Uí Briain had a long-standing alliance with Cynan's son, Gruffud, who had been raised at Swords near Dublin, but it is possible that Irish antipathy towards the English invaders in Wales during the later eleventh-century ensured that Brian Bóruma's descendants were poorly regarded in comparison to Diarmait of Leinster.¹⁹⁰

At Diarmait's death at the battle of Odba in 1072, he died alongside not only his Leinstermen, but also the foreigners. The *Annals of Tigernach* record: '*do marbadh la Concobur h-Úa MaelSechlainn a cath Odba, & ár diairimthe do Gallaib & do Laignib uime*.'¹⁹¹ Diarmait's position as 'King of the Foreigners' was widely recognized, and derives from the events of 1052. The tumultuous years of Dublin's kings between Sitric's departure in 1036 and Diarmait's seizing of Dublin from Echmarcach in 1052 were entangled with the Irish efforts to assert supremacy over a larger number of kingdoms. Their relation to contenders attests to the importance and endurance of Dublin as a kingdom of value for alliances, rather than demonstrating its petty status. Unlike Sitric, neither Echmarcach nor Ívarr ever led a recorded effort to oppose their overlords, though they all benefitted from relationships with them. For example, in 1047, Echmarcach's brother-in-law, Donnchadh, led an army through Mide and Brega to oppose Leinster. At this time, he carried off hostages from Diarmait mac Máel na mBó, and received '*reír/rér*', a word derived from the Irish

¹⁸⁸ Maund, *Ireland, Wales, and England*, 163.

¹⁸⁹ AT 1072.1 [Diarmaid son of Maol na mBó, king of Britons and the Hebrides and Dublin and Mog Nuadata Half].

¹⁹⁰ *ibid*, 295.

¹⁹¹ AT 1072.1 [...was killed by Conchobhar Ó Maolseachlainn in the battle of Odba, and an innumerable slaughter of Foreigners and Leinstermen around him]. See also: AFM 1072.3; AI 1072.2; AU 1072.4; CS 1072; ALC 1072.1

‘*riar*’, defined as will or due, but meaning claims to tribute.¹⁹² Because the northern Uí Néill and the dynasty of Dál gCais of Munster were exhausted, the way was left open for the kingdom of Leinster to become a powerful opponent. In 1052, Diarmait burned the country from Dublin to Albene and successfully removed Echmarcach, who was forced to go across the sea. The *Annals of Loch Cé* suggest further that Echmarcach was replaced by Ívarr, because he is referred to as ‘rí Gall’ at the time of his death in 1054.¹⁹³ If Ívarr did remain in a position of power then his short reign was directly under the authority of Diarmait, because the latter did not release Dublin back like Brian Bóruma or Máel Sechnaill had done with Sitric, but rather annexed the town and its hinterlands into his own kingdom. The Irish king’s involvement with Óláfr *cúarán*’s dynasty is arguably because of Leinster’s close association with the kingdom over the past century. Though his Leinster faction had never been connected to the Uí Ímair in records, socio-political memory and possibly closer trade ties ensured that Diarmait looked to Dublin for support. Because its authority was diminished by political instability after 1036, Dublin was no longer an ally on equal standing with the larger Irish kingdoms. Echmarcach’s power in the Irish Sea ensured that the King of Munster, Donnchadh, created ties with his family, but he could not create the stability required in Dublin to reign as long as Sitric *Silkenbeard*.

3.4 The Uí Ímair after 1054

1054 did not demark the end of Uí Ímair Irish Sea activity, but after this date, any external leader who gained the kingdom was unsuccessful in retaining its rulership regardless of their paternal lineage. Evidence of contenders for the position in the second half of the eleventh-century and early twelfth, apart from Irish kings, comprised of supposed members of the Uí Ímair, including Echmarcach mac Ragnaill (1036-38 + 1046-52), Ívarr Haraldsson (1038-1046 + 1052-1054), Gofraid mac Amlaíb meic Ragnaill, and Godred Crobán (1091-1094). Utilising the term Uí Ímair may suggest that there was some sort of united front against the Irish, but the reality was a dynasty of warring factions, willing to build and utilise political networks with those that played to their advantage. Additionally, the Norwegian king Magnús *berfættr* (d.1003) sought control of Dublin when he grew active in the Irish Sea, a

¹⁹² AT 1048.2: ‘*Sluaiged la Domnall mac m-Briain tar Midhi 7 tar Bregha co Gallu 7 co Laigniu, co ruc giallu o mac Mail na m-Bó 7 a reir o Gallaib*’ [A hosting by Domhnall son of Brian over Mide and Brega to the Foreigners and the Leinstermen, and he obtained hostages from the son of Mael na mBó, and his will from the Foreigners]; CS 1048: ‘*Sluaighedh la Donnchadh mac mBriain dar Midhe et dar Breagha go Gallaibh is go Laignibh go rug gialla ó mac Mail na mBo et a réir o Gallaibh*’ [An army was led by Donnchadh son of Brian through Mide and Brega to the foreigners and the Laigin, and he took hostages from the son of Mael na mbó and his due from the foreigners].

¹⁹³ ALC 1054.1: ‘*Iomhar mac Arailt, rí Gall, do ég*’ [Imar son of Aralt, King of the Foreigners, died].

testament to the endurance of its economic importance, as well as political significance under the cultivation of late eleventh-century Uí Briain. The fight to defend Dublin from the Irish ultimately cost Magnús his life. Late eleventh-century Irish Sea politics was part of wider effort to consolidate power over Dublin, the Kingdom of the Isles, and the Isle of Man. For example, in the 1070s, Godred Crován asserted his control over the natives of Mann in 1075, and then later to Scotland and Ireland, where he attacked Dublin and Leinster.¹⁹⁴

Before 1054, the major differences between an Irish and a hybrid-Scandinavian king in Ireland, was the origin of their power. Dublin's kings' authority was clearly dependent upon their ability to control urban wealth. By contrast, the highest aristocrats of Ireland were reliant on farming, and their wealth dependent upon cattle. However, during the tenth century, in large part because of the presence of urban centres, the Irish kingdoms began an irreversible transformation towards dependency upon trade goods. Clare Downham decisively argued that over time hybrid Scandinavian peoples in the British Isles achieved high social status through their economic success, and that the wealthy members of society coveted the luxuries available in the ports, and the pieces expressing hybrid or Scandinavian identity became fashionable.¹⁹⁵ The power of Dublin's kings was rooted in their ability to control the largest flow of goods in and out of Ireland. Though they lacked sizeable territorial gains and were unable to enter into systems of overlordship over Irish kings, they were capable independent political rulers. In the first half of the eleventh-century Dublin controlled Ireland's local and long-distance trade networks by regulating tolls, taxes, and tributes. They charged tolls on any goods to be traded locally or internationally, and offered in exchange legal rights and protections for the merchants.¹⁹⁶ This economic system ensured a greater degree of political stability than the earlier model of acquisition, which was reliant upon fortunes made during war or raiding activity. Though the latter model continued to provide wealth (for example prisoners acquired and sold into slavery) the new system was a more consistent flow of wealth.¹⁹⁷ Moreover, trading between local Irish markets with the Hiberno-Scandinavian towns increased, and the construction of local fortresses further propelled the town's economy forward.¹⁹⁸ The towns produced commodities with low social status out of

¹⁹⁴ P.A. Munch (ed.) & Rev. Alexander Goss (trans.), "Chronice Regvm Manniae et Insvlarvm or The Chronicle of Man and the Sundreys," Volume 1 (Douglas: Manx Society, 1894). s.a. 1056 (=1075): '*Godredus Crouan collegit multitudinem navium et venit ad Manniam, pnelium cum populo terrte commisit, sed superatus et fngatus est*' [Godred Crouan collected a number of ships and came to Man; he gave battle to the natives but was defeated, and forced to fly]

¹⁹⁵ Downham, "Coastal Communities and Diaspora Identities", 369.

¹⁹⁶ Valante, *The Vikings in Ireland*, 138.

¹⁹⁷ Holm, "The Slave Trade of Dublin", 329.

¹⁹⁸ Hudson, *Viking Pirates and Christian Princes*, 80.

locally sourced materials, such as leather and wood: combs, game pieces, clothing, and shoes.¹⁹⁹ However, the towns also imported a variety of luxury goods, which the Irish became extremely reliant upon. These came mainly from the markets of England and Scandinavia, and were mostly textiles, items made of silver, and even pottery.²⁰⁰ The *Lebor na Cert* is a fairly unutilised source, but it bears consideration because it emphasises the historical geography and politics of the century. Specifically, it details the system of gift exchange between subordinate kingdoms and their overlords, which was crucial to military efforts.²⁰¹ It makes clear that the goods brought into Dublin, especially international materials, were highly prized by Irish aristocrats eager to participate in the more mainstream European developments of the period.²⁰² These profitable towns ultimately made attractive prizes for kings.

3.5 Conclusion

In chapter 1, it was suggested that Glúniairn's reign ended because of factional infighting as the result of his association with his half-brother Máel Sechnaill II. Comparably, Sitric, though close to the Irish, was treated as an independent in his relationship with Leinster, fought against overlordship, and consequently was successful. He also sought out alliances outside of his immediate kin in order to better his socio-political and economic positions. By contrast, Echmarcach and Ívarr appear to have been directly forced to contend with overlords, though the records are frustratingly sparse about the activities of their reigns. Though Echmarcach has an ambiguous ancestry, it seems clear that he recognized his position as a member of the Uí Ímair and used it to claim the kingship of Dublin. However, Ívarr must have viewed Dublin as part of his inheritance as one of the members of Óláfr *cúarán*'s faction who remained in Dublin. Nevertheless, because the Irish saw the town as an instrument for their political ambitions, the kings of Dublin were now subjugated to a greater degree than before. Marriage alliances had forged deep ties between kingdoms during the reign of Ólafur *cúarán* that had greatly benefitted his sons, but these were lacking for both Echmarcach and Ívarr. Lacking the power to enter into military alliances of an equal nature, the kings were consequentially, subjugated by overlords and recognised their authority. After 1054 the claimants to Dublin came from afar, not from within Ireland, where Óláfr *cúarán*'s dynasty had now come to a known end. Instead it endured across the sea in Wales and in the kingdom of the Isles.

¹⁹⁹ Valante, *The Vikings in Ireland*, 136-137.

²⁰⁰ *ibid*, 128-129.

²⁰¹ Swift, "Taxes, Trade and Trespass", 38-41.

²⁰² Holm, "The Slave Trade of Dublin", 339.

Conclusion

My initial interest in this period arose from an understanding that the Scandinavian towns and leaders in Ireland during the late Viking Age were still closely connected to their ‘homeland’. Ultimately, my research revealed that kinship was the fundamental institution upon which power was claimed and maintained in Ireland. Consequently, my understanding of why Sitric *Silkenbeard* ruled successfully for such a long period of time in comparison to his brother and two successors became clear. I proposed in this thesis that Sitric was the last successful Uí Ímair king of Dublin because he was ethnically and biologically half Irish. While he took power through an agnatic claim, he maintained his position through an Irish socio-political network created by his father and mother’s marriages, and sustained up to 1022 by his own machinations. Sitric could not rule like his father, because Ireland was undergoing a period of political transition in which Irish kings began to consolidate greater authority. Underestimated, Sitric’s position as the king of Dublin is thus often relegated to a footnote in the construction of Irish heroes. However, he reigned for at least 41 years and his advanced age in periods of particular turbulence after the battle of Clontarf should not be underestimated as a stabiliser. Ultimately, history does not just record, on multiple occasions and in different languages, the deeds of nobody. He occupied an important space in the politics of the Irish Sea in the first half of the eleventh-century and consequently should be treated as an important figure in the narration of its history. His contribution to the economy through the introduction of coin for trade in Ireland, religion through his later benefactions for the church, as well as his long reign helped to stabilise Dublin’s position within more local and wider milieus.

By comparison, his successors Echmarcach and Ívarr struggled to assert authority in Ireland because they were forced to contend with stronger Irish kings. Ultimately, Echmarcach was unsuccessful because he was too foreign to assume the kingship and rule effectively. Personally, he was the client of King Donnchadh, son of Brian, but he had only forged marriage links between the women in his family and the Uí Briain, rather than utilise the pedigree of Irish queens and princesses to build up his authority in the region. Furthermore, he was not part of the faction claiming descent from Óláfr *cúarán*, and thus too foreign of a king for the Irish who had grown accustomed to Sitric’s biological hybridity. Ívarr was arguably more successful than Echmarcach because he was closely linked with the kingdom of Leinster, but his relationship was subordinate to the strong king. Lacking the equal military alliance Sitric had with his uncle the King of Leinster, Máel Mórda, Ívarr was

therefore a pawn in Irish politics. Sitric and Glúniainn were also subordinate to strong kings, but this status did not equate to the end of Hiberno-Scandinavian rulership in Dublin. The formations of socio-political networks were formed primarily through military alliances, marriages, and the subordination to strong kings in Ireland. Before Brian Bóruma, kings could seek out a greater position of overlordship and achieve acknowledged control over other kingdoms, but alliances were more commonly formed between polities for simple cooperative military engagements and were easily dissolvable. By the eleventh-century, these relationships were most prevalent and led to the annexation of Dublin.

All four kings were deeply entrenched in the politics and cultures of the British Isles, and The Irish and Gaelic biological and cultural heritage of Glúniainn, Sitric, Echmarcach and Ívarr should not be ignored in favour of an understanding that their paternal lineage was still ‘Scandinavian’. Diaspora theories are useful in understanding how and why people and communities during the Viking Age moved and yet retained traditions. However, greater care needs to be accorded to the local individuality of cultural transformations, formed by an impact of variables over several periods of time. An understanding of ‘localised’ diasporas thus accords better attention to the degree to which certain features would have been assimilated or retained in both Irish and Hiberno-Scandinavian communities. However, there would have undoubtedly been a great variety of identities and therefore differences between the many inhabitants of Dublin, as well as between elite class and the people they governed. The construction of identities is open to speculation, but its role is important to consider in the politics of this period, particularly in discussion of the dynasty of Ívarr. Eventually an actual blood connection to the Uí Ímair probably mattered less than the sense of belonging to an elite group claiming a legacy of power in the British Isles.

Irish historical narrative changed most drastically with the arrival of the Normans in the twelfth-century, but there are significant and important shifts in the approach to politics on the part of Irish kings that began with Brian Bóruma’s rise to power in the late tenth-century. During the late eleventh-century kingship claims demanded the control of the wealth-flow from Hiberno-Scandinavian towns, because access to Dublin meant access to all the necessities a king required for his household, as well as those necessary to attract client kings to their court.²⁰³ Control of the sea was at the root of Uí Ímair power, but when the Irish grew more involved - particularly after 1054 - there was a shift in Dublin’s political role in the British Isles. By 1166, the last king of Ireland, Ruaidrí Uí Conchobair, was crowned in Dublin

²⁰³ Holm, “The Slave Trade of Dublin”, 339.

rather than at the traditional site of Tara.²⁰⁴ This is a testament to the power of the Uí Ímair, who established and developed a strong economic and political centre, which Irish kings were then able to cultivate. Ultimately, without strong kings, Scandinavian or Hiberno-Scandinavian, the town would not have developed into a centre of political and economic dominance, and thus became a worthy site in which to crown a king of Ireland.

Donnchadh Ó Corráin wrote that the conservative minds of the medieval Irish learned class and society ensured the preservation of their beliefs.²⁰⁵ He was referencing the Irish law tracts and the maintenance of concepts of kingship, but I believe that this is also applicable to the way in which modern Irish scholars have treated their history. The desire for independence from external foreign government in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries was transposed on to the invader ‘Vikings’, and when reparations were attempted after the mid-century their impact was minimised. Past categorisations of periods in Ireland are subjective because they have been determined a macro understanding of the ‘Vikings’ in Ireland without proper consideration for micro-periods. Consequently, the over-simplification of the political narrative of the kings of Dublin in the eleventh-century has ignored that their authority was fundamentally different from that of Irish kings because it was principally consolidated through a centralised urban environment. Recent efforts have helped to repair misconceptions, but there remains a predisposition to understand that the power of the Uí Ímair declined and did not recover after three important battles: Tara in 980, Glen Máma in 999/1000, and Clontarf in 1014. There are advocates for dubbing the phase between the mid-tenth and early twelfth centuries, a ‘Second Viking Age’ because of noticeable political and socio-cultural change amongst many ‘Scandinavian’ and Irish communities in the Irish Sea. Though this conclusion is superior to past periodization, I have endeavoured to demonstrate that it is still too evolving as it creates a wider narrative that ignores proper conceptualisation, and that 1054 is a more fitting conclusion to an era within an age.

²⁰⁴ Valente, *The Vikings in Ireland*, 14

²⁰⁵ Ó Corráin, *Ireland before the Normans*, 32.

Appendix

simplified family trees; - - - marriage; — descendant; women are italicised

Figure 1

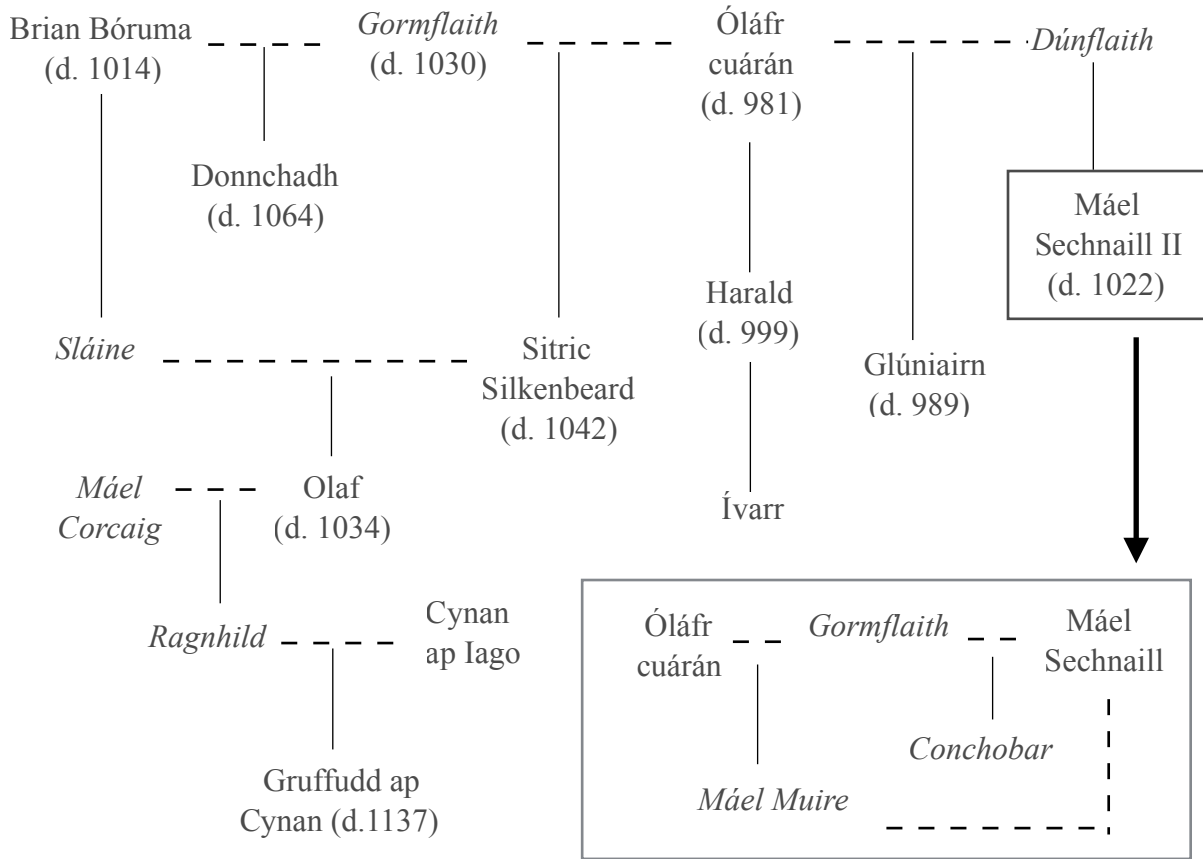
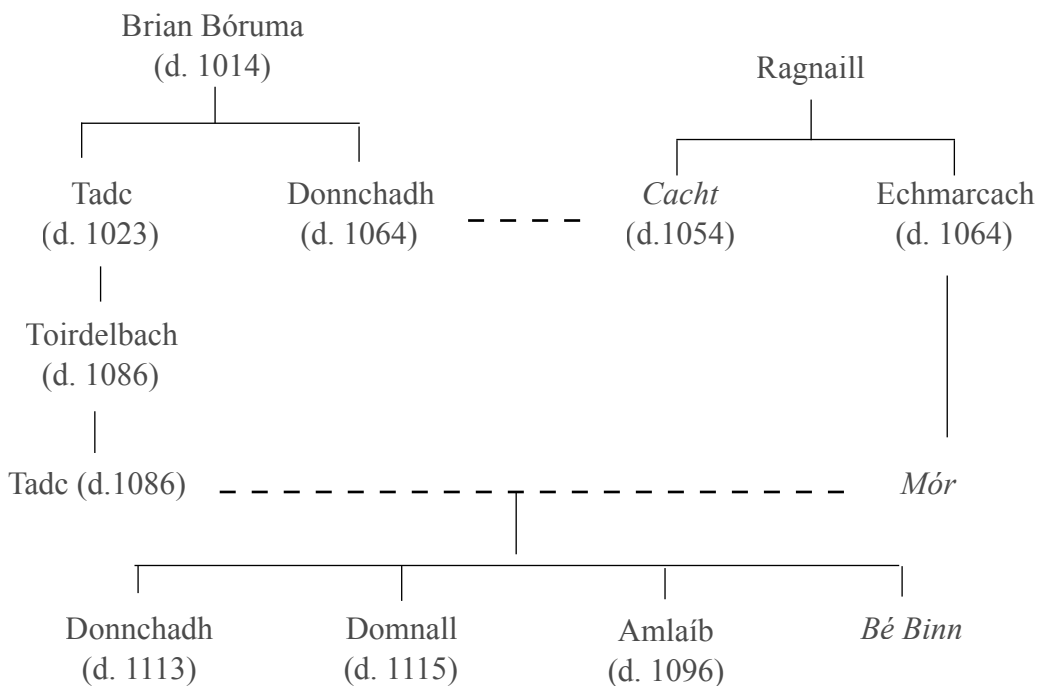


Figure 2



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