

## 19<sup>th</sup> Viking Congress

Theme: Making a Living: Trade, Networks and Towns

Apart From or A Part Of? Considering Local Contexts for Ireland's Viking-Age Towns

*Dr Rebecca Boyd, Department of Archaeology, University College Cork*

Here in Ireland, Viking Dublin dominates our attention. Its spectacular artefacts, gravefields, defensive banks and streetscapes enable us to re-imagine the world of the Viking town. We people it with warriors, merchants and crafters engaging in travel and trade with York, Kaupang, and further afield.

The development of these Viking-Age towns—Dublin, Cork and Waterford—irrevocably alter the Irish landscape. However, this key transition is under-discussed and archaeologists usually separate towns and urbanism from general discussions of early and later medieval Ireland. O'Sullivan et al's *Early Medieval Ireland AD 400-1100: The Evidence from Archaeological Excavations (2014)* devoted just 9 out of 562 pages to the 300 years of 'Viking towns' as a settlement type and 1 page to discussing Viking trade. This treatment 'others' the concept of urbanism: towns are not a natural part of Ireland's settlement narrative. Dublin, especially, is seen as a foreign place. Here urbanism is an alien tendency imported by the Vikings and their descendents, the Normans (Daly, 1986). My work on the architecture of Ireland's towns has explored an urban way of life (Boyd, 2016) but this again focuses on how these places were apart from rather than a part of Ireland. This focus on the overseas connections is, however, limiting and distracts us from the impact these new settlements—towns—must have made on their local environments.

After half a century of excavations in Dublin, Cork and Waterford, we need to ask new questions about how these early towns emerged and sustained themselves. One avenue of inquiry is to consider how they acted and interacted with their hinterlands. Previous works on Dublin's hinterlands by historians (Bradley, 1988, 2009) and archaeo-environmentalists (Geraghty, 1996, Reilly, forthcoming) have only scratched the surface of these relationships. Indeed, the question of Cork and Waterford's hinterland relationships is virtually unasked.

The towns were deeply enmeshed in reciprocal relationships with their surroundings. They were constructed from organic building materials—wood, sod, straw, moss, clay—which needed regular replacement as the structures decayed. The townspeople used large quantities of natural materials for food, energy, and crafting. Viking Dublin didn't even have its own drinking water sources. In return, the hinterlands provided markets for finished goods, both locally-made and imported. The landscapes preserve visible interactions in finds of hoards, burials, artefacts and placenames as well as routes to interactions along rivercourses and highways.

Crucially, the hinterlands also provided the people who populated the town. While the elites did have political and cultural links across the Viking world, the majority of the population came from within Ireland (O'Donnabhain and Hallgrímsson, 2013). This makes it even more important to work towards understanding local as well as international contexts for these settlements. This paper will consider how we can engage with and explore the complex relationships formed between these new and existing features in the Irish landscape, to truly comprehend the interactive nature of Irish Viking Age society.

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