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8 Shifting patterns of mobility in the Insular Scandinavian diaspora between the ninth and eleventh centuries

8.1 Introduction

In Insular history, the period from around 800 to 1300 was characterised by a series of increased interactions with Scandinavia, extending from the first recorded viking raids in the late ninth century down to the diplomatic relations between the kings of Norway, England and Scotland in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. This paper combines prosopographical and material approaches to explore the shifting patterns of mobility of members of the Scandinavian diaspora principally associated with Ireland and Britain across several centuries of this socially and materially entangled era. The principal portion of the paper is concerned with the mobility of three individuals: Óláfr of Hlaðir (ob.AD873×878), Óláfr *Cúarán* Sigtryggsson (ob.AD980×981),¹ and Echnarcach Rognvaldsson (ob.AD1064). A full, high-resolution discussion of the evidence for each individual is not possible within the confines of this article, but will be found in a series of pieces related to each figure currently either under review or in preparation.

8.1.1 Elite focus

Due to the nature of the surviving documentary sources, the focus is typically on elites because of their textual visibility. For each actor, only events that are directly linked to that actor are used in the analysis. This means that many actions carried out by groups associated with these actors but without explicit reference to the actors' involvement are (largely) omitted here. However, it is at least worth noting that these actors did not travel alone: their most visible movements are at the heads of armies or fleets, both of which give some indication then of wider patterns of movement. They were agents of forced mobility, involved in the capture and sale of hundreds, if not thousands, of slaves and hostages, in addition to the ousting or subversion of pre-existing populations during the establishment of settler communities. Furthermore,

¹ The use of a multiplication sign (×) is to separate *tpq* and *taq* where uncertainty exists as to the date of an event, extent of a floruit, or minting of a coin. If appearing before a year without a preceding year, this indicates that it is not possible to add a *tpq*.

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the position of such elite agents relied on ideological, economic, military and political power resources,² which may in part be read from the evidence for the flows of material culture in northern Europe.

There is a caveat regarding elite mobility as a proxy for mobility in general, though. In Irish law texts, mobility between the 130 or so *túatha* (“peoples”, extendable to mean “minor kingdoms”) was theoretically confined to kings acting on behalf of their *túath*, and to the upper classes of ecclesiasts, legal specialists and poets.³ Additionally, it also encompassed women moving for marriage, with the mobility of elite women clearly visible in the *Banshenchas* texts found in several manuscripts concerned with the mothers of major Irish kings.⁴

8.1.2 Sources

This paper draws upon a range of sources, principally Irish and English annals/chronicles,⁵ ranked in order of geographical origin and hierarchy of citation in Table 8.1. Unless a published edition uses section numbers (§X), the standard abbreviation will be used to precede the annalistic date, with square brackets used to indicate a date reconstructed either from the use of a kalends or by comparison to other sets of annals. Convention calls for Old English chronicles to be referred to as ASC/A–F +annalistic year, which is done reluctantly, as they are separate chronicles linked by shared exemplars. Primacy is accorded to the *Annals of Ulster* (AU) for Ireland and the *Winchester Chronicle* (ASC/A) for England. Repeat items in other sets of annals are omitted unless containing novel information, which occurs more frequently after the departure of the exemplars (c. 911 and c. 893, respectively). The focus will mainly be on contemporary/near-contemporary texts, but reluctant use will occasionally be made of retrospective texts, including high-medieval Norwegian and Icelandic sagas and synthetic histories, as well as the narrative-chronicle incorporating saga material known as the *Fragmentary Annals of Ireland* (FAI).

² Mann, *Sources of Social Power* 1 (1986).

³ On this large corpus of legal material, see e.g. Kelly, *Guide to Early Irish Law* (1988).

⁴ The Ban-Shenchus. Ed. Dobbs; Connon, *Prosopography of the Early Queens of Tara*.

⁵ Fully discussed in Ó Riagáin, *Familiar Strangers* (2024), where such texts are argued as lying on a spectrum between “iterative annals” with information laid down year by year in the original exemplar(s) and “narrative chronicles” written in a small number of writing campaigns. Any division between the two forms is complicated by copying, glossing and continuation; on the intertextual layering in these texts, see Ó Riagáin, *Becoming Dál Riata* (2024).

Table 8.1: Principal chronicles and sets of annals used in this article, grouped by their likely (modern) country of origin, and ranked in their hierarchy of citation; very few of the conventional names are unproblematic; CCCC = Corpus Christi College Cambridge, TCD = Trinity College Dublin, RIA = Royal Irish Academy, KBR = Royal Library of Belgium, NLW = National Library of Wales, BL = British Library.

Conventional name(s)	Abb.	MS(S)	MS Date	Language(s)	Coverage
Ireland					
Annála Uladh (Annals of Ulster)	AU	Dublin TCD MS 1282; Bodleian MS Rawlinson B.489	15th C	Latin, Old Irish, Middle Irish	AD431–1588
Annals of Inisfallen	AI	Bodleian MS Rawlinson B.503	14th C	Latin, Old Irish, Middle Irish	AD433–1092 to 1390 (cont.)
Annals of Tigernach	AT	Bodleian MS Rawlinson B.488	12th C; 14th C	Latin, Old Irish, Middle Irish	AD489–1178
Chronicon Scotorum (Chronicum Scotorum)	CS	TCD MS 1292	17th C	Latin, Middle Irish, Early Modern Irish	AD353–1150
Annals of Clonmacnoise	AClon	Armagh Robinson MS A; BL MS Add. 4817	17th C; 17th C	Early Modern English (trans.)	Adam–AD1408
Fragmentary Annals of Ireland		KBR MS 5301–5320	17th C	Middle Irish, Early Modern Irish	AD573–919 with lacunae
Annála Rioghachta Éireann (Annals of the Four Masters)	AFM	Dublin RIA MS C iii 3; Dublin UCD MS A13; etc.	17th C	Early Modern Irish	The Flood–AD1616
Frankia					
Annales Regni Francorum (Royal Frankish Annals)	ARF	multiple see Kurze 1895: v–xix	9th C–	Latin	AD741–839
Annales Bertiniani (Annals of Saint-Bertin)	ASB	Saint-Omer MS 706; KBR MS 6439–51 (B); etc.	11th C; 11th C	Latin	AD741–882
Annales Fuldenses (Annals of Fulda)	AF	multiple see Reuter 1992:2–4	10th C–	Latin	AD741–901

Table 8.1 (continued)

Conventional name(s)	Abb.	MS(S)	MS Date	Language(s)	Coverage
England					
Winchester Chronicle	ASC/A	CCCC MS 173	12th C	Old English	60BC–AD1070
Abingdon Chronicle I	ASC/B	British Library Cotton Tiberius A.vi	11th C	Old English	60BC–AD977
Abingdon Chronicle II	ASC/C	BL Cotton Tiberius B.i	12th C	Old English	60BC–AD1066
Worcester Chronicle	ASC/D	BL Cotton Tiberius B.iv	11th C	Old English	60BC–AD1080
Peterborough Chronicle	ASC/E	Bodleian MS Laud 636	12th C	Old English	60BC–AD1154
Canterbury Chronicle	ASC/F	BL Cotton Domitian A.viii	12th C	Old English, Latin	60BC–AD1058
Chronicon Æthelweardi	–	BL Cotton Otho A.x (damaged)	11th C	Latin	Adam–AD975
CCCC.139 Annals	–	CCCC MS 139	12th C	Latin	AD888–957
Historia Regum	HR	CCCC MS 139	12th C	Latin	AD732–1129
Northern Britain					
Chronicle of the Kings of Alba	CKA	Paris BNF MS latin 4126	13–14th C	Latin	c.AD852–995
Man					
Chronica Regum Manniae et Insularum	CRMI	BL Cotton MS Julius A VII	13th C	Latin	AD1016–1374
Wales					
Annales Cambriae (A)	AC/A	British Library Harleian 3856	12th C	Latin	AD445–954
Brut y Tywysogion	Brut	NLW Peniarth MS 20; Oxford Jesus College MS 111	14th C; 14th C	Middle Welsh	AD662–1332

8.1.3 Nomenclature

In terms of naming, I will be drawing on sources written in Latin, Old and Middle Irish, Old English and Old Norse. I will refer to the actors consistently using one form, in accor-

dance with what is likely to have been their predominant daily language – unless I need to emphasise something. This comes with the caveat that thirteenth-century forms will be used for ninth-/tenth-century Old Norse names (so Óláfr rather than Áleifr or **Anulaibaz*). For Irish surnames, lower-case nominative singular *ua* + genitive is used for grandsons, title-case *Ua* + genitive for surnames indicating descent from a more distant ancestor, and the same occurs with *mac* (“son [of]”) and *Mac*.⁶ Polity names are also quite subjective. For example, the use of Scotland rather than Alba for the principal kingdom in northern Britain is largely unjustified prior to the twelfth century, but so is the use of Alba before the tenth century to refer just to the northern part of Britain rather than all of Britain. Going further, a figure may be *rí* (“[a/the] king”) of *Innsi Gall* (“[the] islands of foreigners [i.e. the Scandinavian diaspora]”) in Irish sources but be described as *Suðreyjarkonung* (“[a/the] king of the southern islands [Hebrides]”) in Icelandic/Norwegian texts, *rex Insularum* (“[a/the] king of [the] islands”) in Latin texts, and “king of the Isles” in modern English. The Isle of Man is usually but not always included in these designations, and there may be several kings of this area at the same time.

8.2 Material mobility

It is important to keep in mind that the movement of material culture requires the movement of human agents, even if such movement does not always imply (permanent) migration, and most often occurs along chains of human interaction, rather than moving with a single agent. Similar to the surviving textual evidence, much of the material culture used to assess mobility in the period around 790 to 1310 is also largely associated with the upper social strata. This material can include coins, ingots, bullion jewellery, hacksilver, personal adornments, mounts, strap-ends, bridle fittings, and a range of other forms of repurposed metalwork, all of which are more archaeologically visible than other high-value goods such as salt, textiles and furs. These materials could have moved both directly, with elites being responsible for their (re)distribution within their social pyramids, or indirectly via their sponsorship of systems and loci of exchange. The growing corpus of published research on Scandinavian emporia, such as Ribe in Jutland and Kaupang in Skiringssal in Vestfold,⁷ has demonstrated the mediation between local and transregional trade via participation in wider networks. This indicates the importance of thinking in terms of chains of interaction rather than just long-distance voyages.

The appearance of repurposed objects of Insular origin, such as mounts and jewellery, in furnished burials in Scandinavia is one particularly visible material trace of

⁶ The nominative plural and genitive singular form is *uí/Uí* + genitive, often used for entire lineages, e.g. the Uí Néill, descendants of Niall (Noígíallach), with *meic/Meic* the equivalent for *mac* + X names. This is discussed at more length in Ó Ríagáin, *Becoming Dál Riata* (2024), 26–27.

⁷ See e.g. *Sindbæk*, *Northern Emporium* (2022/2023); *Skre*, *Things from the Town* (2009).

mobility in this period.⁸ However, this flow seems to have occurred mainly in the ninth century, up until a shift from extractive practices to colonial settlement in Ireland and Britain.⁹ It is striking that there are so few hoards of exclusively ninth-century coins in Ireland contemporary to this shift,¹⁰ even in Northern Ireland, where metal-detecting in areas not subject to protection by heritage legislation is legal, unlike in the Republic of Ireland. This shift from raiding to settlement corresponds to the first peak in the flows into Europe of silver *darāhim* from mints controlled by the Abbasid Caliphate,¹¹ although this peak seems to have been much smaller than the peak in the flow of *darāhim* from Samanid-controlled mints in the tenth century. The number of such coins in Ireland and Britain is low,¹² and it is also comparatively low in Norway. However, the figures are increasing, especially at emporia in Scandinavia, e.g. Kaupang (92 *darāhim*),¹³ and camps associated with the various armies active in Britain and Ireland in the period c. 835–900, e.g. Torksey in Lincolnshire (144 fragments of *darāhim*)¹⁴ and Woodstown in Co. Waterford (one fragment).¹⁵ This leaves the question somewhat open as to whether the Scandinavian diaspora in the North Atlantic participated intensely in the networks of exchange that brought hundreds of thousands of coins to the Baltic region. Considering that isotopic work currently being done on silver objects in Scandinavia has demonstrated the almost exclusive use of silver from Abbasid- and Samanid-controlled mints and mines,¹⁶ Insular objects may yet demonstrate a similar signature, even if sources of silver in England or Frankia cannot be ruled out either.

Considering the number of raids and tribute payments reported in Frankia in the 830s and 840s,¹⁷ it is somewhat surprising that the overall number of Carolingian coins known from Scandinavia decreases rather than increases in this period,¹⁸ albeit starting from an already low figure. Among the contents of the Westerkliof-1 hoard (1996, deposited c.850), are silver ingots, arm-rings, and 78 coins, all of which would

8 At least 300 such objects – principally from Norway but also from Sweden and Denmark – are known, but the number of known examples is ever increasing due to metal-detecting activity, see e.g. *Wamers*, *Insularer Metallschmuck* (1985); *Heen-Pettersen*, *Mellom de britiske Øyer og midt-Norge* (2013); *Mikkelsen*, *Looting or Missioning* (2019).

9 This is the topic of my 2022–2024 project at University College Dublin, “Scandinavia’s Insular Age”, funded by the Irish Research Council.

10 *Dolley*, *Fourth Find* (1967); see also e.g. *Hall*, *Check List* (1974); *Sheehan*, *Early Viking Age Silver* (1998).

11 *Jankowiak*, *Dirham Flows* (2021).

12 *Horne*, *A Viking Market Kingdom* (2022).

13 *Kilger*, *Kaupang from Afar* (2008).

14 *Hadley/Richards*, *Torksey* (2016).

15 *Russell/Hurley*, *Woodstown* (2014).

16 *Kershaw et al.*, *Scale of dirham imports* (2021).

17 *Cooijmans*, *Monarchs and Hydrarchs* (2020).

18 *Coupland*, *Raiders* (2011); *Coupland*, *Frankish Tribute Payments* (2000).

seem to have come from Frankia with the exception of a small number of *darāhim*. Considering this content, it may be that some of the groups active in Frankia became self-sustaining by the 840s, with little material flowing back to Scandinavia.¹⁹

The advent of minting at Dublin, Sigtuna, Lund and Norway occurred around 995.²⁰ While this may have been a reaction to the fall-off in the supply and quality of Samanid silver from the 960s onwards, it also corresponds to the growing imperial power of the kings of Denmark that would shape eleventh-century Scandinavian and Insular politics. This resulted in a major flow of English coins into Scandinavia and the Baltic, not least due to the tribute payments imposed on Æpelræd and general taxation in the era of Knútr. The latter may be the vector by which early eleventh-century Dublin coins ended up in the eastern Baltic.

Not all material flows were necessarily related to predation, with emulative practices spreading via migration streams also possible. Examples of this include the adoption of ring-headed pins and contemporary Insular forms of penannular brooch both among the Scandinavian diaspora and in Scandinavia itself, where excavated evidence has indicated there a marked shift from imports being buried with women to locally produced examples being buried with men.²¹

8.3 Individual mobility

8.3.1 The worlds of Guðrøðr Óláfsson and Eógan Mac Dubgaill

Before moving onto the three main case studies forming the central focus of this chapter, two high-medieval figures will first be discussed. Due to the survival of a wide range of (near-)contemporary references to their movements, their biographies can frame the range of possibilities for movement potentially open to the three earlier figures, some of which might have occurred in the gaps that appear in the data related to them. Furthermore, Guðrøðr and Eógan's mobility may itself be regarded as the outcome of the processes at work earlier, not least the establishment and development of Scandinavian settler communities in Britain and Ireland. However, it must also be acknowledged that their era was characterised by the increasing and competing authority of kings in Norway, England, Alba and Ireland, which may have necessitated personal visits to these areas to a degree not required in preceding centuries.

¹⁹ Discussed Coupland, *Raiders* (2011), 123–124.

²⁰ Woods, *Economy and Authority* (2013); *Gullbekk*, Norway (2011).

²¹ Tsigaridas *Glørstad*, *Ringspennen og kappen* (2010); Tsigaridas *Glørstad*, *Sign of the Times* (2012); Pedersen, *Dead Warriors in Living Memory* (2014), 132–133. For further examples of transculturation in relation to fashions in personal adornment, see Kershaw, *Viking Identities* (2013).

Guðrøðr Óláfsson – at times king of Man and/or the Isles (ob.CRMI1187) and the great-great-grandson of Óláfr Cuarán – was active in Man, the Hebrides, Norway, England, Orkney, Alba and Ireland. He submitted to Ingi Haraldsson in Norway before returning to Man after the killing of his father, Óláfr Guðrøðarson (CRMI1142–3[=AD1152–3]). He fought in Dublin against the overking Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn (CRMI1144 [=AD1156]), but whether he was among the fleets of *Gall-Gáedil*, Arran, Kintyre, Man and Alba in Muirchertach's naval hosting against Toirdelbach Ua Conchobair remains unclear (AFM1145). As a grandson of Guðrøðr *Cró-Bhán* Ívarsson (ob.AU1095), he had a claim on the kingship of Dublin, in addition to Man and *Innsi Gall*. Óláfr Guðrøðarson had been under the protection of both Magnús *berføettr* of Norway and Henry I of England, and Guðrøðr kept up these relations with their grandsons, Ingi and Henri II. According to CRMI1102, Guðrøðr's mother was Affreca, daughter of Fergus of Galloway, and his sister was married to Somhairle/Sumarliði of Argyll. The marriage of Ingibjörg, daughter of Jarl Hákon Pálsson of Orkney, to Óláfr *Suðureyjakonungr* is attested in an interpolated genealogy in the B-text of *Fagrskinna*.²² It is worth noting that Guðrøðr was declared king by the *principes* of the Isles on arriving in Orkney from Norway (CRMI1143[=AD1153]), rather than in the Hebrides where these *principes* were based.

Guðrøðr was forced into a partition of *Innsi Gall* (CRMI1156) before being ousted completely from Man by an alliance of his rivals in *Innsi Gall* and Dublin: Somhairle/Sumarliði, Dubgall Sumarliðarson, and Þórfinnr Óttarsson, which led him to flee to Norway (CRMI1158). En route to Norway, he was given armour by Henry II of England and was declared as in Henry's pay.²³ Back in Norway, Guðrøðr *Suðureyjakonungr* is reported as having abandoned Ingi in favour of Hákon Sigurðarson, resulting in the death of Ingi on the ice near Oslo in February 1161.²⁴ After the death of Somhairle, Guðrøðr returned from Norway and re-established his rule on Man by blinding his brother Rognvaldr Óláfsson, who had seized the kingship the same year (CRMI1164). There is evidence of further finances from Henry II in AD1165,²⁵ and, at some point, Guðrøðr married a granddaughter of Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn (CRMI1176[=AD1177]). Guðrøðr may also have taken part in – or at least supported – the failed AD1171 attack on Dublin led by another Irish overking, Ruaidhrí Ua Conchobair.²⁶

²² *Fagrskinna*. Ed. *Finlay*, 302.

²³ Given armour by Henry II in 1158, RLPTL (Patent Roll Tower of London) 4 Henry II; in pay of king, 1158, RLPTL 4 Henry II; in: CDRS-1. Ed. *Bain*, 9 §56, §60.

²⁴ Hákonar saga §17. Ed. *Vigfusson*, where he fled the battle after signalling to Hákon's men.

²⁵ Liberate mentioned in Pipe Roll Tower of London 11 Henry II roll 3, in CDRS-1. Ed. *Bain*, 13 §102.

²⁶ This support is only mentioned in *Expugnatio Hibernica*. Ed. *Scott/Martin*. Vol. 1, §21; cf. AU1171, AT[1171], AFM1171; that he was an ally of Ruaidhrí here might indicate that it may have been another faction from Man that took part in Muirchertach's hosting against Ruaidhrí's father Toirdelbach; it may also be regarded as unusual that Guðrøðr would oppose Henry II, having been supported by Henry in the previous two decades, but of course alliances can always shift.

Eógan son of Donnchad son of Dubgall was similarly caught up in the political elimination process characterised by the competing imperial projects of Scottish, English, Irish, and Norwegian kings. Eógan's grandfather Dubgall's mother was the sister of Guðrøðr Óláfsson (CRMI1098[=AD1102–1103]). Like Guðrøðr, Eógan went to England and Norway to obtain the support of their respective kings. Unlike Guðrøðr, part of Eógan's core territory, Argyll, was in the kingdom of Alba, and there is no surviving evidence that Eógan was ever active in Ireland.

Eógan's mobility is perhaps best indicated in the range of names applied to him across several sources: he is *Eugenius miles filius Duncani* in his own charters;²⁷ *Oenus de Argæthel* in Matthew Paris;²⁸ *Jón Dungaðarson, konungr av Suðreyjar* in Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar;²⁹ *Johannes filius Dungaldi, rex Insularum* (CRM1250[=AD1248×1250]); *Evynus filius Duncani* in a Scottish inquisition post mortem;³⁰ and *Eugenius de Ergadia* in a series of English letters patent of Henry III,³¹ as well as in his last ever appearance in a Scottish ecclesiastical charter.³²

Eógan and his paternal second-cousin Dubgall mac Ruaidhrí went to Hákon Hákonarson of Norway in 1248 to petition to each be made king of the northern part of the Hebrides ("yfir nyðra hlut Suðreyja"): it was granted to Eógan and Dubgall remained with Hákon.³³ This was shortly before the death of Eógan's third cousin Haraldr Óláfsson, king of Man and the Outer Hebrides and grandson of Guðrøðr Óláfsson, who was also in Norway at the time and married to Hákon's daughter, so it could refer to the northern portion of the southern Hebrides.

Having left Norway, Eógan invaded Man proclaiming himself king of the Isles, having been sent by Hákon following the drowning at sea of Haraldr, but was expelled.³⁴ Afterwards, Eógan seems to have met Alexander II of Scotland under the protection of four earls, but would not give up four castles that he held of Hákon, according to *Hákonar saga*.³⁵ Presumably, these were the maritime Cairnburgh, Dùn Chonail, Aros and Duart, rather than Dunstaffnage, Achanduin or Castle Coeffin in the core Meic Dubgaill ancestral holding of Lorn and held of the kings of Scotland. Eógan fled to Lewis and Alexander II invaded Argyll before falling ill and dying on

27 22 May 1240 grant to Lismore. Ed. *Duncan/Brown*, 219 §4. Calendared in *People of Medieval Scotland: 1093–1371 [PoMS] Document 3/33/1*, poms.ac.uk/record/source/2747/# (accessed 06.01.2025).

28 Matthew Paris, *Chronica Maiora*. Ed. *Luard*. Vol. 5, 88–89 s.a. 1249. See *Duncan/Brown*, Argyll (1957), 208–209.

29 Sturla Þórðarson, *Hákonar Saga*. Ed. *Vigfusson*, 144 §168, 255 §259, 256–257 §260.

30 CDRS-4. Ed. *Bain*, 385–386 §2.

31 21 and 23 September RLPTL 39 Henry III m. 3[×2] and m. 8 in cedula, CDRS-1. Ed. *Bain*, 387–388 §2014, §§2017–2018.

32 Charters of Inchaffray. Ed. *Lindsay/Dowden/Thomson*, 201–203 §96; Earls of Strathearn. Ed. *Neville*, vol. 2, 98–100 §53.

33 Sturla Þórðarson, *Hákonar saga*. Ed. *Vigfusson*, 255–257 §§259–60.

34 CRM1250[=AD1249]; Sturla Þórðarson, *Hákonar saga*. Ed. *Vigfusson*, 259 §264.

35 Sturla Þórðarson, *Hákonar saga*. Ed. *Vigfusson*, 259–261 §265.

Kerrera in 1249.³⁶ Eógan of Argyll was taken into Henry III of England’s protection in 1255 and subsequently reinstated.³⁷

8.3.2 Óláfr of Hlaðir

Overview

Table 8.2: Actions and locations attributable to Óláfr of Laithlinn.

Óláfr, active 853–c.873×878; son of king of Laithlinn				
Event	No.	Location	Movement	References
<i>Born</i>	0	Laithlinn?		none
Arrived in Ireland, submission of <i>Gaill</i> to him, tribute taken from Irish	1	Ireland	Laithlinn to Ireland	AU853, CS[853]
<i>Four-year gap</i>				
Allied with Ívarr and defeated the <i>Gall-Goídil</i> and Caittil or Cathal Find (Cenél Fiachach)	2	Mumu	unknown to Ireland	AU857, CS[857]
Allied with Ívarr and Cerball of Osraige and defeated <i>Gall-Goídil</i> and Cenél Fiachach in Ara-Tíre (north Mumu)	3	Ara-Tíre, Mumu	within Ireland	CS[858]
Invaded Mide with Ívarr and Cerball of Osraige	4	Mide	within Ireland	AU859
<i>Four-year gap</i>				
Plundered Brega with Ívarr and Ausle, and Lorcán son of Cathal of Mide	5	Brega	within Ireland	AU863
Drowned Conchobar of Mide at Clonard	6	Clonard, Mide	within Ireland	AU864, CS[864]
Plundered Fortriu and Alba with Ausle (= Ásgísl)	7	Alba	Ireland to Alba	AU866, CKA [AD864–5]
Ásgísl killed by <i>fratres</i> and/or in parricide (Óláfr? Ívarr?)	8	unknown	Alba? Ireland?	AU867

³⁶ CRMI1249; CMel1249; *Chronica de Mailros*. Ed. *Stevenson*, 177–178; *Duncan/Brown*, Argyll (1957), 217–218; *Brown*, *Wars of Scotland* (2004), 80–81; *Woolf*, *From Pictland to Alba* (2007), 84–85.

³⁷ 21 and 23 September RLPTL 39 Henry III m. 3[×2] and m. 8 in cedula, CDRS-1. Ed. *Bain*, 387–388 §2014, §§2017–2018.

Table 8.2 (continued)

Óláfr, active 853–c.873×878; son of king of Laithlinn				
Event	No.	Location	Movement	References
Óláfr's <i>dún</i> at Clondalkin burned by Cennétig son of Gaitíne of the Loígse	9	Clondalkin, Dublin	absent	AU867
Committed treachery against Lismore, Co. Waterford, liberation of Martán from him	10	Déisi, Mumu	Alba to Ireland or within Ireland	AI[867]
Plundered Armagh	11	Armagh, Airgíalla	Alba to Ireland or within Ireland	AU869, CS[869]
Laid siege to Alt Clut for four months with Ívarr, plundered afterwards	12	Alt Clut	Alt Clut	AU870, AC/A870, Brut870
Brought large number of Angles, Britons and Picts as captives back from Alba with Ívarr	13	Alt Clut and Dublin	Alba and Alt Clut to Ireland	AU871, CS[871]
Killed in Alba by Causantín while taking tribute	14	Alba	Ireland to Alba	CKA[AD873×878]

Interpreting Óláfr's movements

As can be seen in Table 8.2, at least fourteen events can be directly associated with Óláfr, thirteen of which involve movement of some sort and the other occurring at Clondalkin while he was elsewhere. His main reported spheres of activity are in the Irish kingdoms of Mumu, Mide, Brega, Laigin, In Fochla and Airgíalla, and the northern British kingdoms of Alt Clut and *Fortriu.³⁸ This may be a reflection of the partiality of the surviving sources, but, even so, the evidence does indicate that his activities for most of his reported career were in Ireland, with a shift of focus in northern Britain occurring in the later 860s. There is nothing to indicate that he took part in the composite army—or armies?—active in England in the 860s and 870s, even if one of his principal allies, Ívarr, does seem to have been one of the leaders of that army.

The gaps in his reported activities are potentially instructive, with the caveat that general references to activities by *Gaill* (“foreigners”) or *Gennti* (“gentiles”) in Ireland may have involved Óláfr without his actually being named. Furthermore, annals tend to report what the author–compiler thought were the major events of the year of which they were informed; this may mean that Óláfr was involved in events regarded as “minor” or perhaps not interesting enough to warrant reporting, or of which the annalist was simply unaware.

³⁸ This is a reconstructed nominative, hence the asterisk.

The biggest such gap relates to what Óláfr may have done between being born and arriving in Ireland. Where he was born is unknowable, but it is likely that he spent some of his life in his father's kingdom, referred to as Laithlind in Irish sources. As will be discussed presently, there is circumstantial evidence that places Óláfr in West Frankia either before or after arriving in Ireland. This brings us to the second gap, between his arrival in Ireland in 853 and the events related to his alliance with another Scandinavian, Ívarr, against the Mide kings Máel Sechnaill (Clann Colmáin) and Cathal Find (Cenél Fiachach) and their allies the *Gall-Goídil* ("foreign Gaels", i.e. Gaels from outside Ireland, most likely displaced by the establishment of a settler community in the Hebrides).³⁹ The third gap may be related to the nature of how events were reported, as many of the actions of the Scandinavian settler community in Ireland in the early 860s are consistent with Óláfr's actions before and after this gap (859–863). However, he may also have been absent from Ireland and Britain in this period. Without recourse to Scottish (or northern English?) sources, the gap between Óláfr's return to Dublin from northern Britain in 871 and his death in the mid-870s would be somewhat puzzling, and indeed it has prompted much speculation in Ireland from as early as the eleventh century.

Origins and arrival in Ireland

Plugging some of these gaps might help us more fully understand Óláfr's mobility and its ramifications. AU853 describes "Amlaip mac riġ Laitilinde" as coming to Ireland,⁴⁰ taking the submission of the *Gaill Érenn* ("foreigners of Ireland") and tribute from the *Goídil* ("Gaels").⁴¹ Discounting late and unreliable material in FAI, this Óláfr, son of the king of "Laithlind",⁴² is the seventh figure from Scandinavia to be named in surviving Irish annals likely to have been recorded contemporarily, and the second to be given a point of origin (Table 8.3). Jarl Þórir's familial relationship to Óláfr is unknowable,⁴³ but it is striking that two elite figures from the same place were named as involved in events in Ireland. There is no contemporary evidence linking the other early figures to Óláfr or to each other, or indeed to the next two leaders to be named in Irish sources: Ívarr (first ref. AU857) and Ásgísl (first ref. AU863), both of whom

³⁹ *Macniven*, *Vikings in Islay* (2015), 107, 114. For an overview of the dynamic usage of the term, see *Clancy*, *The Gall-Ghàidheil and Galloway* (2008).

⁴⁰ Italics within a quotation from a primary source indicate editorial expansions. Outside a quotation, they are used to indicate words or phrases found in a primary source where the grammar has been adjusted to accord with the syntax of the sentence in which they appear.

⁴¹ Transcribing exactly, TCD MS 1282 fol. 42r has "Amlai¹ p m riġ laitlīde", whereas Rawlinson B.489 fol. 24r has "Amlaip mē riġ laitlīne".

⁴² The forms Laithlinn and Laithlind can be regarded as interchangeable, similar to "nn" versus "nd" in Old Irish in general. The form "Lothlinn" is perhaps more difficult to explain away.

⁴³ Contra e.g. *Valante*, *Family Relics* (2013), 103, 105, who has Þórir as the son of the king of Laithlinn.

were allies of Óláfr's, with later traditions claiming that the three were brothers (FAI §347).

The location of Laithlinn has attracted much debate from as early as the eleventh century.⁴⁴ It appears four times in surviving texts: twice in AU848 and AU853, once in a poem of unknown date attached to AFM864, and in a poem preserved in the top margin of St Gallen Stiftsbibliothek MS 904 p. 112 (composed in 850/1) that portrays the scribe's relief that a storm meant that he would not be in danger from the "læchraid lain óa Lothlind" ("fierce warriors from Lothlind").⁴⁵ Uses of Laithlinn were hypercorrected to Middle Irish "Lochlann" in the sets of annals descended from the **Clonmacnoise Chronicle*,⁴⁶ either due to the correction being in that exemplar, or the later scribes making the change. Laithlinn and Lochlann are not direct equivalents.⁴⁷ AT[1058] might possibly be the earliest surviving contemporary usage of Lochlann as a specific toponym,⁴⁸ possibly as a borrowing of "Rogaland",⁴⁹ though it may also have been a mythological term retrofitted as the homeland of the Scandinavian diaspora.⁵⁰ Lochlann was certainly in use as a personal name in the tenth century, e.g. Lochland son of Máel Sechnaill (ob.AI[983]).

Laithlinn would seem to combine Old Irish *lind* or *linn* ("pool or body of water") with a specific derived from Old Norse, most probably a nominalisation of *hlaða* ("to load") and thus most likely refers to Hlaðir (now "Lade"), and hence to the area associated with the Þrændar around Trondheimsfjorden.⁵¹ The jarls of Hlaðir are accorded a prominent role in sagas and synoptic histories composed in Iceland and Norway several centuries later, and it is important to note that Adam of Bremen credits Jarl Hákon as the first ruler over all of Norway.⁵² Furthermore, the west coast of Norway has the highest density of material culture of Insular origin found repurposed as personal adornments,⁵³ which hints at significant early entanglements.

44 Summarised in Ó *Riagáin*, *Colonialism, Continuity and Change* (2020), 471–473.

45 On the dating of the manuscript: Ó *Néill*, *Irish observance* (2000), where the date of completion of 851 is proposed based on the day that Easter fell that year, with several glosses throughout indicating that it was worked on over winter and spring 850/1.

46 *Grabowski/Dumville*, *Chronicles and Annals* (1984).

47 *Kruse*, *Laithlind* (2015); *Kruse*, *The Norway to Be* (2017).

48 In Modern Irish it is the term for Scandinavia, with *Lochlannaigh* used similarly to English "Viking".

49 Via **Rochlann* and **Rochland*, *Marstrander*, *Lochlann* (1911); *Marstrander*, *Bidrag* (1915), 56–58.

50 *Ní Mhaonaigh*, *Literary Lochlann* (2006); *Kruse*, *The Norway to Be* (2017), 205–208.

51 As proposed by *Egon Wamers*, *Insular Finds* (1998), 19; see also *Etchingham*, *Location of Historical Laithlinn* (2007), 28.

52 As pointed out by *Gazzoli*, *Hákon Jarl* (2019).

53 See e.g. *Wamers*, *Insularer Metallschmuck* (1985), 198.

Table 8.3: Scandinavian leaders named in Irish annals between the 830s and 850s; superscript ^F used to indicate that an item is likely to be fictional.

Figure	Floruit	Position	Deeds	References
Saxulfr (Saxolb)	×837	<i>toísech</i> (leader of) the <i>Gaill</i>	killed by the Ciannachta	AU837, CS[837]
Þórgisl (Tuirgéis)	×845	(leader of) <i>Gaill</i> of Lough Ree	(killing of Tolarg, lord of Fella by <i>Gaill</i> of Lough Ree; establishment <i>dúnad</i> on Lough Ree by Tuirgéis, followed by plundering of Connacht and Mide, Clonmacnoise, Clonfert, Terryglass and Lorrha raided; capture of Tuirgéis by Máel Sechnaill, who drowned him in Lough Owel	CS[844] AU845, CS[845], AClon842, AFM843; AU845
Hákon (Agonn)	×847	(a leader of) <i>Gaill</i> of Dublin	defeat of Agonn by Cerball mac Dunlainge (Osraige), with 1200 killed, AFM has this as defeat of <i>Gaill Átha Cliath</i>	AU847, CS[847], AFM845
Þórir	×848	jarl and <i>tánaise</i> (second/ deputy to) <i>rí Laithlinne</i>	killed with 200 at battle of Sciath Nechtain (Laigin) against Ólchobar (Mumu) and Lorcán mac Cellaig (Laigin)	AU848, AI[848], CS[848], AClon847, AFM846
Rauðúlfr (Rodolb)	×855	(leader of) Lochlannaig	led armies into Osraige, defeated (probably fictional) ^F	FAI §249
Ormr	851×856	<i>toísech</i> of the <i>Dubgaill</i> or <i>Dubgennti</i>	allied with Osraige against <i>Lochlannaig</i> ; ^F allied with Osraige and Mumu against <i>Lochlannaig</i> , guest at Tara with Cerball; ^F killed by Rhodri son of Mervfn, king of Gwynedd	FAI §251; FAI §254; AU856
Sveinn or Hásteinn (Stain)	×852	(leader of) <i>Finngennti</i>	took flight from <i>Dubgennti</i> at Carlingford after attacking with 160 ships	AU852
Jarnkné (Iercne)	×852	(leader of) <i>Finngennti</i>	beheaded by <i>Dubgennti</i> at Carlingford after attacking with 160 ships	AU852
Óláfr (Amhlaiþ)	853×875		Table 8.2	

Early years in Ireland

It is difficult to determine what brought Óláfr to Ireland and where he arrived from. Revenge for the killing of Jarl Þórir may have been one motivation or, alternatively, an attempt to (re)assert Laithlinn leadership over the Scandinavian groups active in

Ireland.⁵⁴ The arrival of 140 ships of the *muinntir ríge Gall* (“people/adherents/supporters of (the) king of foreigners”) to impose the obedience of the *Gaill* already in Ireland (AU849) may have been an action taken by Laithlinn, but it may also have been one of a number of other kings in Scandinavia, or a Scandinavian group active in Frankia or Frisia. It is usually presumed that Óláfr was acting in Ireland on behalf of his father in 853. However, arriving in Ireland with a large force may also have been the action of a loser in a succession dispute, similar to Haraldr *klakk* Hálfðanarson after failing to establish himself as a king of Danes a generation earlier (ARF823; ARF827; AF852). For all we know, Óláfr may already have been active elsewhere after leaving Laithlinn but before arriving in Ireland. Very little evidence survives as to what his relationship was to Laithlinn after 853, and it does not seem as though he used the wealth amassed in Ireland and northern Britain as a springboard to succeed his father. Of course, it may be that his father and family had also been ousted from Laithlinn prior to 853.

Óláfr in Frankia?

Óláfr had two sons that we know of and was married at least twice after arriving in Ireland. “Oistin” (Eysteinn or Hásteinn), was killed in an unstated location as *rex Nordmannorum* by Hálfðanr (AU875) during the infighting after the deaths of Óláfr (CKA, 873×875) and Hálfðanr’s probable brother, Ívarr (AU873). According to AFM866[=AD868], Carlus Ólafsson was killed in a major battle in Ireland between an alliance of the kings of the Cenél nEógain and Connacht against the Laigin, *Gaill* and men of Brega. Carlus is not named in any other account of the battle (e.g. AU868), but all accounts have the *Gaill* involved. It is worth noting that “fail Tomair 7 claidim Carlusa” (“[the] ring of Þórir and [the] sword of Carlus”), seized by Máel Sechnaill of Clann Colmáin (AT[995]), seem to have been important insignia to the rulers of Dublin in the late tenth century.⁵⁵ The sword of Carlus was subsequently part of the ransom for securing the release of Óláfr Sigtryggsson after being captured by Mathgamán ua Riacáin, king of Brega (AU1029), and it was handed over to Diarmait mac Máel-na-mBó of Laigin as part of a fine for Conchbar ua Máel-Sechnaill killing Gallbrat ua Cerbaill (CS[1058]). It may also have been the “sword of the son of the jarl/earl” (AU1165) that was among the treasures given to Muirchertach Ua Lochlainn of the Cenél nEógain in return for the kingship of the Ulaid.

It is likely that the sword was associated with the same Carlus for whom Óláfr’s son was named, which would seem to have been either Charlemagne or Charles the Bald. The sword may have been a gift to cement an alliance, with the son potentially named to commemorate this, even if the possibility that Carlus Ólafsson had a Frankish mother cannot be ruled out. Óláfr or his father may have been among the “poach-

⁵⁴ Ashman Rowe, *Vikings in the West* (2012), 122–123.

⁵⁵ For an overview of the debate, see *Valante*, *Family Relics* (2013).

ers turned gamekeepers” deployed by ninth-century Frankish rulers to shield their kingdoms from viking incursions, with varying levels of success.⁵⁶

With this in mind, it is important consider one of the few hoards of exclusively ninth-century coins in Ireland. The small group of coins reported from Mullaghboden House near Ballymore Eustace in Co. Kildare all seem to be from Aquitaine in the 830s and 840s, leading to a proposition that the coins were deposited there by the *Vestfoldingar* noted as having captured Nantes in 843.⁵⁷ However, there is nothing in the sources to indicate that the *Vestfoldingar* were the only group raiding or settling in Aquitaine and Brittany in this period, aside from Charles the Bald’s own campaign there in 843 (ASB843). Cooijmans outlines how multiple distinct groups were active between Aquitaine and Frisia in the 840s and 850s.⁵⁸ Even if the Mullaghboden depositor had taken part in a Vestfold-led campaign, their allegiance may have shifted to another group later that decade, or the packet of coins may have changed hands intact between Frankia and Ireland, with the possibility that some or all of the Vestfold group took part in a campaign led by another group. Another option is that the coins (and the sword?) were brought back by the emissaries of the unnamed Irish king congratulated by Charles the Bald for his victories over Scandinavians in 848 (ASB848). Considering the centuries of trade between Ireland and Aquitaine indicated by Eware pottery⁵⁹ and hagiographical evidence, the coins may also have moved through trade networks to arrive in Ireland.

This is important to consider to avoid the coin evidence being used to support the identification of Óláfr of Hlaðir as the Óláfr *inn hvíti* of Oppland or Vestfold supposedly active in Ireland and northern Britain, who appears in e.g. *Íslendingabók*, *Landnámabók* and *Ynglinga Saga*.⁶⁰ Smyth proposes that many of the achievements assigned to Haraldr *hárfağri* son of Hálfðanr *svarti* (“the black”) by twelfth- and thirteenth-century authors – not least subduing pirates in Orkney and imposing his overlordship on the settler communities in northern Britain – were originally those of

56 Coupland, *From Poachers to Gamekeepers* (1998).

57 Dolley, 1871 Viking-Age Find (1961); Dolley, *A Fourth Find* (1967), 32–35; see *Annales Engolismenses*. Ed. Pertz, 486; cf. *Annales Bertiniari*. Ed. Waitz, 29; *Annals of St-Bertin*. Ed. Nelson, 55–56, where the attack on Nantes by “pyratae Nordmandorum”, who went on to devastate western Aquitaine and take up residence on a “certain island” that may have been Noirmoutier, L’Île de Ré or another island in the *archipel charantais*.

58 E.g. Cooijmans, *Monarchs and Hydrarchs* (2020), 124–125.

59 Admittedly, this trade network seems to have declined after the ousting of the Umayyad by the Abbasid from southwest Asia, which seems to have altered the long-standing links between the Mediterranean and Atlantic Arc systems of exchange, but it had hardly been forgotten completely; on the material evidence, see Campbell, *Continental and Mediterranean* (2007), 199; Duggan, *Links to Late Antiquity* (2018); for textual evidence, see the Frankish merchants in Argyll in *Adomán, Life of Columba* (1961). Ed. Anderson/Ogilvie.

60 *Íslendingabók*, *Landnámabók*. Ed. Benediktsson, 28, 136–137.

Óláfr.⁶¹ However, it is important to note that Hálfðanr the *Dubgall* (“black foreigner”) was also active in northern Britain in the 860s and 870s, which might be an alternative source for these activities (re)assigned to Haraldr.

8.3.3 Óláfr Cúarán Sigtryggsson

Overview

Table 8.4: Actions and locations attributable to Óláfr Cúarán Sigtryggsson.

Óláfr Cúarán Sigtryggsson 927×981				
Event	No.	Location	Movement	References
Born	0	Ireland or England or northern Britain?		none
Death of father, Sigtryggr Cáech	0	York	York	AU927, CS[927], ASC/D926[=AD927]
Fought at Brunanburh?	1	Brunanburh, England	Dublin to Brunanburh	none
Made king in Dublin?	2	Dublin	unknown to Dublin	none
Went to York, replaced by Blákari Guðrøðarson in Dublin	3	York	Dublin to York	AClon933[=AD940], AFM938[=AD940]
Allied with Causantín of Alba and king of Britons, defeated by Edmund, king of Saxons	4			AFM938[=AD940]
Made king of Northumbria	5	York	York	ASC/D941, Historia Regum
Raided Tamworth, captured Wulfstan the bishop	6	Tamworth	York to Tamworth	ASC/D943
Captured by Edmund and baptised	7			ASC/A–D943
Driven out from kingdom by Northumbrians and Edmund	8	York	York to unknown	ASC/A, E944, Historia Regum
Replaced Blákari Guðrøðarson in Dublin	9	Dublin	unknown to Dublin	AU945

⁶¹ Smyth, *Scandinavian Kings* (1977), 142–154.

Table 8.4 (continued)

Óláfr Cuarán Sigtryggsson 927×981				
Event	No.	Location	Movement	References
Killed group of Ua Canannáin's followers, allied with Congalach of Brega	10	Brega	Dublin to Brega	AU945
Returned to Northumbria, as King of York	11	York	Dublin to York	ASC/E949, ACLon946[=AD949]
Driven out by Northumbrians, replaced by Eiríkr Haraldsson	12	York	York to unknown	ASC/E952
Plundered Inis Doimle and/or Inis Ulad in alliance with Tuathal son of Ugaire (Laigin)	13a	Great Island, near Waterford	unknown to Great Island	AFM951[=AD953]
Plundered Inis Doimle and/or Inis Ulad in alliance with Tuathal son of Ugaire (Laigin)	13b	Little Island, near Waterford	Great Island to Little Island	AFM951[=AD953]
Nine-year gap				
In alliance with Laigin, defeated Sigtryggr Cam Óláfsson at Uí Colgaín (Lusk), wounded by arrow through thigh	14	Lusk	unknown to Lusk	AFM960[=AD962]
Plundered Kildare with <i>Gaill Átha Cliath</i>	15	Kildare	Dublin to Kildare	CS[964]
Defeated by Osraige at Inis Téoc	16	Inistioge, Co. Kilkenny	Dublin to Inistioge	AFM962[=AD964]
Three-year gap				
Killed Muiredach mac Faeláin, abbot of Kildare and ríghdomna Laigen, acting with Cerball son of Lorcán	17	Kildare	Dublin to Kildare	AFM965[=AD967]
Three-year gap				
Plundered Kells with Laigin	18	Kells	Dublin to Kells	AU970
Won Battle of Cell Móna in alliance with Brega against Domnall Ua Néill, Ulaid, Airgíalla and Conaille	19	Kilmona, Co. Westmeath, or Kilmooney, Co. Meath	Dublin to Cell Móna	AU970
Seven-year gap				
Killed Muirchertach son of Domnall Ua Néill and Congalach son of Domnall	20	Not stated, possibly Dublin	not stated	AU977

Table 8.4 (continued)

Óláfr Cuarán Sigtryggsson 927×981				
Event	No.	Location	Movement	References
Defeated along with <i>Gaill</i> of Dublin and Isles at Battle of Tara by Máel Sechnaill, son Rognvaldr and Conamal son of a minor king of <i>Gaill</i> killed	21	Tara	Dublin to Tara	AU980, AT[980], CS[980]
Siege of Dublin by Máel Sechnaill, the Ulaid, huge tribute imposed on Dublin	22	Dublin	Tara to Dublin	AT[980], CS[980]; AT[980]
Went on pilgrimage to Iona and died there	23	Iona, Hebrides	Dublin to Iona	AT[981]

Interpreting Óláfr Cuarán's movements

Óláfr son of Sigtryggr *Cáech* was at different times king of the Scandinavian diasporic communities in Dublin and York, and Woolf proposes that he may even have attempted to establish himself as the main overking in Ireland towards the end of his career,⁶² having played kingmaker for several decades prior to this. His byname Óláfr Cuarán (“[the] shoe/sock/sandal”) is rendered *kváran* in Old Norse, e.g. *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*,⁶³ and *cwiran* in Old English (ASC/E949), which indicates that this Irish epithet was regarded by all the associated speech communities as part of his name. A blow-by-blow account of his career would warrant a long article in its own right, and this has been done elsewhere.⁶⁴ As demonstrated in Table 8.4, there are two three-year gaps and one nine-year gap in his biography, not including the gap between his birth and emergence in the documentary record. The three-year gaps are most likely a reflection of the source material, with Irish annals attributing several events in both to the *Gaill Átha Cliath* (“[the] foreigners of Dublin”) without specifically naming Óláfr but implying his leadership. The longer gap is more difficult to explain and will be discussed in more detail below.

Óláfr may have been born anywhere across his father's sphere of activity, and presumably his youth was spent in York, Dublin or Alba. His brothers Sigfrøðr and Ásgísl were killed at Brunanburh (AClon931[=AD937]; cf. AFM935.17[=AD937]), but whether Óláfr and his brother Haraldr (killed as king of the *Gaill* of Limerick, CS[940]) were among the allies of Óláfr Guðrøðarson and Causantín mac Aéda is unknowable. Óláfr Cuarán left Dublin for York, with Blákari Guðrøðarson arriving in Dublin (AFM938

⁶² Woolf, *Amlaíb Cuarán* (2002).

⁶³ It appears there in the genitive phrase “systir Óláfs kvárans” and in a dative phrase “með Óláfi konungi kváran”, Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla* 3. Ed. Jónsson, 312.

⁶⁴ Woolf, *Amlaíb Cuarán* (2002).

[=AD940]), followed by a defeat in alliance with Causantín and Strathclyde against an un-named king of Saxons (AFM938[=AD940]). Óláfr may well have been in Alba en route to his election in York after the killing of Óláfr Guðrøðarson while fighting the Eadwulfings in Bernicia (ASC/D941; CCCC.139 s.a. 941). After Óláfr had lost York to Eadmund (ASC/A944; cf. CCCC.139 s.a. 945) and the killing of Rognvaldr Guðrøðarson (AClon937[=944×945]), Eadmund's attack on Cumbria (ASC/A-F945) may have targeted Óláfr and his allies, prior to Óláfr displacing Blákari, seemingly with the help of Congalach of Brega and Bráen Finn of Laigin (AU945; cf. AClon937[=AD945]); AFM943 [=AD945].⁶⁵ This alliance was cemented by the marriage of Ragnailt daughter of Óláfr to an unnamed son of Congalach, and of Óláfr to a grand-daughter of Bráen.⁶⁶ Indeed, Óláfr was instrumental in Congalach becoming king of Tara (nominal overking of the northern half of Ireland). The heavy defeat of Congalach and Óláfr by Ruaidrí Ua Cananán at Slane (AU947) seems to have resulted in Óláfr losing the leadership of the *Gaill Átha Cliath*.⁶⁷ Blákari was subsequently killed by Congalach (AU948), with Óláfr returning to Northumbria after the expulsion of his probable nephew Eiríkr Haraldsson (ASC/D948)⁶⁸ and the death of Eadmund of Wessex (CCCC.139 s.a. 948). Óláfr was displaced in York by Eiríkr (ASC/E952), the same year as men of Alba, the (Strathclyde?) Britons and (Bernician?) Saxons were defeated by undescribed *Gaill* after the death of Causantín mac Aéda (AU952). Considering Eiríkr had a marriage alliance with Strathclyde, having probably married a daughter or relative of Dyfnall,⁶⁹ it was most likely directed against Óláfr. This might place Óláfr in northern Britain after losing York. Meanwhile, Máel Coluim mac Domnaill, Causantín's rival and ally of Eadmund, was killed (AU954) seemingly at the behest of Illulb son of Causantín (ob.CS[962]), whose own son Amlaib (Óláfr) was later killed by Cináed son of Máel Coluim (AU977).

The attack on the Waterford area in alliance with the Laigin (AFM951[=AD953]) is the only event in the Irish annals attributable to Óláfr between losing York and the battle in alliance with the Laigin against Sigtryggr *Cam* son of Óláfr Guðrøðarson (AFM960[=AD962]). This Sigtryggr seems to have been based on Anglesey, but had attacked Ireland with Hebridean allies (AFM960[=AD962]). However, there are only a handful of references in Irish sources to the activities of the Scandinavian settler community in Ireland during this period. Leadership of the Dublin community was held by a variety of other figures in these years, each with different alliances and motiva-

⁶⁵ As proposed by, e.g., *Woolf*, *Amlaib Cuarán* (2002), 38–39.

⁶⁶ The Ban-Shenchus. Ed. *Dobbs*, Ban-Shenchus (1931), 227.

⁶⁷ Suggested by *Woolf*, *Amlaib Cuarán* (2002), 38–39.

⁶⁸ On Eiríkr's identity, *Downham*, *Eric Bloodaxe-axed* (2004); *Downham*, *Viking Kings* (2007), 115–120; *Woolf*, *From Pictland to Alba* (2007), 190; contra the view that he was a son of the mythical Harald hárfagri; *Driscoll*, *Ágrip* (1929), 4–5 §2; also *Smyth*, *Scandinavian York and Dublin* (1979), 176, among a very long list.

⁶⁹ Proposed by *Woolf*, *From Pictland to Alba* (2007), 190, based on the evidence of the (probably tenth-century) *Vita de S. Cadroe Abbate Metis* in: *Acta sanctorum*. Ed. *Bolland*, 476.

tions to Óláfr. Guðrøðr Sigtryggsson seems to have led Dublin in an alliance with Congalach of Brega against his main rival Ruaidhrí Ua Canannáin (AU950; CS[950]; AFM948[=AD950]), but churches in Brega were attacked by Dublin (AU950), and again by a Dublin force led by Guðrøðr Sigtryggsson (AU951), before a plague hit Dublin (AU951). Óláfr Cuarán's ally Congalach of Brega was killed by Óláfr Guðrøðarson (AFM954[=AD956]; cf. AU956, where it is *Gaill Átha Cliath*).

Very little information is available for Alba in this period, and Óláfr may well have been active there in the 950s, apart from what may have been a failed attempt to control Waterford in 953. For the remainder of the gap in the 950s, Lewis raises the possibility that the group attacking Brittany and Nantes in the late 950s may have come from northern England.⁷⁰ Óláfr or Sigtryggr *Cam* may have been part of this group, before splitting from it to focus on Ireland from 960 onwards. They may not have been the first descendants of Ívarr to have done so, as the Sigtryggr killed by Louis d'Outremer in 943 may have been the same Sigtryggr minting coins in York around 942 of similar style to those of Óláfr Cuarán and Rognvaldr Guðrøðarson.⁷¹ Six coins found at Mont-Saint-Michel in Normandy provide further indication of mobility between Northumbria and what would later become Normandy, including a penny minted on behalf of Óláfr Cuarán in the early 940s.⁷² This evidence may not be substantial enough to place Óláfr in Brittany, Aquitaine and the Contentin in the 950s, but it does hint at the range of opportunities still available to mobile, well-informed members of the Scandinavian diaspora, able to exploit political crises for their benefit.

The gap can be shortened by recourse to other sources: the *Ríg Uisnig* ("kings of Uisnech [i.e., of Mide]") synchronism has the killing of Carlus son of Conn son of Donnchad in Dublin (AU960), by Northmen (AFM958[=AD960]), carried out by Murchad Find of Laignin and Óláfr Cuarán.⁷³ In between, Óláfr was either no longer important enough to appear in Irish annals or was simply active elsewhere. Even in the 960s, only four events are directly attributed to Óláfr, even if it might be inferred that he led the Dublin community in this period. This continued into the 970s, with Óláfr not referred to directly between 970 and 977, while the Dublin group is referred to five times. An increasing lack of mobility on the part of Óláfr corresponded to the closing off of opportunities to him else-

⁷⁰ Lewis, *Vikings in Aquitaine* (2021), 590–616.

⁷¹ Discussed *Downham*, *Viking Kings* (2007), 111; *Lewis*, *Death on the Seine* (2018), 44–60; on the three surviving coins, see *Metcalfe*, *Rome (Forum) Hoard* (1992), 66; *Grierson/Blackburn*, *Medieval European Coinage 1* (1996), 324; *Naismith/Tinti*, *Forum Hoard* (2016), 23, 44–45, 285; *Naismith*, *Medieval European Coinage 8* (2017), 300. This Sigtryggr was more likely a son of the former kings Rognvaldr (ob. AU921) or Guðrøðr (ob. AU934), rather than Sigtryggr Cáech, as it would be very unusual for him to have his father's name. It is worth noting that a "mac Ragnall" was killed after raiding Downpatrick in Ulaid (AU942). Identifying Sigtryggr as the king of Dublin in the late material worked into AFM939 should be avoided due to the fictional nature of that particular material, see *Ó Corráin*, *Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn* (2000).

⁷² *Dolley/Yvon*, *Group of Tenth-Century Coins* (1971), 11.

⁷³ *Book of Leinster*. Ed. *Best/Bergin/O'Brien*, 196–198.

where, and to the declining importance of Dublin within Irish politics due to pressure from Domnall ua Néill (AU970; AU971) and Máel Sechnaill mac Domnaill (AT[975]). Pushing back against this, with his allies and relatives from factions in Brega and Laigin (AT[976]; AU977; AU978; AT[978]; AFM977[=AD979]), may have almost established Óláfr as overking in Ireland,⁷⁴ but this attempt was ultimately destined to fail. After finally being ousted from Dublin by his step-son Máel Sechnaill mac Domnaill (AT[980]), Óláfr went to Iona, presumably to retire, where he subsequently died (AT[981]). Time spent in Alba, where Dunkeld (a daughter house of Iona) was located, may have influenced Óláfr's patronage of the Iona ecclesiastical federation (probably at Skreen and Swords) as much as his alliance with Brega, within which Kells was located.

8.3.4 Echmarcach Rognvaldsson

Overview

Table 8.5: Actions and locations attributable to Echmarcach Rognvaldsson.

Echmarcach Rognvaldsson, 1004×1064				
Event	No.	Location	Movement	References
Born	0	Man or Hebrides		
Death of father	0			AU1004
Met with Knútr along with Máel Coluim and Mac Bethad	1	unspecified, Alba	Alba	ASC/E1031
Replaced Óláfr Sigtryggsson as king of Dublin when Óláfr went overseas	2	Dublin	<i>Innsi Gall</i> to Dublin?	AT[1036]
Replaced by Ívarr Haraldsson (Dublin?)	3	Dublin		AT[1038]
Succeeded mac Arailt, i.e. Ívarr, in Dublin	4	Dublin	Dublin	AT[1046]
Fled overseas, replaced by Diarmait son of Máel na mBó	5	Dublin	Dublin to Man?	AT1052; CS[1052]
Potentially involved in major alliance attacking England		England	England	AT[1058]

⁷⁴ *Woolf*, Amlaíb Cuarán (2002), 41–43; however, his motivations may also have been familial, promoting the interests of two of his grandsons in Brega and Laigin.

Table 8.5 (continued)

Echmarcach Rognvaldsson, 1004×1064				
Event	No.	Location	Movement	References
Man invaded by Murchad son of Diarmait mac Máel na mBó, (Echmarcach?) Rognvaldsson defeated	6	Man	Man to na Renna?	AU1061
Died on way to Rome as king of <i>na Renna</i> (later Wigtownshire), along with Donnchad son of Brian, his brother-in-law	7	Rome	Na Renna to Rome	AU1064; Marianus Scottus Chronicon s.a. 1087[=AD1065]

Interpreting Echmarcach's mobility

The figure named as Echmarcach mac Ragnail in Irish sources represents an important case study in both social and geographical mobility. Twice ousted from Dublin, then from *Innsi Gall*, Echmarcach had a long and complex career, even if it is difficult to track Echmarcach's movements, not least in relation to where/over whom he was king and when. That he died either in or on the way to Rome sets him apart from the other two case studies. The relatively low number of references to Echmarcach is probably related to a declining interest in the Scandinavian diaspora on the part of Irish annalists as well as the preoccupation of English annalists with other matters during this time, and he is slightly too early to be covered by English administrative documents. This is compounded by the lack of a surviving chronicles from northern Britain in this period. This makes the analysis of the various gaps (Table 8.5) much more difficult than with the two figures (both named Óláfr) already discussed in this chapter. It might be possible, though, to assign further activities to Echmarcach indirectly, if the actions of people from the kingdoms he ruled while he ruled them are considered. It is tempting to see the *Margaðr konungr* in *Haralda saga Sugurðarsonar* as Echmarcach, not least due to the campaign he conducted in the Irish Sea with Guþormr, nephew of Óláfr *inn helgi* and Haraldr Hadrada, only to later betray Guþormr and be killed by him in battle.⁷⁵ Margaðr, however, is most likely an Old Norse rendering of Murchad, a very common name in Ireland and northern Britain, and the saga may be repurposing the Murchad (ob. as king of Dublin in AU1070) son of Diarmait mac Máel na mBó (AU1072), who had been among Echmarcach's main rivals.

Rather than being a son of the Waterford figures Rognvaldr Ívarsson (ob.AU994) or Rognvaldr Rognvaldsson (killed in Dublin, AT[1031]),⁷⁶ Echmarcach is more likely to have been a son of Rognvaldr Guðrøðarson, who died as “rí na nInnsi” (“king of the

⁷⁵ Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla* 3. Ed. Jónsson, 149–150.

⁷⁶ E.g. Duffy, *Irishmen and Islesmen* (1992), 96–97; Duffy, *Man* (2015), 13–19.

islands”) (AU1005) while in Mumu (AI[1004]).⁷⁷ This would be in line both with his associations in northern Britain and with the continuation of the alliance his grandfather and father maintained with the Dál Cais rulers of Mumu. Echmarcach’s sister Cacht was married to Donnchad son of Brian Bóruma (AI[1032]; ob. as “[a/the] queen of Ireland” AT[1054]). Echmarcach and Donnchad both died on pilgrimage to Rome.⁷⁸ Furthermore, Echmarcach’s daughter Mór was married to Tadc son of Toirdelbach Ua Briain.⁷⁹

Echmarcach’s first surviving appearance in the documentary record was his submission to Knútr, as “Iehmarc” along with “Mælcilm” (Máel Coluim son of Cináed, ob. AU1034) and “Mælbæpe” (Shakespeare’s “Macbeth” son of Findláech, ob. AU1058), the kings of Alba and Moray. This occurred on Knútr’s return to Britain following his pilgrimage to Rome and activities elsewhere (ASC/E1031; ASC/F[OE]1031).⁸⁰

Considering that Echmarcach died about fifty-nine years after his father might indicate that he was relatively young when his father died, and he may thus have spent his youth outside his father’s kingdom. *Ágrip* (§23) has Hákon Eiríksson of Hlaðir (ob. ASC/C1030) installed as king of the *Suðreyjar* (“southern islands”, i.e. “the Hebrides” or *Innsi Gall*), by Óláfr *inn helgi* in the early eleventh century.⁸¹ While the historicity of this could be doubted, it may reflect an attempt by figures from Norway to take advantage of Echmarcach’s youth, or an attempt by one or more overlords to ensure stability in *Innsi Gall* while Echmarcach was so young. This interlude in leadership may explain why figures from *Innsi Gall* are listed among the opponents of Brian Bóruma at Clontarf (AU1014) and among the perpetrators of the attack on the west coast of Ireland and Shannon system (AI[1015]). Hákon Eiríksson attested six charters of Knútr around 1019–1030,⁸² before his death in ASC/C1030, after which Echmarcach may have moved to have Knútr recognise his position. As Hudson points out,⁸³ with his alliance with the northern kings, Knútr/Cnut may have sought to install a buffer between his kingdom and any areas that may ally with factions in Norway against him, not least Orkney. This may indicate that Echmarcach spent his childhood elsewhere.

⁷⁷ Hudson, *Cnut and the Scottish Kings* (1992), 335–336; *Etchingham*, North Wales, Ireland and the Isles (2001), 180–184.

⁷⁸ AU1064.; with important information in Marianus Scottus, *Chronicon*, Ed. Waitz/Kilcon/Pertz, in *Codex Palatino-Vaticanus* no. 830, s.a. 1087[=AD1065], 559 line 33; and the annals in the Book of Maol Conaire (British Library MS Add. 30512 f. 40rb), see Annála Gearra. Ed. Mac Niocaill, 339 [s.a. 1065].

⁷⁹ The Ban-Shenchus. Ed. Dobbs, 196, 229.

⁸⁰ The identification is by Munch, *Det norske folks historie* 1.2 (1852), 673 note 1. See also Hudson, *Cnut and the Scottish Kings* (1992), 350–60; Woolf, *Moray Question* (2000), 149; McGuigan, *Máel Coluim III* (2021), 85–86.

⁸¹ *Ágrip*, Ed. Driscoll, 97 §23 and note 78; also *Encomium Emmae*. Ed. Campbell, 72; Woolf, *From Pictland to Alba* (2007), 246; Ó Riagáin, *Colonialism, Continuity and Change* (2020), 515–516.

⁸² Ó Riagáin, *Colonialism, Continuity and Change* (2020), 1671–1672.

⁸³ Hudson, *Cnut and the Scottish Kings* (1992), 358–359.

Echmarcach's move from *Innsi Gall* to become king in Dublin was at that point unprecedented. Echmarcach and his allies seem to have taken advantage of Sigtryggr Óláfsson (departed overseas AT[1036], died AI[1042]) seemingly outliving all of his sons, leaving a vacuum as regards a potential heir, combined with a succession crisis in Waterford (AU1035; AU1037; AFM1037), which likely removed another set of rival claimants. Echmarcach may have been installed by Donnchad mac Briain, either after the departure of Donnchad's uterine brother and one-time brother-in-law Sigtryggr,⁸⁴ or at Sigtryggr's expense. It may well have been that that Echmarcach's mother was the daughter of a previous king, which could have been used to legitimate his claim to the kingship of Dublin, similar to the eleventh-century claims by Donnchad and Mac Bethad in Alba, and, significantly, to claims later made on Man by Murchad son of Diarmait mac Máel-na-mBó of Laigin (AT[1061]),⁸⁵ and Amlaíb (AFM1096) and Donnall (CRMI1075[1095×1098]; AI[1111]), the sons of Tadc Ua Briain and Echmarcach's daughter Mór.

Having succeeded Sigtryggr, presumably in Dublin, Echmarcach was in turn replaced by Ívarr Haraldsson (AT[1038]). Ívarr's father was most likely Haraldr Óláfsson, who had been killed in a battle while allied with the Laigin against Donnchad's father Brian (AU999). Ívarr was later expelled and replaced again by Echmarcach in Dublin (AT[1046]; AFM1046). Echmarcach fled overseas from Dublin due to pressure from Diarmait mac Máel na mBó (AU1052; AT[1052], overking of Laigin and enemy of Echmarcach's main ally, Donnchad mac Briain. Echmarcach may have taken part in the alliance that involved Magnús Haraldsson or Óláfsson, Gruffud of Gwynedd, Orkney and *Innsi Gall* that invaded England seemingly to restore Ælfgar to the earldom of Mercia (AT[1058]; AC/B1078; Brut1056; ASC/D1058).⁸⁶ If he did, then the attack on Man by Murchad son of Diarmait (AU1061) may have been related to this as much as the events in Dublin. Whether or not Echmarcach was expelled from Man at this point is difficult to determine, but if he was, it would explain his obit as king of *na Renna*.

8.4 Conclusion

Before attempting some conclusions, it might be best to recapitulate a broad outline of the three case-study figures. There is no evidence that Óláfr was born in his father's kingdom of Laithlind, but he likely at some point spent part of his life there. The area

⁸⁴ Gormflaith was the mother of both Donnchad and Sigtryggr, see the Ban-Shenchus. Ed. *Dobbs*, 189, 227. On Gormflaith, see *Ní Mhaonaigh*, *Tales of Three Gormlaiths* (2002); Sigtryggr was married at one point to Sláine, daughter of Brian, who was the mother of Óláfr Sigtryggsson.

⁸⁵ The wife of Diarmait mac Máel-na-mBó was Derbogil (AFM1080), the daughter of Donnchad mac Briain and presumably of Cacht, sister of Echmarcach, The Ban-Shenchus. Ed. *Dobbs*, 229.

⁸⁶ See also John of Worcester s.a. 1058; for context, see *Ellis*, *A plausible eleventh-century Welsh–Orkadian alliance* (2020); *Ó Ríagáin*, *Colonialism, Continuity and Change* (2020), 527.

around Trondheimsfjorden remains the best fit for this, with the caveat that there are other options. That Óláfr had a son named Carlus hints at activity in Frankia prior to his taking up more permanent residence in Ireland, which would align with some of the material evidence, in addition to the documentary evidence demonstrating the activity of multiple Scandinavian groups between Aquitaine and Frisia. There is nothing to place Óláfr in England at any point, nor in any of the armies that were active there, but he certainly had three phases of activity in northern Britain in the 860s and 870s. What is perhaps most striking is that there is no evidence for Óláfr going back to Scandinavia, which needs to be better understood in the light of potential shifts in the flows of wealth from Frankia, Britain and Ireland back to Scandinavia. That he did not go back to succeed his father may indicate his motivations for his activities abroad: either to permanently settle or gather enough wealth to compete for succession in the homeland.

There is no evidence that Óláfr Cúarán ever set foot in Scandinavia, but that may be a reflection of the surviving sources. The gap between being ousted from York in 952 and returning to Dublin may have been (at least partially) spent with allies in Alba during the succession dispute there in the 950s. He may subsequently have been active in Brittany, Nantes and the Cotentin, but Denmark, Norway, Al-Andalus or Byzantium may all have presented opportunities to an opportunistic king without a kingdom in this period. After re-establishing himself in Ireland by 960, it would seem as though Óláfr's mobility was confined to Ireland until his ousting from Dublin in 980 and death on pilgrimage or retirement to Iona in 981. It is worth noting that the narrowing of his mobility coincided with the wider decline in flows of Samanid silver into Scandinavia and its diaspora, as well as the establishment of the overkingship of Haraldr *blátǫnn* Gormsson in Denmark, Hákon of Hlaðir and Eiríkr Hákonarson in Norway. It also corresponds to other significant events, including the late Carolingian crisis in Frankia and Otto II's defeat by the Fatamids in Italy plus the rejection of Otto's rule by Polabian Slavic groups east of the Elbe.

Finally, Echmarcach's career was also characterised by opportunism. He seemingly made use of the death of Óláfr *inn helgi* and the succession crisis in Hlaðir to submit to Knútr and presumably gain a more secure hold over his father Rǫgnvaldr Guðrøðarson's kingdom of *Innsi Gall*, before somehow gaining the kingship of the Scandinavian diasporic settler community in Dublin at the expense of an aging Sigtryggr Ólafsson and Sigtryggr's nephew Ívarr Haraldsson. That he had the resources – even after losing all but one of the elements of his polyfocal kingdom – to go to Rome on pilgrimage, and that he was regarded as enough of a near-equal for his sister to marry the most powerful king in Ireland, indicates his importance on an Insular level. It may well be that Echmarcach did not hold all of those kingdoms at once, and he may have had to relinquish one to take up another, similar to Óláfr Cúarán when moving between Dublin and York. If not, it appears that medieval Insular kingship was peripatetic, with kings having to move around to receive the various things owed to them and give the various things expected of them, aside from the regular need to engage in military activity. This must have been a

pressing concern for Echmarcach in his sea-based kingdom, necessitating a particularly high level of mobility. There may well have been trips to England, Denmark and Norway, which could account for some of the many gaps in his documented activities, as Irish annalists were largely only concerned with his activities when they affected Ireland.

What conclusions can be drawn from these data? Firstly, the range of any figure's mobility knowable to us today reflects the nature of the surviving sources as much as it does their actual mobility, something also highlighted when comparing against twelfth- and thirteenth-century kings among the Scandinavian diaspora(s). Secondly, this fact limits the utility of employing studies of elites as proxies for wider patterns of movement – including the establishment and operation of migration streams – and sets documentary evidence in an uneasy relationship with the equally imperfect material record. Thirdly, all three figures display the abilities of an elite largely dependent on military power resources to adapt to circumstances. As such, they each would have utilised unseen chains of interaction to obtain up-to-date information regarding political circumstances across a wide swathe of Eurasia, enabling them to adapt to shifting circumstances and maintain their positions.

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