

## *The Vikings in Britain*

BY DAVID M. WILSON

In the heady days of 1966 *Antiquity* published an article by the Disney professor of archaeology at Cambridge, Grahame Clark, entitled *The Invasion hypothesis in British Archaeology*. Clark in this paper, which was mainly concerned with British prehistory, was struck by the fact that Britain with its imperial past has strangely never distorted, unless in a negative sense, the vision of British archaeologists. Indeed he says: »British archaeologists went out of their way to ascribe every good thing about their early past to foreign influences, if not indeed to foreign conquerors. So anxious were some of them to avoid ascribing any innovation to their own forebears that one might say that they were suffering from a form of invasion neurosis. For much of the first half of the 20th century British archaeologists felt themselves under strong compulsion to ascribe every change, every development to overseas influence of one kind or another«<sup>1</sup>).

In 1966 Clark was able to see that there was a tendency for British archaeologists not »to appreciate the achievements of their prehistoric forebears« and he consequently tried to redress the balance. There has been a tendency ever since then to play down the invasion element in British history, which has caused some problems with such well-documented invasions as that of the Romans or the Normans. Perhaps the best antidote to Clark was a series of papers published in 1979 entitled *Invasion and Response, the Case of Roman Britain*<sup>2</sup>), which swung the imperial balance the other way by drawing parallels (often highly controversial) between Roman Britain and the North-West Frontier, the African situation between 1885 and 1965 and the problem of Portugal in Africa from the seventeenth century to the present day.

Since Clark wrote in 1966, there has been a considerable revolution in archaeological thinking about prehistory as ethno-archaeological interpretations emerged from the *New* archaeology and comparison was made as in the case of the Roman symposium just mentioned, with well documented societies. This is reflected in the recently published volumes

1) J. G. D. CLARK, *The invasion hypothesis in British Archaeology*. *Antiquity* 40, 1966, p. 172-189.

2) B. C. BURNHAM and H. B. JOHNSON (eds.), *Invasion and Response, the Case of Roman Britain*. BAR British Ser. 73 (Oxford 1979).

in the ›One World Archaeology‹ series, particularly in the volumes entitled ›State and Society‹<sup>3)</sup> and ›Centre and Periphery‹<sup>4)</sup>.

It might be thought that such considerations might affect a study of the Viking adventures in the British Isles. In fact – save for the rather awkward methodology and muddle-headed thinking revealed in Klavs Randsborg's book ›The Viking Age in Denmark‹<sup>5)</sup> – there has been little attempt to muddy the waters by the introduction of ethno-archaeological parallels to the study of the Viking Age. Archaeologists, historians and philologists of this period have combined in an agreement to try and understand each others' disciplines and not adventure too far into the ethnography of the Trobriand Islanders or the Hesperides.

The most controversial discussion of the Viking Age in relation to the British Isles was that put forward by Peter Sawyer in 1962<sup>6)</sup>, and modified in 1971. The thesis is resurrected from time to time in his writings in a number of chapters or papers, most recently in the chapter entitled ›Danske erobrere og kolonister‹ in ›Danmarks Historie 700–1050‹<sup>7)</sup>. Towards the end of this paper I shall consider Sawyer's thesis concerning the size of the Scandinavian presence in the British Isles at various times, but first I must outline the course of the Scandinavian adventure in Britain, which is reasonably well-documented in the historical sources, particularly in ›The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle‹. This remarkable document, whilst certainly biased towards a specific English, clerical point of view, carries an almost contemporary account of the course of the Scandinavian raids and settlement – however summary it might be.

I must here say a word of introduction and apology. My title seems to limit me to the archaeological evidence, if that was all the evidence I could use I would sit down after ten minutes – so slender is it. In any case I have outlined it on at least two occasions in a book I edited in 1976, entitled ›The Archaeology of Anglo-Saxon England‹, and in an earlier article in ›Frühmittelalterliche Studien‹<sup>8)</sup>. To this may be added the catalogue of an exhibition held in Denmark and York in 1981 entitled ›The Vikings in England‹<sup>9)</sup>, to which I also contributed, and an article in ›The Transactions of the Royal Historical Society‹ for 1976 on an archaeological view of Scandinavian settlement in the north and west of the British Isles. In these places I have used the evidence of other disciplines and would emphasize here that the archaeology of

3) J. GLEDHILL, B. BENDER and M. T. LARSEN (eds.), *State and Society. The Emergence and Development of Social Hierarchy and Political Centralisation. Papers from the World Archaeological Congress held in Southampton, England 1986* (London 1988).

4) T. C. CHAMPION (ed.), *Centre and Periphery. Comparative Studies in Arch. One World Archaeology 11* (London 1989).

5) K. RANDBORG, *The Viking Age in Denmark: The Formation of State* (London 1980).

6) P. H. SAWYER, *The Age of the Vikings* (London 1962).

7) P. H. SAWYER, *Da Danmark blev Danmark. Fra ca. år 700 til ca. 1050. Gyldendal og Politikens Danmarkshistorie 3* (København 1988).

8) D. M. WILSON, *The Archaeology of Anglo-Saxon England* (London 1976). For the earlier article see D. M. WILSON, *Archaeological evidence for the Viking settlements and raids in England*. In: *Frühmittelalterl. Stud.* 2, 1968, p. 291–304.

9) ROESDAHL et al. (ed.).

the Vikings in Britain is inextricably involved with evidence drawn from other disciplines. My title is properly ›The Vikings in Britain *archäologisch gesehen*!‹

What was Britain like before the first Viking Age raids at the end of the eighth century? England was a well-settled land, divided into a number of small kingdoms which were sometimes at war with each other. It was a Christian country, rich both in culture and in natural resources. On the north and west England was bordered by the Scottish, Pictish and Welsh peoples who spoke Celtic languages. Cumberland and Westmorland, Devon and Cornwall were semi-Celtic lands, their people speaking a Celtic language, but infiltrated with English culture. Far to the west lay Ireland. Christianity had nurtured in all these countries learning, art and poetry, and British clerics enjoyed a high reputation abroad. Round the coast were trading stations both of a secular and a religious character. The most important of these were those monasteries – Whitby, Lindisfarne, Iona, Jarrow, Monkwearmouth and so on – which acted not only as religious centres but also as economic nexuses for the community. Founded in remote places in order to be out of the world, they provided spiritual and intellectual stimulus. But gradually they were dragged into the world: the pious gave them land and, because of the income generated by their vast estates, they groaned with portable wealth and attracted traders and hangers-on in considerable numbers. Many of these communities may well have consisted of a thousand or more souls – both religious and lay. In England and Scotland such religious centres seem to have lived charmed and peaceful lives (although there is some evidence that everything was not quite so beautiful in the Irish garden). The English had coins – the Celtic lords had none – and the currency had been standardised on the basis of the penny as a unit, first by Kentish kings and later by such great Mercian kings as Offa (757–796). The result was a sound economy based on a settled agriculture supported by silver coins which were used in daily commerce. The English were in touch with the continent, both economically and intellectually. Offa and Charlemagne corresponded, and the royal families intermarried; Alcuin was but one of many scholars who worked in the schools of the Empire. There was frequent and economically important trade between Britain and the Continent.

In England the great kingdom in the immediately pre-Viking age was Mercia, but Northumbria, despite a royal family riven by internecine feuding, was still, at the time of the first Viking raids, an important region – and a rich one – sometimes split with the kingdom of Bernicia, to the north of the River Tyne, and Deira to the south. Scotland was partly independent, partly client. The Picts' power was on the wane, and by about 800 the Scots controlled most of the southern half of Scotland, whence in 843, under Kenneth MacAlpine, they were united with their Pictish neighbours of the north. In Ireland the kingdoms of Connaught, Munster, Ulster and Leinster dominated the scene, but the monasteries were the great social and religious centres with great wealth and many secular traits. Never at peace, Ireland was almost cheerfully anarchic; the monasteries themselves were subject to raids, as were the secular homesteads.

It was the rich monasteries, both in England and in the rest of Britain, that attracted the attention of the first Viking marauders. Many of these monasteries were by the sea or on major

rivers – accessible easily to merchants and protected by spiritual function and royal protection from external interference. It was, therefore, with a great sense of shock that the attack of 793 on Lindisfarne was received by Christendom. The learned Englishman, Alcuin, wrote from the palace school of Charlemagne concerning this event: »Lo, it is nearly 350 years that we and our fathers have inhabited this most lovely land, and never before has such terror appeared in Britain, as we now have suffered from a pagan race, nor was it thought that such an inroad from the sea could be made. Behold, the church of St Cuthbert spattered with the blood of the priests of God, despoiled of all its ornaments; a place more venerable than all in Britain is given as a prey to pagan people. And where first, after the departure of St Paulinus from York the Christian religion in our race took its rise, there misery and calamity have begun«<sup>10</sup>.

Lindisfarne had been founded on an island, inaccessible and originally eremetical; protected only from land attack. It had grown in power and influence – its landholding was legendary. It had been founded in a desolate place in the Celtic monastic tradition and it is clear that whichever Viking first had the excellent idea of getting rich quickly by attacking this isolated monastery, so easily accessible from the sea, he soon had imitators elsewhere. In Ireland the church on Lambay Island was pillaged in 795. In the same year Iona, the great Columban monastic foundation off the east coast of Scotland, was attacked and the communities of Inismurray and Innisboffin on the west coast of Ireland were plundered (these latter perhaps by the same body of Vikings). The Lindisfarne raiders may well have been those who struck again in 794 at *Donemuthan* (which Simeon of Durham identified as Jarrow, but which might more sensibly be reckoned as Tynemouth). If it was the same group who carried out both raids then they got their just deserts; much later Simeon of Durham was to write of the revenge: »But St Cuthbert did not allow them to go away unpunished; for their chief was killed by the English with a cruel death, and after a short space of time the violence of a storm battered, destroyed and broke to pieces their ships, and the sea overwhelmed many of them. Some were cast on the shore and soon killed without mercy«<sup>11</sup>.

In Ireland the pattern of raids on monastic coastal communities continued until about 836. The isolation of the monasteries and the speed of the attacks usually allowed the raiders to retreat in safety after having wreaked their havoc. But occasionally, as in 811 and 812, attackers were beaten off by the Irish, as were the attackers of Donemuthan. The attacks continued sporadically for a few years, but little can be traced in the archaeological records of the raids. The burnt and broken book mounts at Whitby<sup>12</sup>, the treasure of St Ninian's Isle in Shetland<sup>13</sup>, are some of the more dramatic traces of these events.

10) D. WHITELOCK (ed.), *English Historical Documents*, c. 500–1024 (1955), p. 776.

11) *Ibid.*, p. 248.

12) C. PEERS and C. A. R. RADFORD, *The Saxon Monastery of Whitby*. In: *Archaeologia* 89, 1943, p. 27–88, see pl. XXVI a; b.

13) A. SMALL, Ch. THOMAS and D. M. WILSON, *St Ninian's Isle and its Treasure I–II*. *Aberdeen University Studies Ser. 152* (Oxford 1973).

A pair of moulds from Whitby<sup>14</sup>) may have been used by Vikings to make ingots from melted-down church plate. Signs of burning at North Elmham<sup>15</sup>) and Jarrow<sup>16</sup>) may or may not reflect attacks on these religious houses. Similarly, certain objects found in Scandinavia, in Viking Age graves particularly, might reflect the raids. These objects, rudely torn from their original contexts, were perhaps adapted as ornaments of personal adornment. But it would be easy to exaggerate the incidence of such souvenirs: the famous Celtic houses-shaped reliquary in the National Museum in Copenhagen, which originally came from Norway, still contains silk-wrapped relics of the medieval period which surely suggest that this object was never secularized despite its runic inscription, ›Ranvaig owns this casket‹<sup>17</sup>). One major hoard of gold survives from the period of raids in Norway, that from Hon, Haug, which contains (amongst other exotic objects) merely a single English finger-ring<sup>18</sup>). Where has all the wealth gone?

Nonetheless it must be true that until the early 830s raids were carried out with apparently only one motive in mind – the attainment of wealth. The Scandinavians went where the treasure was – to monasteries in the British Isles and to trading emporia in England and France. Because they had no Celtic roots, the French monasteries were not so isolated as in Britain and were not, initially at least, attacked by the Vikings (save only Noirmoutier). There seems from the historical record to have been little concerted effort in these raids. This was not the period of the English *micel here*. Sawyer was surely right in denying the involvement of a large number of Scandinavians in the raids during these years. But his suggestion that in the period of the raids, ›The Norwegian area was in the north and west of the British Isles together with western Frankia, while the Danes concentrated on the southern North Sea and the coasts of the Channel‹<sup>19</sup>), may have been largely true in the later ninth century, but is demonstrably not so in the earlier period. The 787 reference in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle refers to Danes in Portland on the South Coast. But Æthelweard refers to the incomers as from Hordaland in Norway. Indeed, elsewhere Sawyer says that ›the first report on Viking attacks in our written sources were on Lindisfarne in 793, on Iona in 795 ...‹<sup>20</sup>), these raids were the work of Norwegians, and should be seen a by-product of the Norse colonization in the second half of the eighth century of Shetland, Orkney and the Hebrides. There is, however, no evidence in

14) P. G. FOOTE and D. M. WILSON, *The Viking Achievement* (London 1970), see pl. 1 b.

15) C. A. R. RADFORD, *The bishop's throne in Norwich Cathedral*. In: *Arch. Journal* 116, 1959, p. 115–132, see p. 120.

16) R. CRAMP, *Monastic Sites*. In: D. M. WILSON (ed.), *The Archaeology of Anglo-Saxon England* (London 1976), p. 201–252, see p. 238.

17) J. GRAHAM-CAMPBELL, *Viking Artefacts: a Select Catalogue* (London 1980), see p. 90 no. 314.

18) J. PETERSEN, *British Antiquities of the Viking Period, Found in Norway*. *Viking Antiquities in Great Britain and Ireland* 5, ed. H. SHETELIG (Oslo 1940), see p. 178 fig. 142.

19) P. H. SAWYER, *Kings and Vikings. Scandinavia and Europe AD 700–1100* (London–New York 1982), see p. 80.

20) P. H. SAWYER, *The Two Viking Ages of Britain: a Discussion*. *Medieval Scandinavia* 2, 1969, see p. 163.

the archaeological record of Norse settlement in the northern or western isles at this period (and archaeology is the only real evidence we have for settlement in this area). Barbara Crawford has recently confirmed this when she denied Ó Corráin's statement »that the Orkneys and the Hebrides had been extensively settled by Norse fishermen before the Viking raids on the Irish coast«<sup>21</sup>). I cannot find any eighth-century Norwegian material in any of the graves or settlements of the Norse in the northern or western isles. The Scandinavians do not appear to have been there.

It is also beginning to appear doubtful whether there is evidence of early ninth-century settlement in the northern and western Isles. Colleen Batey, in her book on the major settlement site of Freswick Links in Caithness has clearly demonstrated that there is no early (that is ninth-century) Norse settlement on the northern mainland of Scotland<sup>22</sup>); and her work and that of her husband, Christopher Morris, would seem to suggest that the dating of the putative earlier Norse settlements in neighbouring Shetland and Orkney needs very careful examination. The dating given by John Hamilton in his pioneering work in 1956 to the earliest phases of the Norse settlement at Jarlshof, at the southern tip of Shetland, may be based on contexts which a modern archaeologist would find unreliable<sup>23</sup>). Further, the dating of the graffiti found in the 1951 excavations of the midden beneath House 3 could well be questioned<sup>24</sup>). If this does come from the first Viking phase then its stylistic attributes – particularly that of the ship prow – are extremely odd in Norse terms. The page of discussion which Hamilton gives to this phase is less than illuminating and the whole needs a great deal of reexamination. The earliest datable Scandinavian object from Jarlshof would appear to be a much worn and badly-burnt trefoil brooch from a tenth-century context<sup>25</sup>), which itself should date to the late ninth or early tenth century.

In Orkney and Shetland the Scandinavians seem to have come in and settled on Pictish sites at some stage in the ninth century. Precisely when this happened is unsure, the evidence from such sites as Birsay and Buckquoy is equivocal and until more <sup>14</sup>C dates are published no firm statement can be made. The graves do not help greatly, save that women's graves, the contents of which can be dated roughly to the late ninth century, would imply that settlers were present there by 900. Sigrid Kaland, who has been excavating at Westness on Rousay, believes that a house found here is of ninth-century date and is associated with the extensive cemetery, but the evidence she has so far produced is unconvincing and I would quote with approval the cautious statement of Morris concerning it: »The interim report on the earlier phase of excavations by Dr Kaland has indicated the high quality of both buildings and graves, but the precise relationship between the cemetery, the boat naust, the dwellings, the earlier grave from

21) B. E. CRAWFORD *Scandinavian Scotland. Scotland in the Early Middle Ages* (Leicester 1987), p. 40.

22) C. E. BATELY, *Freswick Links Caithness* (1987), p. 287.

23) J. R. C. HAMILTON, *Excavations at Jarlshof, Shetland Ministry of Works Arch. Reports 1* (Edinburgh 1956).

24) HAMILTON (see note 22), pl. XXI, 4.

25) HAMILTON (see note 22), pl. XXIX, 3.

the Knowe of Swandro, the place-name Skail ... and the probable castle-site of ›The Wirk‹, indicates that the evolution of settlement in this area was a complex process«<sup>26</sup>).

It is clear that there was Scandinavian settlement in Orkney in the ninth century, but it is probable that such settlement started rather towards the end of the century. Any early Scandinavian graves of the male sex could represent raiders rather than settlers, for there is no reason to doubt that Orkney, Shetland and the Western Isles were under attack at least as early – if not earlier – than the first recorded English and Irish attacks at the end of the eighth century, as witness Dicuil in ›de Mensura Orbis Terrae‹ writing c 825 of what everyone accepts to be the Faroe Islands: »But just as they were always deserted from the beginning of the world, so now because of the Norsemen pirates (*causa latronum Normannorum*) are emptied of anchorites and filled with countless sheep and very many diverse kinds of seabirds«<sup>27</sup>. 825 was still to Dicuil a period of pirates not settlement; an indication if nothing else of Scandinavian activities in the North Atlantic.

The Western Isles and the Isle of Man can hardly have been settled before the end of the ninth century, although the publication of Ian Crawford's excavation at the Udal in North Uist may ultimately suggest a slightly earlier date. It is interesting that no objects decorated with style E have been found in the British Isles and that the Borre style, the beginning of which is usually dated to the very end of the ninth century, is the first coherent Viking style to appear in the British Isles.

As for the northern and western Isles, so for Ireland. In all these areas the first datable traces in the archaeological record are the graves and cemeteries of the pagan peoples who first raided here and then settled. (It must be remembered that there had been no accompanied burials for 150 years before the Viking raids.) The distinction between settler and raider can rarely be distinguished: the only unequivocally recognized settlers must be those represented by the rare women's graves. The main argument against the later dating of the settlement in Ireland may be the Berdal type, P 11 B brooches and the half-a-dozen P. 37 brooches from Islandbridge, Dublin<sup>28</sup>), the former of which must, if we accept Ingmar Jansson, be dated to the early ninth-century – or at least to an early phase of what he calls his Early Birka Period<sup>29</sup>). The P. 37 brooches are the commonest oval brooch type and are difficult to date closely.

26) C. D. MORRIS, The Vikings in the British Isles. Some Aspects on their Settlement and Economy. In: R. T. FARRELL (ed.), *The Vikings* (London 1982), p. 70–94, see p. 79.

27) J. J. TIERNEY (ed.), *Dicuili liber de mensura orbis terrae. Scriptores Latini Hiberniae* 6, Dublin 1967, 76f.

28) J. BØE, *Norse Antiquities in Ireland. Viking Antiquities in Great Britain and Ireland* 3, ed. H. SHETTLIG (Oslo 1940), see p. 39 fig. 17; p. 40 fig. 18.

29) I. JANSSON, *Ovala spännbucklor: en studie av vikingatida standardsmycken med utgångspunkt från Björköfynden*. Arch. Studies. Uppsala Univ. Institute of North European Arch. 7 (Uppsala 1985), p. 176ff.

Although some were certainly produced in the ninth century, these, like the brooches from Cloughton Hall and Northallerton in England<sup>30</sup>, may be of tenth-century date.

I would postulate then that settlement started only slightly (if at all) earlier in Scotland and the Irish Sea than it did in England. That the first fifty years of the ninth century may have been a period of intermittent raids. I do not deny settlement in the British Isles before 850, but I would suggest that the majority of settlements (as, for instance, in the Isle of Man and the Hebrides, where James Graham-Campbell's work is inexorably leading in this direction) must be rather later in date (even in the Isle of Man, as secondary settlement from England).

What then about England. The story is baldly told in the Anglo-Saxon sources. In 875, after a series of temporary winterings in mainland England, Hálfðan shared out the land of the Northumbrians, and they proceeded to plough and to support themselves. This was the first real settlement of England. Recent work at Repton by Martin and Birthe Biddle, has convincingly revealed the dramatic traces of Scandinavian activity in Repton in 873/74 immediately before Hálfðan's settlement<sup>31</sup>. Here the Scandinavians constructed a defended enclosure of 1.4 hectares, but the most extraordinary find was a burial mound, probably originally with a confined central burial surrounded by a bizarre collection of the bones of 249 people who might easily have been the dead of a single winter in a large encampment: 80% of them were men, 20% women. But for the post-876 period we have but little evidence of Scandinavian rural settlement in the north – only the farm at Ribbleshead<sup>32</sup> in the wildest part of the Pennines between Lancashire and Yorkshire which must date from the period and may represent the type of settlement founded by Hálfðan.

Historical geographers do not always help matters. In a recent book entitled *Anglo-Saxon Settlements*<sup>33</sup>, Tim Unwin has written a chapter called *Towards a model of Anglo-Scandinavian Rural Settlement in England*. Far from being a model of a Scandinavian settlement (as, for instance, is Alan Small's model for Shetland), he addresses *the reorganization of settlement between the end of the Roman era and the twelfth century*. He assumes that the incoming Anglo-Saxons and Scandinavians had settlements and field systems of a form which can be recognized to this day. He then concentrates on two Midland counties – Nottingham and Derbyshire – based on Domesday Book studies. He assumes *a change from a dispersed pattern of Anglo-Saxon settlement to a more nucleated one during the ninth and tenth centuries*. He adduces only theories in support of this and thinks that it is unlikely that *the townships could represent the Scandinavian sharing out of Mercia in AD 877*.

30) A. BJØRN and H. SHETELIG, *Viking Antiquities in England. With a Supplement of Viking Antiquities on the Continent of Western Europe. Viking Antiquities in Great Britain and Ireland 4*, ed. H. SHETELIG (Oslo 1940), see p. 19 fig. 5; p. 21 fig. 6.

31) M. BIDDLE, in: *Current Archaeology* 100, 1986, p. 138–141, see p. 140f.

32) ROESDAHL (see note 9), p. 70.

33) T. UNWIN, *Towards a Model of Anglo-Scandinavian Rural Settlement in England*. In: D. HOOKE (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Settlements* (Oxford–New York 1988), p. 77–98.



He admits that the evidence for fields is negligible, but turns for comfort to north Germany or Norway and Sweden. N. Germany and Holland may, he alleges, have produced some *Terpen/Wurten* settlements in Anglo-Saxon Lincolnshire – but the evidence rests on an undocumented personal communication. He sees the Danish pattern as reflecting Germany – an arguable point – but notes the fact (well known to everyone) that in Norway and Sweden, even in the ninth century, a pattern of dispersed farmsteads predominated.

Using archaeological evidence and (believe it or not) ›Orkneyinga Saga‹, he says that the Norwegians were most familiar with this settlement type in Britain. In Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire he sees a similar pattern which he finds reflected in the multiplicity of manors per township in Domesday Book. The Scandinavians he postulates ›retarded‹ nucleation. For all this theory – attractive though it may seem – there is little evidence.

Archaeology has provided us with a certain amount of evidence of Scandinavian urban settlement. Particularly important are the late ninth- and early tenth-century remains from York which reflect the control (sometimes only sporadic) of this ancient international mercantile centre until 954, when Eirik Bloodaxe was expelled from York and the English finally gained control of the ancient Kingdom of Northumbria. Less firmly dated evidence is available from Lincoln – one of the five boroughs of the Danelaw<sup>34</sup>).

The Viking settlement of England in this period is also expressed in a few – very few – burials (which lack a modern study), but much more importantly in a number of silver hoards, both of coins and hacksilver, which have been found in the north of England and which peak in the first quarter of the tenth century. The hoards include Cuerdale<sup>35</sup>, buried by the River Ribble in Lancashire in 903. It consisted of some 40 kilos of silver, both coins and hacksilver, deposited in a lead chest – a hoard much larger than any Viking hoard found outside Russia.

The varied and extraordinary eclectic sculpture<sup>36</sup>) tells of the meeting of English and Scandinavian cultures more expressively than any other group of material in the Viking Age. It also tells of the meeting of two religious traditions – Christian and pagan. The stone-carving tradition of Christian Anglo-Saxon England combines with the strong ornamental traditions of pagan Scandinavia to produce an art which, although of high quality, was ultimately to degenerate into muddle and misunderstanding in the late tenth century. But for the rest – for the settlement of the Five Boroughs (Nottingham, Derby, Stamford, Lincoln and Leicester), which formed a centre of a Scandinavian polity of some might and influence; for the settlement of East Anglia by Guthrum after his treaty with, and baptism at the hands of, Alfred between 878 and 880; for the settlement of the north-west – for all these the chief evidence resides in place-names. Names of Scandinavian origin occur in abundance in northern and eastern England and have been discussed, dissected and interpreted in great depth by Gillian Fellows-Jensen over a period of thirty years. Maps of Scandinavian place-

34) ROESDAH et al. (see note 9).

35) GRAHAM-CAMPBELL (see note 17), p. 87.

36) ROESDAH et al. (see note 9), p. 83ff.

name elements show the pattern and intensity of the settlement in the Scandinavian areas of England<sup>37</sup>). Place-name maps show the differences and similarities of Scandinavian settlement in the non-English parts of the British Isles and demonstrate above everything the extent of those settlements.

It is not for me to evaluate the evidence deduced from place-names. Fellows-Jensen has capably done this. It is both subtle and complicated. For example, the presence of *bý* names in western and central Cumberland – an area probably settled after 900 by Scandinavians from Scotland and the Isles – shows that there was settlement here by Danish Scandinavians from west of the Pennines – not only Norwegians from the west<sup>38</sup>). It is, however, clear that the Scandinavian settlers in England were not only taking over existing settlement centres, but were exploiting for the first time some of the marginal land; especially, for example, in such areas as the Lake District. They were also able to take over relatively easily the estates of the monasteries – particularly the vastly wealthy Lindisfarne estates, the heirs of the patrimony of St. Cuthbert<sup>39</sup>).

What is more, the language survived quite late – the man who in the last years of the eleventh century scratched an inscription on a stone in Carlisle cathedral in runes:

*tolfín wrait þasi runr a þisi stain* (Dolfinn carved these runes on this stone)

was almost certainly a local Scandinavian-speaking man<sup>40</sup>). It is not possible, however, to say whether he was a survivor of a family settled there in the early tenth century, or of one established in the time of Knut in the early eleventh century, or merely a recent incomer from the west. The evidence for the survival of Scandinavian language in the more central parts of England, however, is rather slim; most place-name evidence points to the conclusion that the great majority of Scandinavian, hybrid and Scandinavianized names were introduced in the earliest years of settlement.

The place-names – together with personal names which appear in legal documents – attest to a strong Scandinavian settlement in England; they tell of the breaking up of land-holding and the foundation of new units of settlement, and of the taking into use of much marginal land. It is hard to believe that Sawyer can be right when he talks of a very small group of real settlers. The settlers were strong enough to take over and hold the land; but we cannot put numbers to them. The Scandinavians did not build a new kingdom in England, they took over existing towns and institutions. Only the church, which was rich, suffered. The Scandinavians certainly altered things, but by the middle of the tenth century the English had regained control and England returned to itself. Perhaps the most extraordinary, if incidental, result of

37) ROESDAH et al. (see note 9), p. 78.

38) G. FELLOWS-JENSEN, *Scandinavian Settlement Names in the north-west*. Navnestudier udg. af Institut for Navneforskning 25 (København 1985).

39) C. D. MORRIS, *Northumbria and the Viking Settlement: The Evidence for Land-holding*. In: *Archaeologia Aeliana* Ser. 5, 5, 1977, p. 81–103.

40) R. I. PAGE, *How long did the Scandinavian language survive in England? The epigraphical evidence*. In: P. CLEMOES and K. HUGHES, *England before the Conquest* (London 1971), p. 165–182.

the Scandinavian conquest was the fact that a united English kingdom was at last achieved, a factor which was to be of some importance sixty years later, when the Scandinavians returned to power.

Let us now examine the archaeological evidence for the permanent settlement of the Scandinavians in Scotland. Again, we cannot put numbers to the settlers, although they must have been substantial. Place-names again show a pattern of settlement throughout the west and north of Scotland of some considerable density<sup>41</sup>). The survival of *Norn* – a Scandinavian based language – in the Orkneys and Shetland until the eighteenth century demonstrates the depth of the Scandinavianisation of the northern isles and also the close and continuing contact of this region with Scandinavia. The overwhelming nature of the Scandinavian settlement in these islands cannot be seriously questioned. Similarly I would be surprised if the same were not true of the western isles. These (with the Isle of Man) came under the control of the Scottish Crown at the Treaty of Perth in 1266, two hundred years before the impignoration of Orkney and Shetland by Christian I of Denmark to James III of Scotland on the occasion of the latter's marriage with Princess Margaret of Denmark. The western isles became politically important and the Scottish tongue and Scottish lairds drove out Norse language and political power long before a similar process was achieved in the far north.

Excavations by Crawford, Batey, Peter Gelling, Morris, Anna Ritchie, John Hunter and many others<sup>42</sup>) have – in the course of thirty years – revolutionized our knowledge of the settlement of the Scandinavian areas of Scotland: and this is particularly true of the Orkney Islands. Previously scholars depended on the large number of grave finds from all over the north and west of Scotland, a number which has been added to by the work of Kaland at Westness in Orkney, where properly excavated Scandinavian graves have revealed a new dimension to the form of graves in the colonies.

The settlements of Jarlshof and Birsay have long been familiar in the literature of the North. Here were seen for the first time (without too much obfuscation) major settlement sites which had a continuous history from the pre-Viking Pictish era to the Middle Ages. The sites were generally aristocratic (at least in their later phases) and, in the case of Birsay, had pre-Norse and late Norse ecclesiastical functions: wealth attended them in their earlier states. Long houses with central hearths, byres and other out-houses, enclosures and paved ways were all recognised. At Jarlshof collapsed and ruinous buildings were used as pens and animal houses. Hunter's excavations at Birsay, Ritchie's work at Buckquoy on Orkney, Gelling's work at Skail, Batey's work in Caithness and Morris's work at Birsay (which will shortly be published) all tell a story of continuity of settlement from Pictish beginnings – the Picts probably living alongside the Norse, although obviously subservient to them. A more cataclysmic view is taken by Crawford. Using evidence from the Udal site in North Uist he

41) W. F. H. NICOLAISEN, *The Viking Settlement of Scotland: The Evidence of the Place-Names*. In: FARRELL (see note 29), p. 95–115.

42) For bibliography see MORRIS (note 26); BATEY (note 22).

states: »there is a precise point of transition, there is abrupt disruption of a settlement of five hundred years' duration and replacement and supplantment throughout the range of archaeological criteria. Furthermore, there are positive signs of turbulence in the form of fortification at this precise point in time ... (The) deposit contains a comprehensive range of settlement data, some of which is typically Norse, most not so readily identifiable, but all contrasting sharply with what immediately precedes it«<sup>43</sup>).

The very uncertainty of dating and of artefactual distinction at Buckquoy would suggest that Crawford's thesis cannot be applied universally in the Norse areas of Scotland. Ritchie is surely right in arguing for distinct Pictish elements in the Norse period, however questionable her dating may be. Perhaps we should leave the final word on the interrelation of Norse and Pictish inhabitants in the Western Isles to Batey: »To date, too few sites have produced sufficient evidence to solve this problem. There may well be more than one solution and negative evidence may not provide a positive answer. It is likely that incomers were accepted willingly in some areas, but not in others; the reaction would have surely relied on the intentions and attitudes of the incomers«<sup>44</sup>).

I would endorse such a statement for the Isle of Man, where the number of excavated sites is slightly greater than in the Western Isles, but where there is some evidence, both in respect of graves and memorial stones, of a continuity rather than a discontinuity. The Norse incomers certainly became dominant, the language flourished and place-names were changed, but people with Celtic personal names were marrying people with Norse names.

And so we turn to Ireland. After the initial period of raids, Scandinavian settlers came to Ireland, but exclusively to sites which became towns. Five are of particular importance, although others may have existed: Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Waterford and Wexford – the major later medieval ports of Ireland. Archaeological evidence of settlement from some of these towns has been uncovered over the last twenty-five years, particularly in Dublin, but no evidence of Norse settlement in the countryside has yet been found. Ireland seems to have been largely used by Scandinavians as a place for establishing trading posts – some of which (Dublin certainly) became major emporia for the north/south Atlantic trade between the rich source of Atlantic raw materials and that of France and the Empire. The imported material found in the Dublin excavations points firmly to this.

The Scandinavians had a military encampment (*longphort*) in the Dublin area by the mid-ninth century – probably reflected in the famous Islandbridge, Kilmainham, cemetery. But it was not until well on into the tenth century that a proper mercantile settlement was set up, and not until the end of the tenth century that the first coins were struck there. That there was a reasonably continuous history of settlement from the mid-ninth century is clear; but it was basically a military settlement, the Scandinavians acting as raiders and mercenaries using these

43) I. A. CRAWFORD, *War or Peace – Viking colonisation in the Northern and Western Isles of Scotland* reviewed. In: H. BEKKER-NIELSEN, P. FOOTE & O. OLSEN (eds.), *Proceedings of the Eighth Viking Congress. Århus 24–31 august 1977* (Odense 1981), p. 259–269, see p. 266.

44) BATEY (see note 21), p. 293.

centres and particularly Dublin to bolster their varying fortunes in Ireland and in the York kingdom. They of course also fought amongst themselves. In 924, for example, the Dubliners attacked Limerick and were themselves threatened when the Vikings of Limerick established a fortress at Osraige in 930 which the Dubliners attacked and reduced in the following year. By the middle of the century the Scandinavians had settled down as part of the Irish political set-up in the area round their five major towns and had, through trade, become a major element in the development of the Irish economy. Although mostly dominated by the Irish kings after 950, the incomers were generally left in peace (as much as anyone is ever left in peace in Ireland) to develop the major trading stations which were to survive as medieval towns. It may indeed have been the economic power of Dublin which was perceived as dangerous to English trade and led to the invasions of Ireland by the English in the second half of the twelfth century.

Of this period of Irish history the great excavations of Dublin have revealed a portion of the town wall, houses, industrial processes, a quay and many artefacts. The publication has just started and will reveal much detail, but probably little that will change our view of the great entrepot of Dublin or of the position of Ireland in the Viking world. Dublin's archaeology emphasizes its international mercantile role.

Finally, I must deal with the Scandinavian conquest of England in the eleventh century. Here the historian must tell the story which is so familiar. From about 980 for nearly forty years England was subject to attack by Danes and Norwegians. The attacks were mounted in search of wealth, at first simply plundering towns and countryside, monasteries and estates. But then, in 991, the English paid the first Danegeld, £10000 worth of silver. At intervals over the next years the Danegeld is paid in inflationary steps which culminated in the great payment of £72000 in 1018 (together with another £10500 from the city of London) in the year after Knut had become King of England<sup>45</sup>). From 1017 to 1037 there was a Danish king on the throne of England, and although the king was anglicized and although many of the leading families in England were able to retain some control over their estates England became part of a vast northern empire.

Of this period archaeology tells but little. In Scandinavia rune-stones tell of the geld taking. A stone from Väsby in Uppland, for example, reads, 'Alle had this stone raised in his own memory. He took Knut's geld in England. God help his soul'. The geld was enormous: the £72000 geld of 1018 was equivalent to seventeen million silver coins and some of these coins must be represented among the 34000 coins which have been found in Swedish coin hoards alone. In England the Scandinavian kings and their immediate retainers had an influence on the art of the country. The eclecticism of the Scandinavians has already been noted in the sculpture of the early tenth century in northern England; now, however, there was a full flowering of the Ringerike style in England. A style which is seen at its most

45) D. M. WILSON, *Danish Kings and England in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries – economic implications*. In: *Proceedings of the Battle conference of Anglo-Norman Studies* 3, 1980.

accomplished on the stone from St Paul's churchyard in London, presumably set up over the grave of one of Knut's followers<sup>46</sup>).

If this paper has demonstrated nothing else, I hope it has shown that archaeology can help towards an understanding of the Viking Age in the British Isles. But it has also shown that to study this particular phase of the history of the British Isles a scholar must use all the disciplines at his disposal – history, philology, place-name studies, archaeology, numismatics and style history – and these are only the beginning.

46) S. HORN FUGLESANG, *Some Aspects of the Ringerike style: a phase of eleventh century Skandinavian art*. *Medieval Scandinavian Supplement 1* (Odense 1980), p. 189.