

Vikings in Ireland:

Research Question:

How did the Vikings shape the culture and society of Ireland?

Thesis:

The Viking invasions of Ireland from the ninth to the twelfth century left a lasting impact on city-building, culture, and society.

Background Information on Ireland:

The Vikings first arrived in Dublin in 841 A.D., where they overwintered in a longphort (temporary ship fortresses). From their longphorts, the Vikings engaged in trade, collected taxes, and participated in Ireland's internal conflicts as mercenaries. Best known of these settlements is Dublin, but also towns such as Wicklow, Arklow, Wexford, Waterford and Limerick were founded by the Vikings.

Beginning as winter quarters, these settlements eventually blossomed into trading towns with great production of everyday consumer items. The Vikings were eventually expelled from Ireland, but returned in the early 10th century where settlement was reestablished and Dublin was developed into a full-fledged city. During the Viking Age, Dublin was the most important city in Ireland; it was the center for the western Viking expansion and trade, and remains one of the more famous Viking settlements. It is safe to say that the Viking invasions of Ireland during the 9th-12th centuries left a lasting impact on city-building, culture, and society.

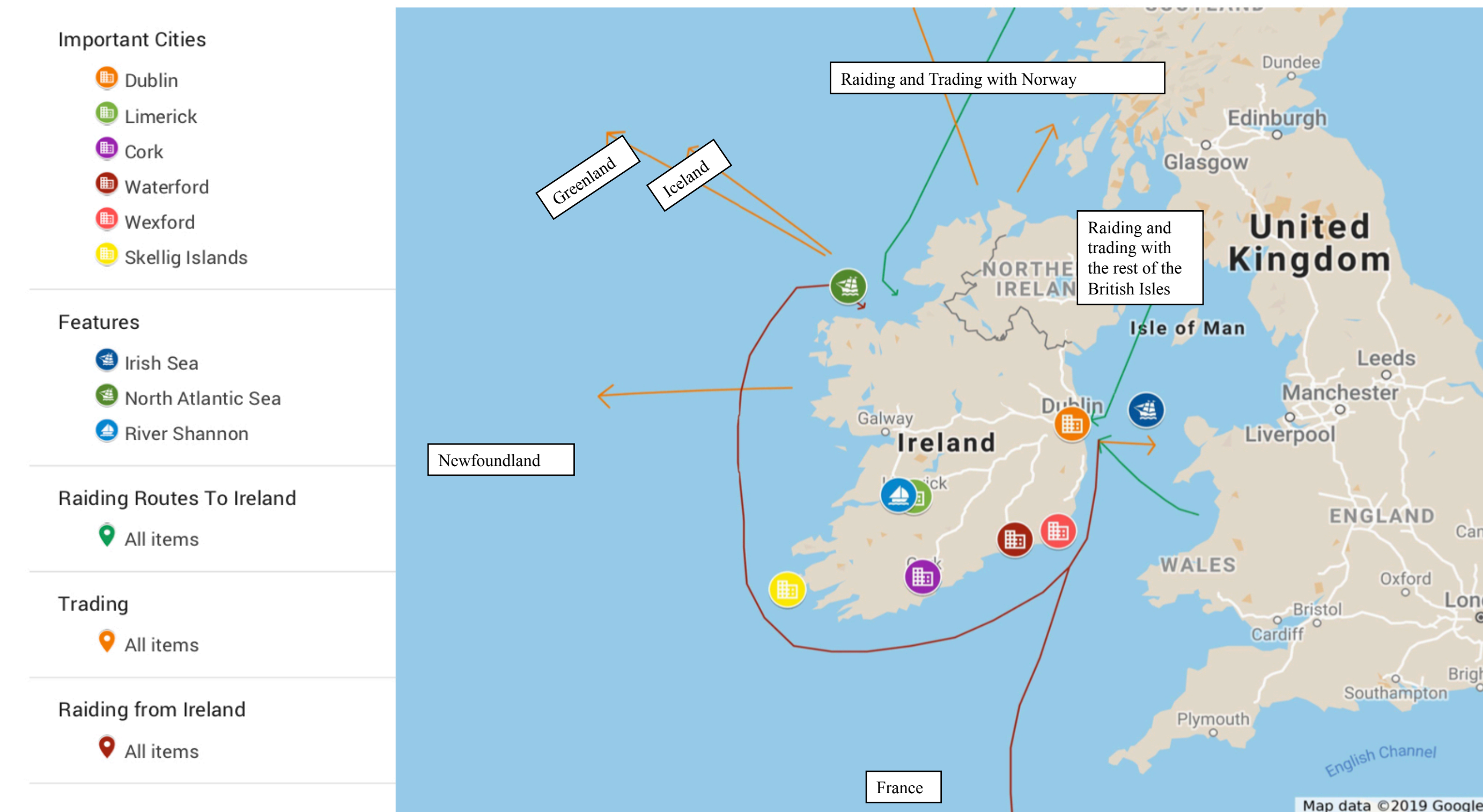
A rigorous period of Viking settlement in Ireland began in 914 A.D. Between 914 and 922 the Norse established Waterford, Cork, Wexford and Limerick (among others). From these coastal bases, the Vikings would move inland to attack, often using rivers such as the Shannon to travel, and then retreat back to their headquarters.

Viking raiders first established a settlement near Waterford in 853. It was vacated in 902, with the Vikings having been driven out by the native Irish. The Vikings re-established themselves in Ireland at Waterford in 914, and built what would be Ireland's first city. Among the most prominent rulers of Waterford was Ivar of Waterford.

Cork is located in Southwest Ireland in the province of Munster, located on the River Lee. Cork notably has one of the largest natural harbors in the world, which made it especially easy for Viking longboats to glide in and set up long-term encampments. Originally a monastic settlement, Norse settlers founded a trading port there between 915 and 922 A.D., establishing Cork as an important trading center. Founded around 800 A.D. by Vikings, Wexford is located in the Southeastern corner of Ireland on the south side of Wexford harbor. Notably, Wexford remained a Viking town for 300 years before it was besieged and overtaken by an Irish king. Limerick is a city in County Limerick (with part in Munster), located in the Mid-West region at the head of the Shannon estuary (where the river widens before flowing into the Atlantic Ocean). The earliest record of Vikings at Limerick is in 845, with permanent settlement on the site of modern Limerick by 922.



Vikings In Ireland:



Viking Trade Network In Ireland:

Ireland played a pivotal role in connecting and adding to the international trading network. The position of Ireland in relation to the other trading locations in Europe, the North Atlantic and Scandinavia allowed for a booming trading network using Ireland's port cities (Fitzhugh & Ward, p. 134). Ringed pins are one of the most abundant trading goods that historians and archaeologist have used to trace the trading routes of goods exported from Ireland. The ringed pins that are shown Figure 2 have been found in Iceland, Norway, and Ireland respectively. There have also been other pins that have been confirmed by archaeologists as having "Irish styles" in places like Newfoundland, England and Faeroe Islands (Fitzhugh & Ward, p. 172). There are other artifacts that have been found and linked to Ireland in both origin and in style. Some of these include arm rings, coins and bullion. The silver found had multiple uses and was melted down to form things such as the arm rings mentioned above. These themes allow historians to gather the extent of the trading network that thrived during the Viking Age. This can be seen in Figure 1 where a button was found in Lø, Steinkjer dated around 920-960 AD. It was found alongside the moved cremated remains of a woman into an unburnt boat. The button that was found in Lø has similar characteristics of those found in Ireland and Iceland. Archaeologist who continue to work with this button have noted these similarities and have also considered the possibility that it could have been made elsewhere (Heen-Pettersen, p. 4). Viking involvement in Ireland expanded through trading these material goods.



Figure 1



Figure 2

Longphorts In Ireland:

An instrumental part of Viking influence on Ireland was the longphort. Beginning with the first establishments of winter camps in the early 9th century, longphorts became an important hub of society, trade, and commerce.

The main characteristics of the longphort consisted of earthworks and trenches built along riverbanks that would provide both a defensive position and a place to keep ships banked. They were primarily built in a D-shape, had an opening to the water, were adjacent to a pool, and were protected by marshlands surrounding the structure (Sheehan, p. 284).

Key longphorts in locations such as Dublin and Linn Duachail were established in 841, and are considered the first permanent Viking settlements in Ireland (Sheehan, p. 282). Viking fleets were stationed along these rivers such as the Liffey and Glyde, and the Vikings conducted raids, established trading, and spent winters encamped in these longphorts. Soon after, similar longphorts would be constructed in numerous locations throughout Ireland, such as the coastal regions of Cork and Limerick, and inland regions such as Lough Ree in Co. Westmeath, a tributary of the River Shannon. Over time, these longphorts eventually became permanent, year-round settlements functioning as important trading centers and markets. It is speculated that many of the locations of these longphorts were chosen based on both geographical and political factors.

Background Information on Dublin:

The original settlements of the Vikings in Dublin were established in the 830's and 840's. The evidence of this is found in the Liffey Valley where "several hundred men and a few women who were found buried upstream in the Nordic way" (Magnusson, p.164). This is the first evidence found of Viking settlement in Ireland. This first arrival of the Vikings is also recorded in the *Irish Annals*, and that larger fleets of the Norse began showing up in Ireland and "overwinter" for the first time (Fitzhugh & Ward, p. 129). At first, the Irish were hostile toward the Viking settlers of Dublin, but as the Vikings became more involved with Irish politics and trade became more prominent and their settlement was established, both rivalries and alliances were formed between the Vikings and the Irish. This led to more cultural blending of the Irish and the Vikings.

The Vikings were driven out of Dublin by the Irish in 902, and their settlement was destroyed. When the Vikings returned, they re-established their settlement in Dublin, and turned their focus to a more urbanized settlement, and there was an increase in economic reliance on trading. At first, the Irish were hostile toward the Viking settlers of Dublin, but as the Vikings became more involved with Irish politics and trade became more prominent and their settlement was established, both rivalries and alliances were formed between the Vikings and the Irish. This led to more cultural blending of the Irish and the Vikings.

Trading:

Dublin became one of the main trading centers for the Vikings and the rest of Europe. Its coastal location made it better for trading because of easy access and was an important link to the international trade network at the time. The archaeological evidence of trading date back to the second half of the 9th century. Some of this evidence include balance scales and weights. The balance scales Common items used for trading also include arm rings (Figure 3), which were tokens of allegiance, and were also often cut up and given out as coins. These can be seen in Figure 4. This style of arm ring were known to be from Viking settlers in Dublin. Ring pins were also another signature trading item from Dublin, and are found all over Europe. Other archaeological evidence of trade, and how vast the trade networks were in the Viking age, and brought to Dublin includes silk, which was likely imported from Asia or the Near east (Fitzhugh & Ward, p. 129). Dublin is also known for slave trading. The prevalence of raiding for and then trading slaves in Dublin is recorded in the Annals of Ulster, from 871 that "Amlaib and Ímar returned to Áth Cliath (Dublin) from Alba (Scotland) with two hundred ships, bringing away with them in captivity to Ireland a great prey of Angles and Britons and Picts" (Sheehan, p. 289). This recount shows that many of the raids that the Vikings went on was to get wealth, and part of that wealth included slaves. Slave trading was also a main component of the wealth and trade economy of Dublin during Viking settlement there. The importance of trade and Viking influence made Dublin the biggest urban settlement in Ireland and continued to be an urban center after the Viking Age.



Figure 3



Figure 4

Longphort of Ath Cliath (Dublin)

The most important longphort was established in Dublin in 841. It was located along the Black Pool, an opening of the River Poddle, a tributary of the River Liffey. *Dubhlinn*, later shortened to Dublin, is the Irish word for 'Black Pool'.

It served as a settlement as well as a trade center, including slave trading (Sheehan, p. 289).

Archaeological excavations have uncovered weights, purse mounts, and balance scales that give physical evidence to the role of Dublin as a trade center. Over time, Dublin became a center for commerce in Ireland.

While most longphorts were heavily fortified with defensive embankments, no such defensive fortifications have been discovered by archaeologists. Some researchers speculate that in the late 9th century, the population of Ath Cliath was large enough for the Scandinavians to not see themselves as vulnerable to attacks, therefore did not require such fortifications (Sheehan, p. 290).

