Why was Wales relatively unaffected by the Viking expansion in the British Isles?

Student Dissertation

How to cite:
Egan, Oliver (2021). Why was Wales relatively unaffected by the Viking expansion in the British Isles? Student dissertation for The Open University module A329 The making of Welsh history.

For guidance on citations see FAQs.

© 2021 Oliver Egan

https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/

Version: Redacted Version of Record

Copyright and Moral Rights for the articles on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. For more information on Open Research Online’s data policy on reuse of materials please consult the policies page.
Why was Wales relatively unaffected by the Viking expansion in the British Isles?

By

Oliver Egan

Submitted for A329 ‘The making of Welsh history’

May 2021
# Table of contents

**Introduction** ................................................................. 3

**Chapter 1. The Welsh Kingdoms and their Impact** ..................... 7

**Chapter 2. Wales as a target for raiding** ............................. 14

**Chapter 3. Wales as a target for settlement** .......................... 20

**Conclusion** .......................................................................... 25

**Bibliography** ....................................................................... 27
Introduction

The "Viking age", as it was known, is a period between the eighth and eleventh centuries in which Scandinavian peoples raided, colonized and controlled large parts of Europe and the North Atlantic sea area. The impact of the Viking Age on the social and political landscapes of these areas was profound, particularly within the British Isles. During this period, Vikings raided along the coastlines of Britain and Ireland, traded silver and slaves, and amongst others settled in places such as Dublin, the Isle of Man, The Shetlands, Scotland, Orkneys and established a territory in several English regions called "Danelaw", which followed rule of Danish leaders. This changed the cultural, social and political landscapes of these regions for centuries and tied the English Crown to that of Denmark and Norway until 1066.

However, despite its geographical proximity, the historical record suggests that the Welsh Kingdoms were relatively untouched by the Vikings, when compared to the rest of the British Isles. The primary records regarding Wales show "no dramatic crisis [or] confrontation" (Loyn, 1976, p. 3) that could have caused major Viking legacy within the region. "There was little impact on the Welsh language and political structures [and] the Vikings initiated no urban developments" (Brink and Price, 2012, p. 408). Moreover, as shown in figure 2, there is a distinct lack of Norse, Swedish and Danish DNA within Wales when compared to the rest of the British Isles, displaying a smaller genetic impact from the Vikings within the area.

Clearly, Wales was an anomaly within the British Isles when considering the impact of the Viking Age. This dissertation considers why this was the case, focusing on the impact of the Welsh Kingdoms, whether or not Wales was a good candidate for raiding, and whether or not Wales was a good candidate for settlement. The two primary ways in which the rest of the British isles had been effected by the Vikings.
The Viking impact in Wales lies in the "middle range of difficulty" (Loyn, 1967, p.4) as a topic of study. For this era, there is a wealth of primary sources, in the Irish, Anglo-Saxon, and Welsh annals and the Viking Sagas. There are also valuable archaeological studies of the few areas within Wales with Viking finds. There is, however, no grand event or conflict that has prompted serious literary effort into the topic of Vikings in Wales. H.R. Loyn’s book “Vikings in Wales" provides an older but essential source that modern sources all utilize. Loyn seeks to create a methodological summary of all study of the Vikings in Wales that had occurred by the late seventies. Loyn introduces the idea of three phases of Viking activity in Wales, in which the nature of interaction between the Vikings and the Welsh kingdoms changed between each phase. Loyn further considers the toponymy of Wales, the primary sources, and the limited archaeological evidence available in the late seventies. For this
dissertation, and for modern historians studying the subject Loyn's work provided an excellent basis of research. The main shortcoming of Loyn's work is its age. Since the late seventies, there has been much development on the subject, and more modern historiographical approaches have been utilised. Nevertheless, Loyn's work provided a vital building block from which to base this dissertation.

Mark Redknapp's chapter "The Vikings in Wales" in Brink, S. and Price, N. 2012 book "The Viking World" provides the next key piece of literature on the subject of the Vikings in Wales. The whole book was significant to this dissertation, providing necessary background on various elements of Viking life, but Mark Redknapp's chapter specifically addressed the topic of Wales. Redknapp's piece is almost a follow on from the work of Loyn. Another methodological summary of all study of Vikings in Wales, but with thirty-six years of additional historiographical research to utilize. Redknapp also utilizes Loyn's idea of three distinct Viking phases in Wales, and addresses the various interactions that occurred within them. Like Loyn, Redknapp looks into the toponymy of Wales. However, he discusses the issues that toponomy can raise. Namely that a Viking place-name does not necessarily mean heavy Viking interaction. Redknapp then looks into the archaeological evidence of Vikings in Wales, an area in which modern research has improved significantly on that of the late seventies—providing additional information and discussion than that seen in Loyn's work. Finally, Redknapp looks into the limited legacy that the Vikings had in Wales, describing it as "invisible" (Brink and Price, 2012, p. 408). As a chapter in a greater book, Redknapp's work focuses on summarising the historiography on the topic rather than presenting new ideas. Nevertheless, Loyn's work provided a modern outlook on the broad subject of Vikings in Wales and was invaluable in seeing what interaction had occurred between the Vikings and the Welsh kingdoms.
David Griffiths' book "Vikings in the Irish Sea" provides an incredibly detailed outlook on Viking Activity within the Irish Sea. Griffiths looks in detail at Viking life in the area, dedicating chapters to settlement, trade, burial, urbanization, and cultural assimilation within the region, looking into why and how Vikings affected the region and what lasting impact they had. Griffiths takes a methodological approach, listing all the information available in each particular subject matter, rather than providing their own input into the topics or a narrative to events. This work was instrumental when looking into Wales' neighbours to determine what separates Wales from them as an exception. Furthermore, the Welsh Kingdoms predominantly experienced Viking raids originating in Ireland, and accordingly, Griffiths' work provided an interesting outlook into the formation of these Viking settlements that would go on to exercise raids into Wales. While incredibly detailed on the Irish Sea region, the shortcomings of this source are that Wales often takes a backseat. The information on Viking activity in Wales is utilized to strengthen the discussion of the Viking landscape in Ireland, or the Isle of Man, more than it is an exploration of Wales itself.

As discussed by Loyn, with no driving event or factor that prompted interest, there is limited literature on the Viking impact within Wales. Moreover, this literature is detailed and methodological in detailing all the evidence we have recovered of Viking activity within Wales. Furthermore, we have substantial literature discussing the Viking activity in the Irish sea and the relatively minor part that Wales played in this region. However, something that has not been explored is why Wales, relative to the rest of the British Isles, came through the Viking age comparably unscathed.
Chapter 1

The Welsh Kingdoms and their impact

Wales during the early Middle Ages was not a single political entity; instead, it was a complex, fragmented region without the gradual development towards a consolidated kingdom as seen in nearby England (Davies, 1982, p. 85). However, throughout this period, several continuously prominent kingdoms formed in the arable areas of lowland, namely Gwynedd, Powys, Ceredigion, Dyfed, Builth, Brycheiniog and Glywysing (Davies, 1982, p. 91). The waxing and waning of Viking raids on these Welsh kingdoms allow us to split the Viking age into three distinct periods. The earliest of which begins with the first definitive raid in Powys, where 'Brut y Tywysogyon' records the killing of Cyngen of Powys in 850 or 852 (Williams, 2012, p. 14) (Hadley, 2009, p. 200), and ends with the lull in raiding that starts in 914 (Brink and Price, 2012, p. 402) (Loyn, 1976, p. 5).

During this first period of Viking raids, the Welsh kingdoms experienced a "backwash" of activity as the Vikings established themselves in Ireland in the 830s and the Sudreys in the 850s (Loyn, 1976, p. 5). Only a few of these raids were important enough to be given detail in the Welsh, Irish and Anglo-Saxon Chronicles, namely, when in the Annals of Ulster in 855 [or 856] 'Rhodri the Great'; the King of Gwynedd repelled a Viking force that had invaded Anglesey in 850 and killed their leader Horm (Koch and Busse, 2012, p. 688) (Loyn, 1976, p. 5). Archaeological finds in Anglesey provide testimony to these records, with evidence of Viking settlement in Anglesey. The earlier finds date to the late ninth century and possibly relate to the record of Rhodri the Great expelling the Vikings from Anglesey (Griffiths, 2010, p. 118). Further, in the Annals of Ulster in 871, two Vikings, Amlaib and Ivarr, returned to Dublin with "a great prey of Angles and Britons and Picts" (Hadley, 2009, p. 201). In the
Anglo-Saxon chronicle in 894, a combined Welsh and English army defeated an army of Danes led by "Hástein" (Griffiths, 2010, p. 39) in Buttington, Powys, "stripped [them] both of the cattle and the corn that they had acquired by plunder", and pushed them through the North of Wales into the Wirral (The Project Gutenberg, 2008). Furthermore, finally, in the Annales Cambriae, "Merfyn ap Rhodri .... was slain by 'gentiles' [but, after being] expelled by the Welsh King, Ingimund and his followers sailed east and were allowed to land near Chester" (Brink and Price, 2012, p. 402). These records in the annals show that the 'backwash' (Loyn, 1976, p. 5) of raids that the Welsh kingdoms experienced was typical of Viking raids in this age, i.e. the taking of slaves and plunder. However, what is significant is that three out of the four accounts detailed of Vikings in Wales resulted in Viking expulsion by the Welsh. With the principal Viking directive being the "taking-in of new land ... with little human opposition" (Loyn, 1976, p. 6), this "early on sharp and successful resistance by the Welsh" would have made the Welsh kingdoms an uninviting proposition for Viking invasion (Loyn, 1976, p. 6). This feat is especially remarkable when considering that amongst other areas, "Dublin was settled as a defended enclave or longphort from around 840" (Griffiths, 2010, p. 20), and York was settled in 876 by "Healfden" where the Vikings became "harrowers and plowers" (The Project Gutenberg, 2008). Evidently, the Welsh kingdoms had been more successful at repelling Viking invasion than other regions of the British Isles.

If the theme for the first phase of Viking raids is a backwash of aggression from other regions attacked by the Vikings, then the defining element for the second period of Viking raids is the "exporting of violence" from these new Viking settlements in and around the Irish sea (Griffiths, 2010, p. 38). Amlaib and Ivarr in 871 showcases that this trend occurred during the first period of raids, but the second period is when these Irish and North Sea settlements began to affect the Welsh kingdoms regularly. The second period of Viking raids begins in
about 950, with numerous attacks on coastal religious centres across the Welsh kingdoms and continues until the Viking governance becomes more centralised and their activity in the Welsh kingdoms is more preamble to the Norman conquest of Wales (Brink and Price, 2012, p. 402). 'Brut Y Tywysogion' provides the first detailed records of events. Starting in 952, when "Hirmawr and Anarawd were killed by the Pagans; they were sons of Gwriad" (Williams, 2012, p. 23), followed by details of further raids on Caer-Gybi [Hollyhead] and Lleyn by Abloec, a Norse King of Dublin, and in 961 when "Towyn was devastated by the Pagans" (Williams, 2012, p. 23). From around this time, we also get our first records of Wales from the Viking Sagas when in the Heimskringla Eirik Bloodaxe "plundered in Scotland, Bretland [Wales], Ireland, and Valland" (Killings and Widger, 2009). 'Cogadh Gáedel re Gallaibh' then discusses that in 969, Danes led by 'Imar' were expelled from Limerick and so attempted conquest of Wales. They returned a few years later, unsuccessful (Henthorn, 1867, p. 84). In 969-970, Madoc and Godfrid, Norse-Gael Vikings, attacked and subjugated Anglesey (Williams, 2012, p. 25). This Viking subjugation of Anglesey further fits with the archaeological finds of the second phase of Viking settlement. "The fortified settlement at Llanbedrgoch was never a major, densely populated settlement approaching urban status" (Griffiths, 2010, p. 118). However, it could have been "established as a defended enclave of Viking traders in the Welsh landscape ... with some measure of overall political authority" (Griffiths, 2010, p. 118). The Godfrid subjugation of Anglesey and the archaeological site at Llanbedrgoch is the first evidence of Viking raids evolving into successful colonisation within the Welsh Kingdoms. With this new foothold, Godfrid begins to appear in the local politics more, allying with Constantine of Gwynedd against Hywel in internal Welsh politics (Williams, 2012, p. 25).
Furthermore, most of the Viking Saga's that mentions Wales write about this second phase of raids. The Orkneyinga and *Brennu-Njáls* Sagas writes about Vikings from Orkney raiding Wales (Anderson, 2018)(DaSent 1861) Jómsvíkinga Saga writes about a Jarl who ruled over part of Wales. What is evident from this second period of raids is that Viking settlements such as Dublin and Orkney established in the first period had grown and could project power into the Welsh Kingdoms through raiding. However, within the Welsh kingdoms themselves, it is clear that the early defeats to the Welsh Kings had set the Viking timescale back roughly an entire century. While settlements in other regions of the British Isles were conducting raids in their own right, the evidence from Wales is that it was possibly experiencing the preliminary stages of Viking settlement in areas such as the "defended enclave of Viking traders" (Griffiths, 2010, p. 118) at Llanbedrgoch. The uncertain nature of settlement in Wales during this period of more frequent raiding and the record of Imar's failed conquest from 'Cogadh Gáedel re Gallaibh' shows that Wales was still a problematic prospect Vikings to conquer, even during this second period.

The endpoint of the Viking age is usually set in 1066, with the battle of Stamford Bridge in York (Brink and Price, 2012, p. 5). In truth, however, by 1066, the landscape of the Viking age is unrecognisable from that of the ninth century. Scandinavia was almost entirely Christianised (Brink and Price, 2012, p. 621-628), and the kingdoms of Denmark/Sweden and Norway were being established (Brink and Price, 2012, p. 645-673). This shift to a more centralised power structure changed the way that the Vikings interacted with the world. The raid sizes increased from a few ships in the eighth century to hundreds of ships in the eleventh (Brink and Price, 2012, p. 193-195). Moreover, the structure of the conflicts changed from "private ventures, carried out by warleaders with whatever followers they were able to attract through their own reputations and the promise of wealth" (Brink and Price,
into king led armies, thousands strong raised from their nation and colonies as seen with Harald Hardrada (Manley, 2008). Of course, this change did not occur abruptly in the eleventh century but had been a gradual process of small changes throughout the Viking Age, resulting in this vastly different landscape seen in the eleventh century.

During this period, the Welsh Kingdoms were also changing. In 1055 Gruffyd ap Llewelyn had "established Wales as a united and independent state for the only time in the country's long history" (Davies and Davies, 2011). This third phase of Viking activity occurs in these changing times. One interesting development that we see in these years is that of ransom. In 1037 "Brut y Tywysogion" records that Vikings captured and ransomed Meurig ap Hywel (Williams, 2012, p. 39), and in 1040 "Howel vanquished the [Vikings] who were ravaging Dyved [and] Gruffudd was captured by the [Vikings] of Dublin" (Williams, 2012, p. 41). We also see that Vikings were being utilised as mercenaries. In 1042 "Howel, son of Edwin, meditated the devastation of South Wales, accompanied by a fleet of [Vikings], and against him was opposed Gruffudd, son of Llywelyn" (Williams, 2012, p. 41). In 1049 and 1053, King Gruffydd ap Rhydderch took Viking mercenaries and raided the English border (The Project Gutenberg, 2008). Viking mercenaries were also utilised by the eventual King of Wales, Gruffyd ap Llewelyn. In 1055, Gruffyd ap Llewelyn utilised Viking mercenaries to assault Hereford and gain a treaty with King Edward (The Project Gutenberg, 2008); it was around this time Gruffyd ap Llewelyn was acknowledged as King of all Wales (Williams, 2012, p. 45). It is not clear how much the Vikings aided figures such as Gruffyd ap Llewelyn, but if we attribute any importance to his utilisation of Vikings against Hereford then, this third period could be the time in which the Vikings affected Wales the most. They may have moved away from their attempts at raiding and settling, but their utilisation as mercenaries in disputes between the Welsh Kings, their utilisation by Gruffyd ap Llewelyn in furthering his
renown and their impact on the landscape of the Welsh kingdoms through the capture and ransom of important figures may have had more impact on Wales than the previous centuries of raiding and attempted settlement in places such as Llanbedrgoch.

Figure 1 (Pissegure82, 2019)
In conclusion, the standard Viking methodology for influencing an area was; sporadic raids of weak but wealthy targets, the building of a small defended area such as a longphort from which to repair boats and load goods/captives, and the utilisation of these longphorts to start farming, trading and exporting violence to new areas and with that a slow growth in size and influence (Griffiths, 2010, p. 13-). As shown in Figure 1, the critical period for the Viking settlement was the ninth century, with most initial settlements occurring in this period. During this time, the Welsh kingdoms experienced a "backwash" of activity as the Vikings established themselves around the Irish and North Seas. However, according to the records, no serious, successful settlement was established in Wales as the Welsh Kings successfully repelled and expelled the Vikings throughout this initial period. From there, the Viking timeline for influencing an area was set back almost a century. As shown in Figure 1, there were very few initial settlements dated after the ninth century, and even less still in the British Isles. Being now surrounded by a Viking world of successful settlements, Wales experienced "exported violence" through raids and attempts at invasion. While the records still show other successful defences of Welsh shores, they also provide strong evidence that Anglesey was settled at Llanbedr-goch, which archaeology backs up. However, with an initial settlement date so late, it would prove difficult for a settlement to be as historically impactful as the earlier ones seen in areas such as York and Dublin. Throughout these centuries, the Viking World and Welsh landscape had changed significantly, as had the interactions between them. Arguably, however, this is the period in which the Vikings affected Wales the most through influencing the local politics of Wales as mercenaries, ransoming of important Welsh people and fighting alongside the eventual King of all Wales Gruffyd ap Llewelyn.
Chapter 2

Wales as a target for raiding

As discussed in chapter 1, H. R. Loyn describes the initial Viking period of raids as a "backwash" from Scandinavian efforts in other areas (Loyn, 1976, p. 5), but what made these areas the target for attacks rather than Wales? Following this initial period of raids, we also began to see Viking settlement and migration across the British Isles and Europe, as seen in fig.1. This chapter will assess why the Vikings left Scandinavia during this era; what made them choose their targets for raids? Moreover, whether or not Wales could meet these requirements.

In his paper "What caused the Viking Age?" James H. Barrett lists and analyses the modern scholarship on the commonly believed causes of the Viking Age, precisely the reasons for initial Viking raids.

- Technological determinism
- Environmental determinism
- Demographic determinism
- Economic determinism
- Political determinism
- Ideological determinism.

(Barrett, 2008, p. 672)

Technological determinism in this context is the idea that the seafaring knowledge and naval technology in eighth-century Scandinavia took a leap forward and that this showcases a motivation within Scandinavia to travel further and faster. However, as stated by James H.
Barret, "ships capable of carrying warriors long distances are a necessary pre-requisite for the Viking Age, but clearly they did not 'cause' it" (Barrett, 2008, p. 673).

Environmental determinism looks into the idea that an exceptionally warm climate in the medieval warm period opened up more remote areas for travel, such as Greenland and Iceland. Andrew J. Dugmore, Christian Keller and Thomas H. McGovern agree that climate change could have been a factor that opened Greenland up for settlement (Dugmore, Keller and McGovern, 2007). However, for this dissertation, Wales is more comparable with closer neighbours such as England and Ireland, both of which were settled long before Greenland and Iceland. Furthermore, this provides the opportunity for raids and settlement in more extreme areas but can not be considered a cause (Barrett, 2008, p. 673).

Demographic determinism is the idea that Barrett gives most credit. Scandinavia experienced the widespread European population boom at the end of the 10th century. We can see evidence of this in forest clearance and settlement expansion in this period (Barrett, 2008, p. 674). The commonly held view is that this caused the Vikings to spread in a great wave across Europe from Scandinavia. However, Barrett suggests that, in actuality, it was a leapfrogging migration across a settlement network, where migrants would move to a nearby area searching for something (typically an economic opportunity). Barrett suggests that this may have led to "Norse and Irish adventurers [meeting] in the ... years leading up to the ninth century .... providing knowledge of the riches that lay in the Celtic monasteries" (Barrett, 2008, p. 676). Barrett uses interactions with the Irish as a specific example, but conceivably with a comprehensive enough network, this leapfrogging model could cover all areas in which the Vikings raided/settled. As shown in Figure 1, the date of the first contact progresses south through the Shetlands, into Lindisfarne in one branch and then into the
Sudreys, Isle of Man, Hebrides, and Ireland, in the other branch. This appears to support Barrett's theory of a leapfrogging process, and so raiding selection would require knowledge to travel back through the Viking network, spreading information of where prime raiding targets were situated.

In addition to this, Nancy L. Wicker looks at evidence of female infanticide in Viking age Scandinavia for her paper 'selective Female Infanticide as Partial Explanation for the Dearth of Women in Viking Period Scandinavia". If there was indeed female infanticide, then combined with the European population boom Viking Age Scandinavia would be disproportionately young and male. Barrett believes that this provided a "marriage imperative" in which young men needed wealth for a bride price, forcing them to venture further and ultimately raid in search of wealth. However, both Edward Stewart and Steven P. Ashby believe that while this theory provides a good explanation, that as we lack a site containing evidence that female infanticide was committed, we cannot give this idea too much weight (Ashby, 2015), (Stewart, 2019).

Economic determinism looks at the idea that the Vikings had a 'Gold Rush style mentality', which caused a mass migration in search of silver. Wladyslaw Duczko discusses hoards of Islamic coins found in Norse held Ladoga in the eighth century (Duczko 2004: 67). From this, it is argued that the trade routes with the Arab world could not keep up with the demand for silver and that this was the catalyst that ignited raiding in search of silver(Ashby, 2015).

Political determinism focuses on push and pull factors in the political landscape of the eighth century. Traditionally, weaknesses in the initial targets for raiding is seen as a significant pull factor. However, Barrett believes that there is a problem in this theory because, during these
periods, "there were strong hegemonic powers in both Anglo-Saxon England (Offa's Mercia) and continental Europe (Charlemagne's Frankish empire)" (Barrett, 2008, p. 673). Barrett’s argument is perhaps correct for the later Viking invasions, but as can be seen in fig.1, the initial Viking raids were not in Mercia or the Frankish empire, but Northumbria, Ireland and the Hebrides. Northumbria during this time was much less stable; in 790, "Osred, king of the Northumbrians, was betrayed and banished from his kingdom, and Ethelred, the son of Ethelwald, succeeded him" (Ingram, 2000), and in 794 "Ethelred, king of the Northumbrians, was slain by his own people" (Ingram, 2000). Furthermore, Scotland and Ireland in the eighth century "were subdivided into many ... chiefdoms in comparative terminology" (Barrett, 2008, p. 678), rather than the strong kingdoms seen in Mercia/Frankish empire. This showcases that the political pull of weak opposition may have indeed influenced the initial raids and that only later in the ninth century were the attacks on more hegemonic powers attempted. Barrett then considers push factors, such as the giant neighbour of Scandinavia, The Carolingian empire. However, these factors focus on what politically would push the Vikings to leave Scandinavia but does not offer insight into what could draw them to Wales.

Idealogical determination is the idea that "two facets of Scandinavian ideology must have played an important role in the highly militarised and risky context of the Viking Age diaspora: honour and fatalism" (Barrett, 2008, p. 680). The thought is that to find people willing to go on such a dangerous expedition required a uniquely structured ideological society that peer-pressured men into raiding. However, Barrett does not give much credit to this idea as "a mentality geared for war is thus only a precondition for the Viking Age diaspora" and "there is no reason to think that beliefs in honour and fate were unique to Scandinavia, or to the Viking Age" (Barrett, 2008, p. 680). Conversely, Steven P. Ashby does believe that this ideological determination has merit (Ashby, 2015). Ashby notes that in raids,
the Vikings targetted portable wealth to be used as capital, but also exotic and unique items, Christian art, beads made from Mediterranean tesserae, and Byzantine Silks. Ashby believes that this was to enhance their fame and their identities within their communities; these unique items "carried people, places and stories with them. For this reason, they held significant power as the possessions of members of the elite" (Ashby, 2015). The significance of this in choosing targets for settlement is that the Vikings would choose targets that could bring them fame and wealth once they returned home.

From this historiographical discussion, we can start to build a picture of what the Vikings may have looked for when choosing their initial raiding targets and apply that to Wales. One thing that is almost universally agreed upon, because of the size of the forces raiding and the selection of religious sites to be raided, is that the Vikings were looking for poorly defended, easily transferable wealth (Martinez, 2020), whether it be for bride-wealth or a gold-rush mentality. As seen in the raids on St. Davids in the ninth century (Williams, 2012), Wales had similar religious sites to those in Lindesfarne (Ingram, 2000), Iona abbey (CELT, 2020), and Lambay Islands monastery (CELT, 2020), and so could conceivably have been equally targetted. Ashby adds a caveat that fame, as well as portable wealth, was also desired in Viking raids, and so possibly Wales did not have the same draw as other locations to Vikings seeking fame. Barrett's leapfrogging theory could potentially explain why Wales was not an initial target. As the Vikings moved into the British Isles through their network in the Shetlands, information on the more northern targets would reach the Vikings first; what was required for Wales to become a target was a local Viking network node, from which information about Welsh religious sites could spread. This idea is congruent with Loyn's position that Wales experienced a backwash of activity from raids in other areas (Loyn, 1976, p. 5). These areas would have acted as new nodes, allowing the Vikings to plan and carry out
attacks in Wales. The concept of political determination offers further possibilities into why Wales was not targeted initially. The Vikings looked for the pull of weak political opponents such as the chiefdoms in Ireland and Scotland (Barrett, 2008, p. 678) and unstable Northumbria. As discussed in chapter one, the ninth-century raids on Wales were less than successful. So potentially, the Vikings had correctly anticipated the Welsh kingdoms to be challenging raiding targets and accordingly, they were not attempted until later, as seen in other politically solid entities such as Mercia and the Frankish Empire (Barrett, 2008, p. 673).
Chapter 3

Wales as a target for settlement

In Chapter 2, this dissertation considered whether Wales would have been an adequate target for Viking raiding. One of the other key ways the Vikings affected areas was through settlement. As discussed, typically, Viking longphorts were created in areas of common raiding to allow boat repair, the loading of goods/captives (Griffiths, 2010, p. 13) and to allow Vikings to winter in these new areas (Foster, 2021). These longphorts would grow in population and utilisation and become the basis for Viking settlement in the area. The new settlements allowed Vikings to project influence into these regions. This chapter will look at what made the Vikings select areas for settlement above and beyond the longphorts and look at successful Viking settlements to see what they provided. Then, this chapter will consider if Wales could have equally provided these needs and therefore been an adequate target for Viking settlement.

Skre Dagfinn writes in their article 'The Social Context of Settlement in Norway in the First Millennium AD' that the Viking "aristocracy set their men, some of whom were slaves, to cultivate new farms on the land that was in their dominion" (Dagfinn, 2001). The population boom given as a cause of demographic determinism in the Viking age "made manpower abundant, while good arable land at that time was scarce" (Dagfinn, 2001). In their article "Reconstructing early shieling landscapes & landuse in Cumbria during the Viking Age, "Ryan Foster notes that only 3% of Norway was arable land (Foster, 2021) and that during the Viking settlement of Cumbria "evidence points to the establishment of shielings, suggesting that Scandinavian settlers imposed their infield and outfield system on the
landscape. This system relied heavily on cattle manure as fertiliser for arable farming, which in turn necessitated the exploitation of other land for grazing cattle and winter fodder collection in summer." (Foster, 2021). From this, we can see that the Vikings required arable land and that they acquired it through settlement outside of Scandinavia. In this regard, Wales did not provide a prime target. Wales was, and is, an extremely mountainous country, with more than a quarter over 100ft and no vast stretches of Lowland (Davies, 1982, p.5). This made farming especially difficult. In her book 'The Viking Age', Caroline Ahlström looks at teeth and bones to deduce that Vikings grew "barley, wheat, oats, rye, and peas from which they made bread, porridge, and soup" (Ahlström, 2018), during the Early Medieval period however "In some areas of Wales, and certainly at higher altitudes, the summer is too short to provide an adequate growing season while even in the lowlands there is often too much rainfall and too little heat to guarantee an adequate ripening of cereals" (Davies, 1982, p.7) showing that Wales did not provide adequate conditions to grow some of the Viking's main crops efficiently, and accordingly would not be a primary choice for settlement with farming in mind.

However, arable land was not the only quality that the Vikings looked for when settling, as evidenced in Ireland "the Scandinavians did not succeed in winning large areas of land in Ireland on which they might settle as farmers. In the tenth century they seem to have concentrated their Irish enterprise on the development of trade" (De Paor, 1978). Dublin was developed as a Viking settlement due to its strategic location on trade routes rather than its access to farmland. Dublin's central position in the Irish sea made it desirable as a midway position between the Viking homelands and the markets of the Mediterranean Sea and Africa (De Paor, 1978). Through Dublin, the Vikings traded Silver, "Mediterranean and Gaulish ceramics and glassware" (Griffiths, 2010, p. 101), but more notably slaves. The Irish annals
note that Slaves, possibly from Africa or Islamic Spain, were traded through Dublin, and Paul Holm argues that this slaving activity was the driving factor for the development of Dublin between the 9th and 12th centuries (Holm, 1986). With the critical factor for this settlement being the strategic position in the central Irish sea, it would appear that Wales would also be a suitable choice. Indeed, in their journal 'Evidence of early medieval trade and migration between Wales and the Mediterranean Sea region' K.A. Hemer, J.A. Evans, C.A. Chenery, and A.L. Lamb discuss how in the early medieval period Wales has evidence of a connection to the Mediterranean in which long-distance shipments of people and valuable goods were transported between the locations. From this, it is clear that locations in Wales could have provided a similar settlement opportunity to the Vikings as Dublin, allowing a midpoint in the Irish sea and access to the Mediterranean markets. Perhaps the reason then that Wales was not settled in this fashion is because Dublin was already providing this strategic location. In Chapters 1 and 2, we looked into Viking difficulties in raiding Wales and how Dublin was way ahead of Wales on the Viking timeline of raids-longphort-settlement. If Dublin provided the trading station the Vikings needed, then there was no need to invest resources opening Wales up to provide this service.

Alan Macniven, in his article 'Modelling Viking Migration to the Inner Hebrides', provides a further economic reason for Viking settlement. Macniven argues that emigrating from Scandinavia would have been a costly expense and therefore only accessible to the Viking elite or for people on an expedition funded by the Viking elite (Macniven, 2013). With this, he argues, the venture would likely be one to increase wealth rather than to find land for lower-class Vikings who did not have access to it. This supports the idea that founding economically strategic trade routes such as seen in Dublin were a key reason for Viking settlement. Macniven further provides a different driving force for settlement using the
example of the Hebrides, arguing that the Hebrides provided a gateway to wealthy lands for raiding: War-torn Ireland, and Northern England. This shows that access to areas in which to project power was also a driving factor in Viking choice for settlement as well as access to key trade routes. When considering if Wales could have similarly provided access to new opportunities to raid, it is essential to consider Barrett's leapfrogging model, as discussed in chapter 2. The Vikings moved through the Hebrides, and this node allowed them access to England and Ireland. Once these nodes were established, they allowed access to new areas. This effect can be seen in the increased Norse-Gael raids on Wales in the 10th century, coming from the new Irish Nodes on the Viking network. Accordingly, the question is not whether Wales could allow access to these wealthy areas for raiding (we know that Vikings went from Ireland to Wales and brought plunder back, and so presumably the inverse would be possible), but whether or not Wales could provide new and unique opportunities for raiding. As shown in figure 1, however, Wales was surrounded by areas raided and settled earlier, Hebrides and Cumbria to the North, Ireland and the Isle of Man to the west, and Danelaw to the east. The only exception is Cornwall to the south, but as shown by Lazareth, Claire E and Mercier and Jean-Claude C work, Ireland was also an avenue from which to project power into Cornwall (Lazareth and Jean-Claude, 1999). Thus, Wales was not needed in this regard, with the difficulties Vikings experienced in Wales discussed in Chapter 1. Wales would not be worth the resources required to settle for this purpose; it offered no new areas to project influence and was challenging to gain any foothold in.

Many other settlements within the British isles could be considered to determine why Vikings settled in particular locations and if Wales could provide the necessary elements, and while there are other factors present, most of them fall primarily into one of the three categories discussed above. The Orkneys have strong evidence of a Viking fishing industry but were a
stepping stone to project further into the British Isles (Barrett, Beukens, Simpson, Ashmore, Poaps and Huntley, 2000). The Danelaw was a vast area that allowed for farming (Hadley, 2000, p. 171) and projection into other English kingdoms (Brink and Price, 2012, p.341). The Isle of Man "was at the hub of the Irish Sea and thus crucial for continuing links between the Britons of the north and those of Wales and between Britons and Ireland" (Hemer, 2014).

There are many other examples, but they all tend to fall within one or more of the three categories discussed. In that regard, Wales was a poor target for settlement. The landscape was harsh and mountainous and did not provide a suitable location for Viking Farming. The Welsh kingdoms have proved a tough nut to crack and set the Viking timeline way behind when compared to the rest of the British isles, meaning that any trade routes or areas in which to project power were already accessible from other nodes in the Viking network. Ultimately the difficulty the Welsh Kingdoms provided and the limited potential rewards made Wales a poor choice for attempted settlement. Anglesey, which as discussed was potentially a Viking settlement, offered a node from which to raid and trade in Wales, as seen in Chapter 1, but even this was largely unsuccessful and a role that was also provided by the various settlements in Ireland.
Conclusion

The two most significant way that Vikings influenced the world in the Viking age were through raiding and settlement of areas. Wales was relatively unaffected by Viking expansion due to its characteristics as a poor target for both of these phenomena. James H. Barrett proposed a leapfrogging method of Viking nodes, from which the Vikings gained information on new places in which to expand. This initial chain can be followed from Scandinavia, through the Orkneys, down into the Hebrides and Ireland on one side of Britain, and down into Northumbria on the other. In this regard, Wales would not be a target for raids until new nodes could be established from which the Viking network could learn of targets within the Welsh Kingdoms. This appears accurate as Wales had a relatively late initial raiding date compared to the rest of the British Isles with raids described as a "backwash" (Loyn, 1976, p. 5) from other parts of the British Isles by H. R. Loyn. These initial raids were largely unsuccessful. As discussed in Chapter 1, the primary sources indicate a determined defence by the Welsh kingdoms and show no real Viking successes. Vikings looked for targets with "little human opposition" (Loyn, 1976, p. 6); in this regard, the Welsh kingdoms proved themselves a poor target for Viking raiding. This initial dogged defence by the Welsh kingdoms set the Viking timeline in Wales back significantly. Wales was still experiencing sporadic raiding, while in areas of the British Isles, there were already highly successful Viking settlements. These Viking settlements, such as in Ireland, provided Wales with a new and more frequent pattern of raids, where the Viking settlers in these areas exported violence into the surrounding areas. With this came some Viking success within the Welsh kingdoms and possibly even a settlement at Anglesey. This progress, however, was still well behind the rest of the Viking territories within the British Isles, and for Wales to catch up, it would require Viking investment in the form of settlement.
In this regard, Wales did not provide a good candidate for Viking settlement. Vikings primarily looked for three key elements when choosing where to settle; land for farming, strategic locations on trade routes, and strategic locations to export raids into surrounding areas. Wendy Davies explains the landscape of Wales in the early modern period was too mountainous, too rainy and too cold for the growing cereals, one of the main Viking crops (Davies, 1982, p.7). In terms of a strategic settlement for trading and raiding, Wales could have provided a successful location. K.A. Hemer, J.A. Evans, C.A. Chenery, and A.L. Lamb discuss how the early medieval period Wales has evidence of a connection to the Mediterranean in which long-distance shipments of people and valuable goods were transported between the locations, showcasing that had the Vikings wanted to trade with the Mediterranean through Wales, that they could have done so. Furthermore, the Norse-Gael raids on Wales showcased that Wales could have provided a suitable location from which to launch raids into neighbours such as Ireland. However, as Wales was behind the Viking timeline when compared with its neighbours, the neighbours such as Ireland were already providing these strategic locations. Accordingly, Viking resources were not utilised in opening up Wales, and, as the Viking age progressed, so did the nature of Viking interaction within the British Isles. Viking raids grew bigger and became affairs of kings with national armies rather than small groups of men following a warlord. Consequently, identification of targets for Viking interaction was tied to the politics of kings and crowns, such as demonstrated by the Norse, Danish and English crowns being tied together in the eleventh century; in this regard, Wales had not been drawn into the politics of the Viking world in the preceding centuries and so, was not a target for conflict in this new Viking world.
Bibliography

Primary Bibliography


Jones, A., 1910. The history of Gruffydd ap Cynan; the Welsh text, Manchester [Eng.: University press.


Williams ab Ithel, J. (ed.) (2012) "In Brut y Tywysogion: Or, the Chronicle of the Princes,"
In Brut y Tywysogion: Or, the Chronicle of the Princes of Wales, Cambridge Library Collection - Rolls, chapter,' Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp. 3–374.

Wyatt, D., 2009. Slaves and warriors in medieval Britain and Ireland, 800-1200,

Þorgilsson, A. and Ellwood, T. (1898). 'The Book of the Settlement of Iceland: Tr. from the Original Icelandic of Ari the Learned' available at https://archive.org/details/booksettlementi00ellwgoog/page/n14/mode/2up (accessed 14/03/21)

Secondary Bibliography


Holm, P. (1986). The Slave Trade of Dublin, Ninth to Twelfth Centuries. Peritia. 5. 317-345


Loyn, H. R. (1976). *The Vikings in Wales*. Viking Society for Northern Research


Maund & Maund, K. L., 1996. Gruffudd ap Cynan : a collaborative biography,


Norwegian Archaeological Review, 34:1, 1-12, DOI: [10.1080/00293650116757](https://doi.org/10.1080/00293650116757)


