

## **Brian Boru Lecture Series**

# **Vikings on the Shannon**

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# Viking websites

- Powerpoints on Irish Vikings, list of Viking finds in Ireland by county, list of annal entries by county and film on Viking settlers in Co. Clare: [www.vikingage.mic.ul.ie](http://www.vikingage.mic.ul.ie)
- See also website for *National Centre for Technology in Education*: [www.ncte.ie/viking](http://www.ncte.ie/viking)
- (For teaching International Vikings)  
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/vikings/>
- Also (on British Vikings)  
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ancient/vikings/index.shtml>

## Beginning of (documentation of) Viking age:

attack on Lindisfarne in A.D. 793:

“ravages of pagan men miserably destroyed God’s church on Lindisfarne with plunder and slaughter”



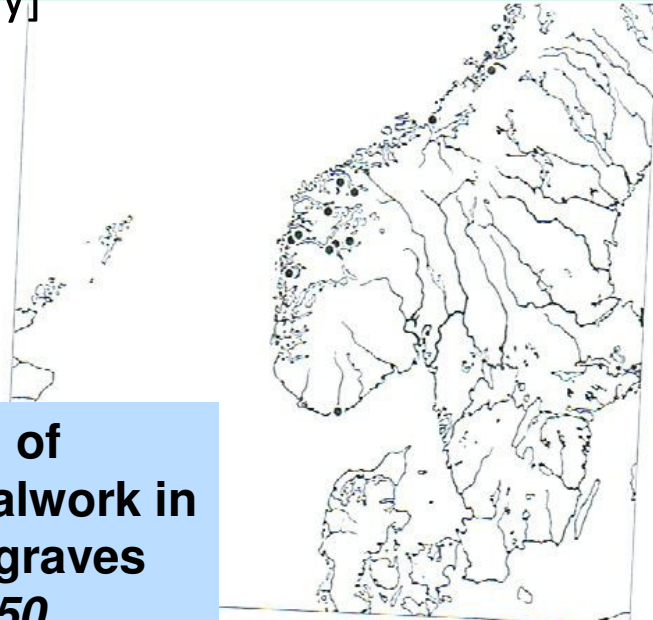
BRITISH ISLES AND NORMANDY  
 Viking settlement in these areas can be plotted from the occurrence of Scandinavian place-names. In 886 Alfred's treaty with the Danes in England confined them to the area known as the Danelaw. Normandy was granted to the Viking chieftain Rollo and his followers in 911, but by the end of the century their descendants were speaking French and had lost their Scandinavian heritage.



**Irish vikings of 9<sup>th</sup> C date, unlike those who attack eastern England, originate in Norway, via the western Isles of Scotland.**

*Is acher in gáith innocht  
 Fu fuasna fairrgae findfholt  
 Ní agor réimm mora minn  
 Dondláechraid lainn ua Lothlind*

Bitter is the wind tonight; it tosses the ocean's white hair; I fear not the travelling of a placid sea, by the fierce warriors of Lothlend [Norway]

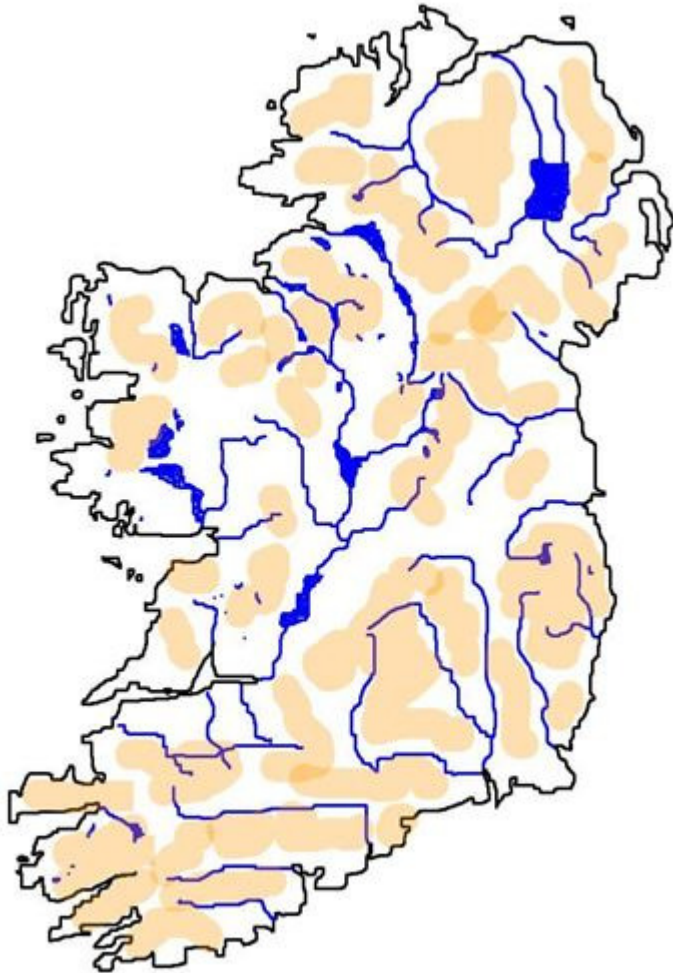


**Distribution of insular metalwork in Norwegian graves c. AD 800-850**

dated from 'around 800' with Insular metalwork. These are concentrated in central western Norway with three outliers in Trondelag and Aust-land.



# Shannon is the easiest entry-point to the interior of Ireland by water



**AD 795** The burning of Raithlin by the heathens, and Skye was overwhelmed and laid waste.

**AD 798** The burning of Inis Pátraic (Holm Patrick, Co Dublin) by the heathens, and they took the cattle-tribute of the territories, and broke the shrine of Do-Chonna, and also made great incursions both in Ireland and in Alba.

**AD 807**

The heathens burned Inis Muiredaig (Inismurray) and invade Ros Comáin (Roscommon) – travelling up Shannon?

## Pagan Viking burials in Ireland of 9<sup>th</sup> C date (1998 map)

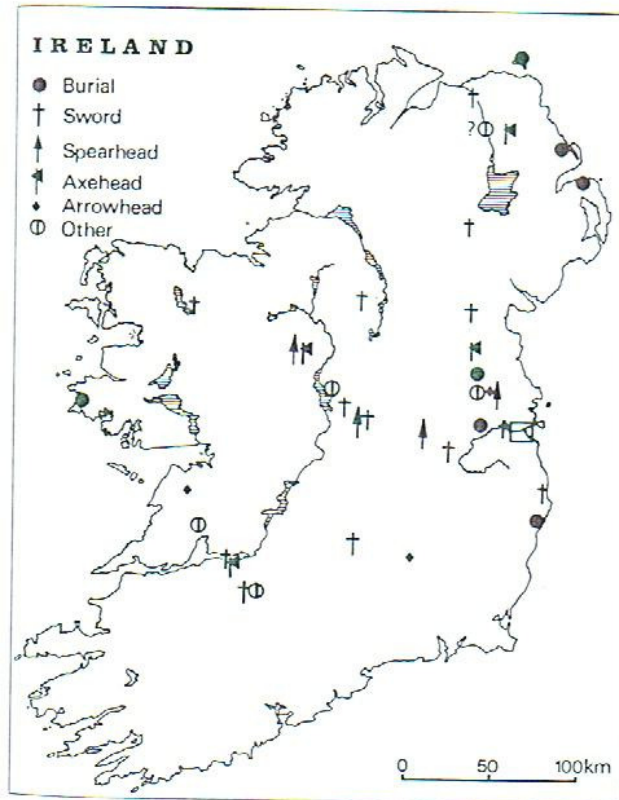
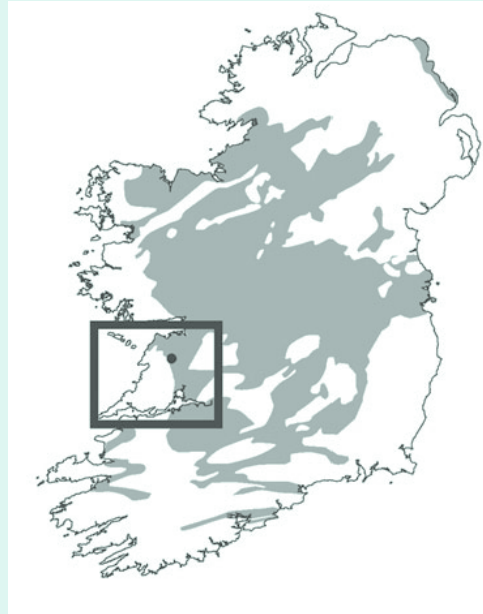


FIG. 5.5: Distribution map of early Viking Age Scandinavian finds and burials in Ireland outside Dublin.

- 824 Étgál of Skellig was carried off by the heathens, and died shortly afterwards of hunger and thirst.
- 835 Mungret and other churches of western Munster were burned by the heathen.
- 837 Inis Celtra was plundered by the heathens.
- Turgeis and wife Otta plunders Clonmacnoise, Clonfert, Lorrha, Terryglass and Inis Cealtra “and all the churches of Derg-Dheirc (Lough Derg)” - *Cogadh*
- 845 capture of abbot on Armagh and brought to ships of Limerick

Etchingam **1996** - Intensification of Viking activity in Shannon/Brosna in 830s & 40s is somewhat disguised since this was an area which was a traditional focus of annalists interests.

# Viking settlers in mid west



Largest Viking necklace found in Ireland, Glencurran cave, Burren – found 2010 – associated with human burials?



Cloghermore cave, Co. Kerry – Collection of human remains and artefacts in pit = C<sup>14</sup> dated to late 9<sup>th</sup> C or early 10<sup>th</sup> C including amber, walrus ivory, silver and remains of men, women and children. Burial rituals suggest direct Scandinavian origins

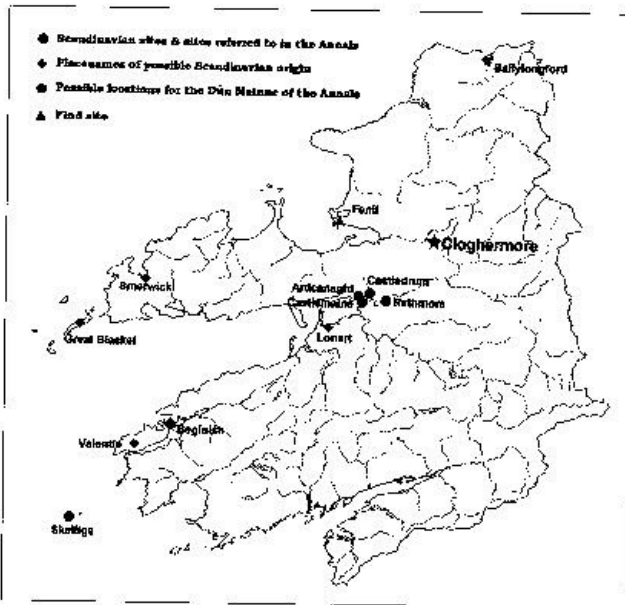


FIG. 56  
Map showing evidence  
for Scandinavian  
activity in Kerry



# Activity on the Shannon estuary

- *Cogadh* (a 12<sup>th</sup> C propagandist text) says that in 10<sup>th</sup> C – “n immense fleet of Vikings landed in *Luimnech* and their leader “ordained kings and chiefs, stewards and bailiffs in every territory and in every chieftainry and he levied the royal tax. ..And there was a king of the foreigners over every territory and an abbot over every church and a soldier in every house so that none of the men of Ireland had power...”
- *Luimnech* included the entire estuary of Shannon while Inis Sibtonn was the colony on King’s Island in the centre of modern Limerick city.
- i.e. Cogadh author is claiming that **VIKINGS CONTROLLED SHANNON BASIN NOT JUST KING’S ISLAND?**

They certainly seem to have had free access to the Shannon waterways and possibly some of the surrounding lands as well.



***The tripartite life of Patrick* edited Whitley Stokes (London 1887), I 202ff.)**

Then he desired to reside in Grian in Arada (Cliach) – [Pallasgreen]...now as Patrick was going from there the women of Grian came to bewail Patrick's departure from them. Patrick blessed them and said that every child which they should bear to men of foreign kindreds would be raised in status

**Annals of Inisfallen 930**

“A naval encampment [made] by the foreigners of Luimnech at Loch Bethrach in Osraige, and **Lough Derg**”

**Life of St Senan edited W. Stokes in *Lives of the saints from the Book of Lismore* (Oxford 1890),66**

“It (Scattery Island) will be a sanctuary/protection (*dín*) for Foreigners and Irish”

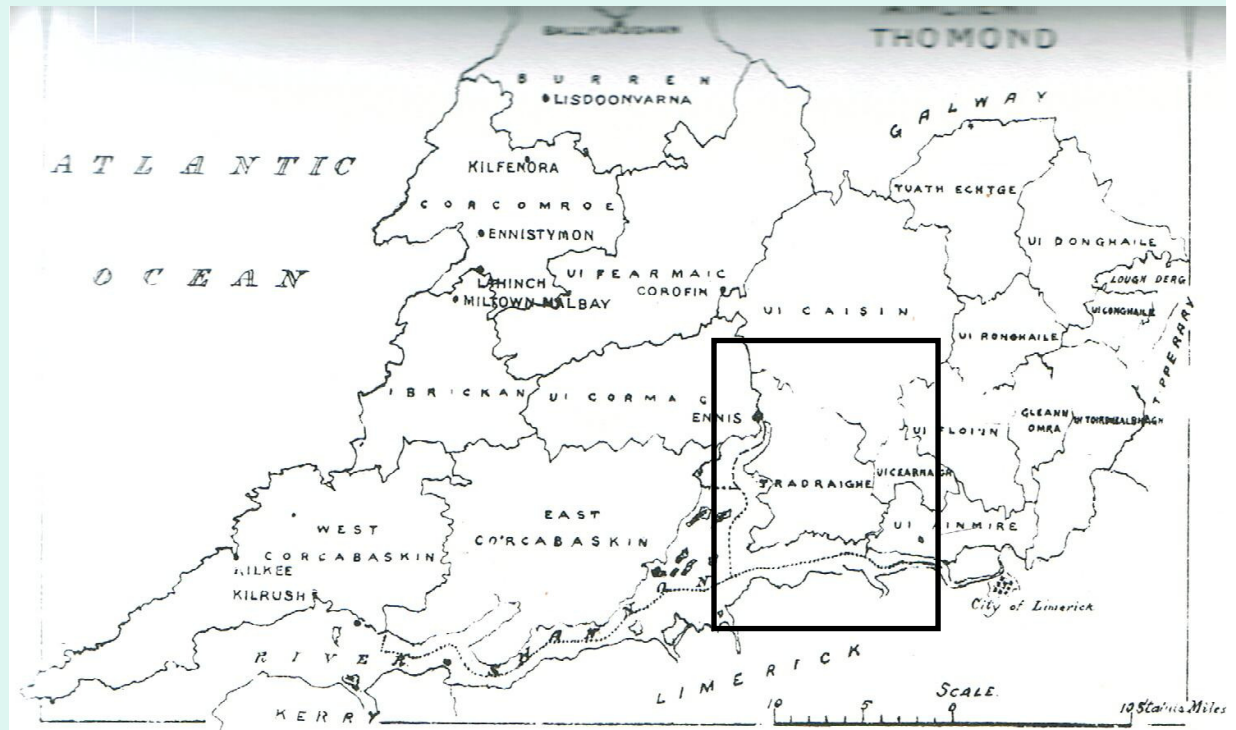
**?14<sup>th</sup> C poem on Inghean Baoith incorporating earlier materials (Sheehan *et al.* 2001, 113); edited by Paul Grosjean *Irish texts IV* (Dublin 1934), 80-86**

“it will be under tax by Danes”, “Vikings will plunder the island” there will be fair blonde women flaunting their cloaks”. “there will be sex and marriage on the island during [the reign of] three kings”;

## *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh*

Brian, however, after that and with him the young champions of the Dál Cais, went back again into the forests and woods and deserts of north Munster. He began then immediately to plunder and kill and retaliate on the foreigners.”

The country was wasted by him from Lough Derg to the Fergus and from Sliabh Echtghe to Tratraighe. .. Then the foreigners of all north Munster assembled around Tratraighe and they raised a fortifying bank all around Tratraighe and they proposed to render all Tratraighe one garrison and from it to conquer the whole of north Munster and Uí Conaill and make them subject to them.





Dublin Viking house (Wood Quay)



Wexford Viking house (Bride Street)

# ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE FOR VIKING SETTLEMENT

Shannon-style Viking house?  
Knockea, Co. Limerick

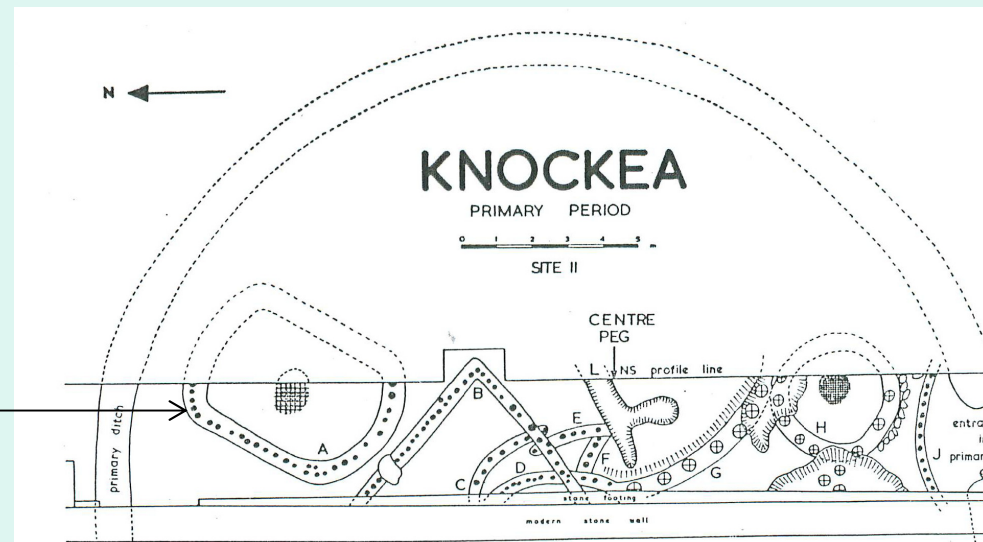
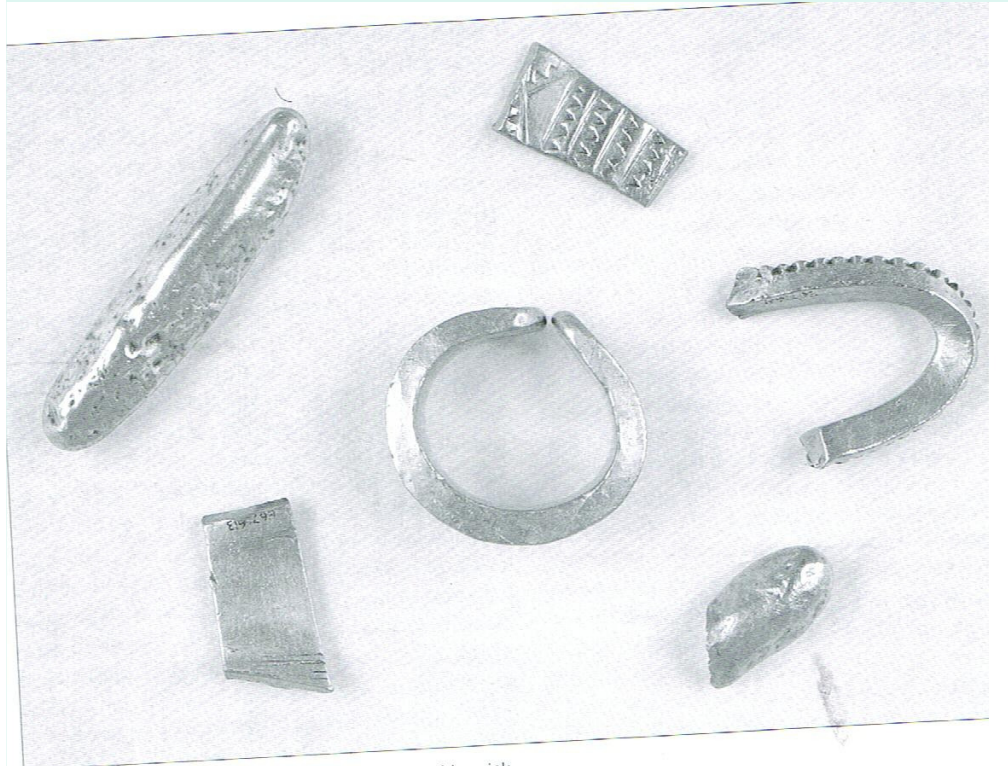


Fig. 7. Site III - Ringfort. Plan of primary horizon.



# Viking trade for silver: Carraig Áille at Lough Gur

This silver hoard has been dated to between AD 880 and 940 by John Sheehan

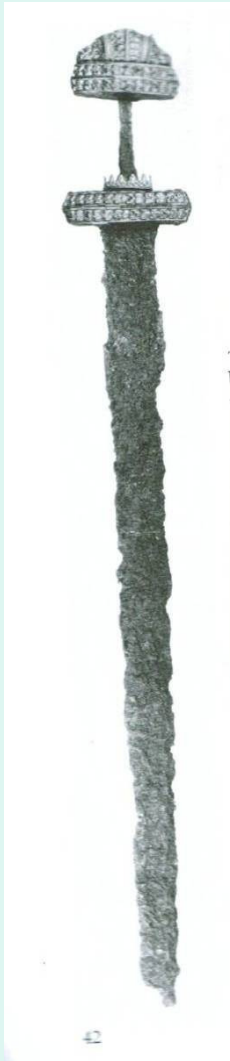


Modern reproductions of broad band Viking armrings (see hacksilver above). Ingots (above, left) could be pounded flat and embossed to make them into armrings of specified weight and value.





# Military equipment of Viking style in the mid-West

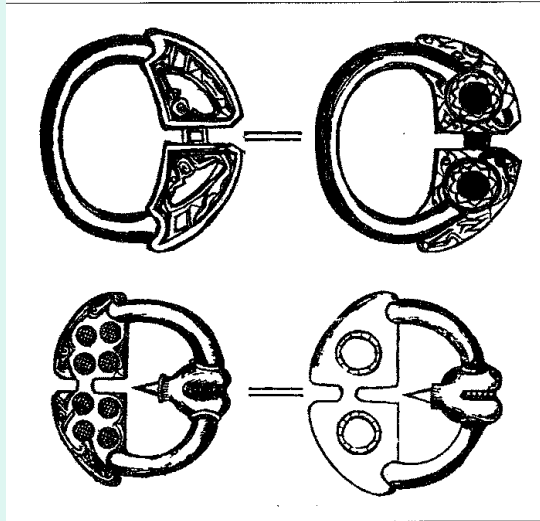
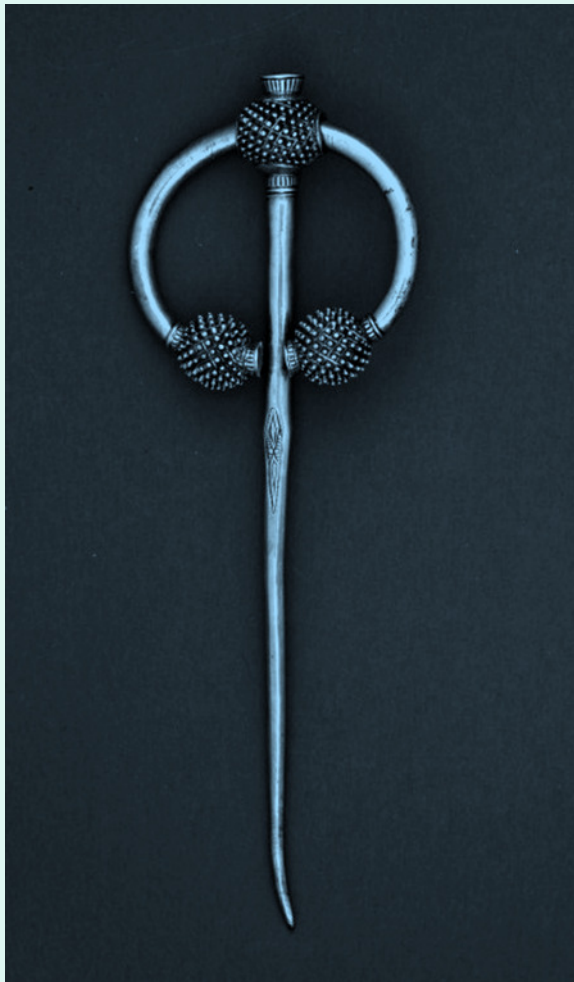


- Type D Viking sword from Cooperhill, Kilkeedy, Co. Limerick
- Anglo-Saxon type sword with decorated pommel from Askeaton
- Type I arrowhead (identified as common Viking type pre 950 in Dublin and York) from Cahercommaun, Co. Clare
- Type 6 (armour-piercing) arrowheads of Hiberno-Norse type – found in Limerick city (King John's castle). These are of 10<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> C date in type but given the excavational context, these examples may all be of later date in this instance.

# Viking period artefacts from lower Shannon and surrounding region

- Silver thistle brooch from Ballynolan, Limerick (nr Pallaskenry and now in Cambridge) – First half of 10<sup>th</sup> C
- Thistle brooch from Ardagh hoard – possibly of late 9<sup>th</sup> C date. Latest of group of 4 brooches found together with Chalice
- Thistle brooch from Clonloghan, near Newmarket on Fergus, Co. Clare
- Gold brooch pin from Kilfinnane, Co. Limerick
- Nordic Style Kite-brooch dating to the early tenth century, was found with another “near Limerick” in 1845 during the construction of the railway line and possibly within 1 km to the south of Viking base on King’s Island.
- Silver bossed penannular brooch, Kildimo, Co. Limerick
- Pair of mid –ninth century pseudo-penannular brooches from Scatterry Island
- Tenth-century plain-ringed, polyhedral-headed ring-pin in fragments from possible 10<sup>th</sup> C hack-silver hoard in Ardagh. This example is longest recorded pin of this class, being over 35cm in length.

**Ballynolan thistle brooch from near Pallaskenry**



**Scattery Island brooches**

**Thistle brooch, Cashel**



**Kite brooch from near Limerick**



# Ingots, coinage and rings from lower Shannon and surrounding region

- Hoard of ingots and coins from Mungret – deposited c. 950 +/- 5 (over half surviving examples from north of England including Chester)
- A hoard of similar date from Tipperary, also including Chester coins
- 2 silver Anglo-Saxon pennies found at Site C Knockadoon, Lough Gur
- Hammered gold ingot from Askeaton
- Ring-money (plain rings) from “Shannon at Clare side”
- Gold armring from Edenvale cave, near Ennis
- Plaited neck ring from Miltown Malbay



# Do Scandinavian artefacts necessarily mean Scandinavian settlers?

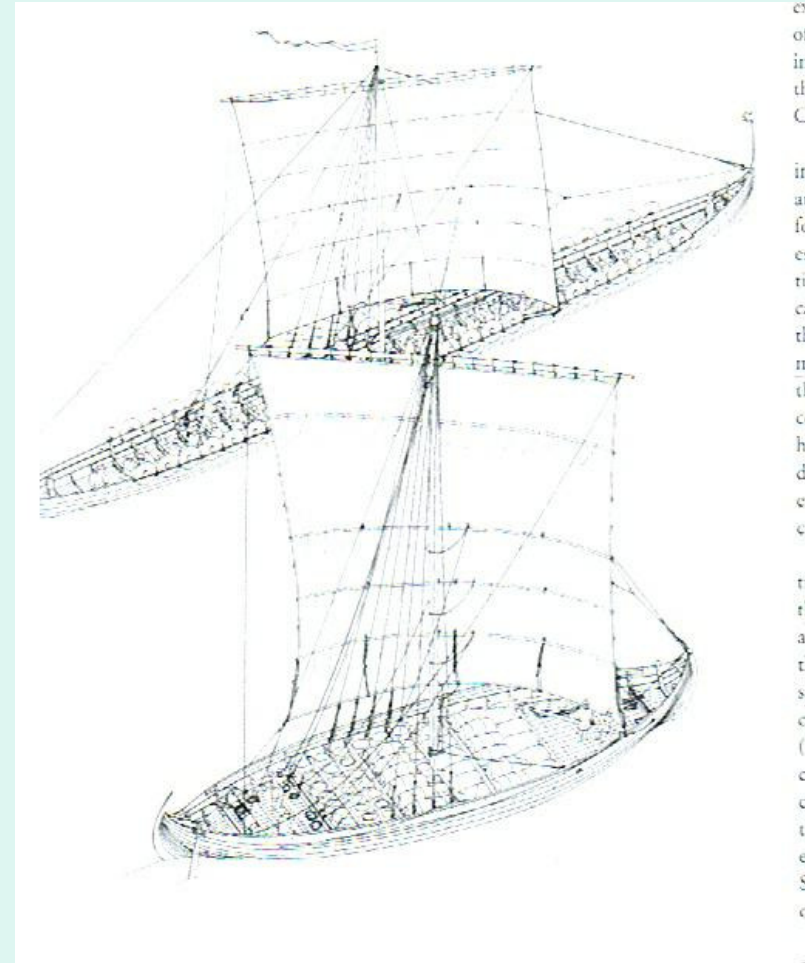
- This proposition is currently being argued by archaeologists in the literature – see E.P. Kelly, “The Vikings in Connemara” in *The Viking Age: Ireland and the West* eds John Sheehan & Donnchadh Ó Corráin (Dublin 2010) 174-87 putting the proposition that they do versus Michael Gibbons who disagrees and argues that when such artefacts are stray finds, they simply represent trade by native Irish with Viking merchants.
- John Sheehan (2009, 27) argues Scatterry Island pseudo-penannular brooches are Irish in style (though made in silver which first appears in bulk in Ireland during Viking period and is thought to have been imported by Vikings). Sheehan points out, however that one shows nicks checking silver purity and this “indicates that this object formed part of the circulation of silver within the Scandinavian bullion economy.”

# Norse style shipping

Two different main styles of Norse shipping: the longship or warship was a narrow raft designed to carry as many men as possible and operated by oars as much as sails.

The merchant ships had much deeper keels and were operated by small crews of 5-10 and powered almost entirely by sail.

These very different types of ships had emerged by Brian Boru's day; not clear they were as distinct in early raids at beginning of ninth century .



# Reconstructions of merchant ship (to left) and war ships (to right) from Roskilde



Viking ships of both kinds were most likely active on Shannon by Brian's day: merchant Hrafn Hlymsreckfari (Hlymrek(Limerick)-traveller) active in Iceland in *Landnamabók*; see also reference to "ships full of men" in eleventh-century *Lebor na Cert*

To pay for silver and other Viking merchandise, the Irish apparently sold wood, cattle and hides, wool, furs of pine martens, fish and slaves





# BILINGUAL GRAVE-MARKER OF SCANDINAVIAN SETTLER THORGRIM FOUND AT KILLALOE - WITH INSCRIPTIONS IN RUNES AND IN OGAM

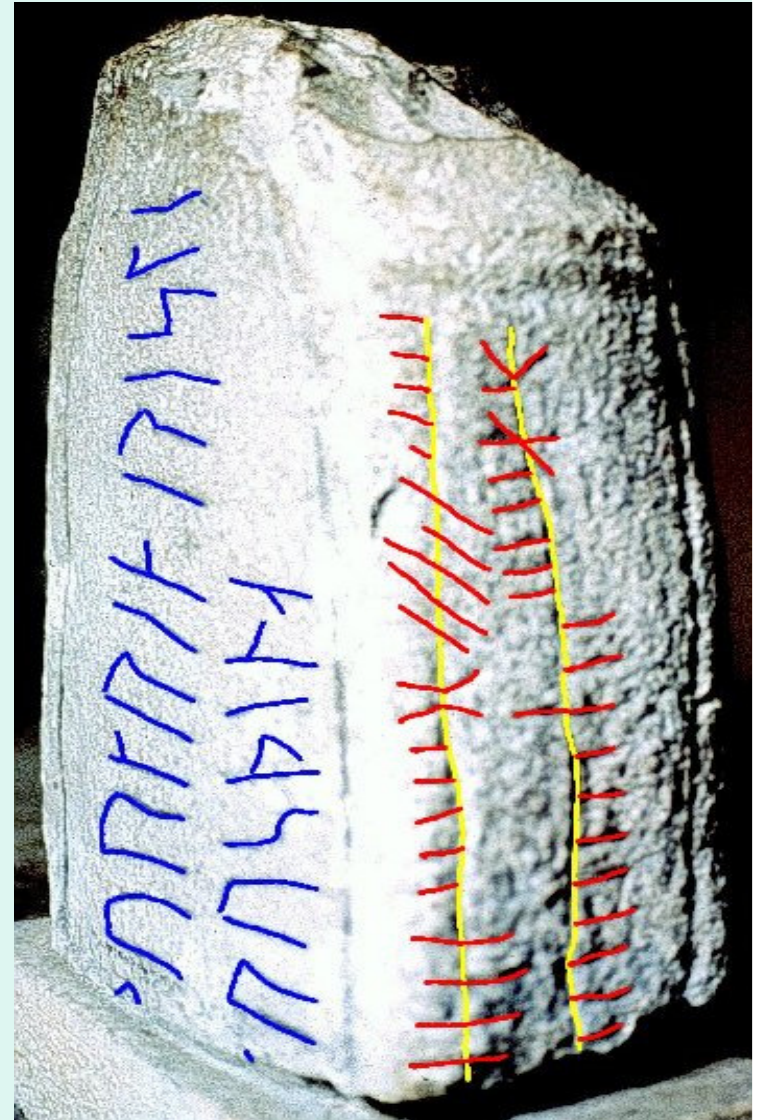
> ÞORGRIM / F + ÞORGRIM +  
 'RORGRIM'

**Þur Kri\* þrisli+`.....**  
*Barnes et al. 1997*



**BEANDACHT**  
**[AR] /**  
**TOROQR**

*Macalister 1945*



# *De bunad imthechta Eóganachta:* “On the origin of the wanderings of the Eóganacht

Origin legend of the *Eoganacht* – ruling families within Munster before rise of Dál Cais – 2 main branches centred on Cashel & Lakes of Killarney

Story is published by Kuno Meyer “The Laud genealogies and tribal histories” (1912)

- Discussed by D. Ó Corráin, (1985) – dated to late ninth/early 10<sup>th</sup> C
- Discussed by F.J. Byrne (2001) – dated to ?c. 900
- Transcribed, translated and discussed by Old Irish Word-list group – 2010/spring 2011
- A story which gives us some insight into Irish/Viking trading relationships?

*i. doluid longes mór, do fheraib hÉirenn a mbunad, edón meic Eogain Táidlig.*

*2. Trí anmand bátar fair .i. Eogan Táidlech & Mug Núadat & Eogan Fitheccach.*

*3. Gabsat a n-Inbiur Cholpthai, tri cóicit fer a llín, immusrála muir aimsera co táncatar Éirind.*

*4. Tráth atchessa di thír doaurchomraicthea fir hÉirenn ar a cenn.*

- Item: a great fleet of ships came to the men of Ireland. [This was] the origin, namely, of the boy-child Éogan Taídlech.
- 2. He had three names, i.e. shining Eoin and Núadu's slave and Eoin Fitheccach.
- 3. They landed in Inber Colpthai [mouth of Boyne], three fifties of men their number, the sea replete in weather (?)conveyed [them] so that they came to Ireland.
- 4. When they were observed from land the men of Ireland were assembled to meet them.

5. *Gabsat ald daingen, ná haithgén nech bélrai araili itagmar.*

6. *Dorónsat essomon trí laa & trí n-oidchi etarru oc coibche biid ar arget ó haés na lunge.*

7. *Inn-accatar ba hamrae a n-indbas arfóitea hi tír & fodálid sechnó hÉirenn*



5. They captured secure high ground. No one understood the language of the other. They are ready to fight.

6-7. They made a truce between them of three days and nights while food was traded for the silver of the men of the ship during which time they [the natives] saw that their wealth was prodigious. They were accepted into the land and they spread throughout Ireland.



8. & gabthu mac a rríg do haltrom ar seótu .i. Eogan Túidlech, co mbo tretell hÉirenn.

9. Tobretha trí dúne dó .i. Fithecc ainm cach aé.

10. Óen díib i nDolaib Glais oc Sléib Smóir, araili inn-Ucht Meic Caechán hi crích Chíarraighi Lúachrai, araili hi tír Delmnae hÚa Néill.



8. And the son of their king was taken into fosterage in exchange for a fee, that is, Eogan Túidlech, so that he was Ireland's darling.

9. Three forts were given to him; item: Fithecc [was] the name of each of them.

10. One of them in Dolab Glas at Sliabh Smóir, another in Ucht Mic Caechán in the territory of Ciarraige Luachra (Nth Kerry), another in the land of the Delbnae of the Uí Néill.

# Conclusions

- Story of Vikings on west coast of Ireland has been minimised by modern historians – possibly due to lack of major excavations in Limerick
- Shannon was the key waterway leading into interior of Ireland and was used extensively by Viking shipping
- Limerick was major political power amongst Viking lords and contended with Dublin and Waterford for leadership of Vikings in Ireland
- Evidence for scattered Viking communities in and around the Shannon estuary in historical documentation, archaeology placenames (see Limerick's Viking Community by Lenore Fischer)
- Once settled, these communities brought in foreign goods to Ireland and exported Irish goods (and people) abroad.

These Viking communities, raided, traded and (probably) intermarried with Irish locals in 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries before Brian Boru rose to power. Though the lordship of King's Island might be disputed by leading Scandinavians from wider region of Irish Sea, it appears they lived surrounded by an ethnically mixed hinterland which was characterised by a mixed Hiberno-Norse culture.

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