Seán Duffy (ed.), *Medieval Dublin XVI: Proceedings of Clontarf 1014–2014: National Conference Marking the Millennium of the Battle of Clontarf.* Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2017. €50.00(hbk); €24.95 (pbk). 328 pp. ISBN 978-1-84682-603-0 (hbk); 978-1-84682-604-7 (pbk)

Seán Duffy's series, *Medieval Dublin,* has been a staple introduction to the latest research on medieval archaeology and history of 'Dublin' (loosely defined) for the general public. This sixteenth volume in the series is a bit different from what the title suggests. Prof. Duffy called the 1000th anniversary of the Battle of Clontarf a 'National Conference' and such a name warrants a longer and more rigorous review than may be normal for an issue of *Medieval Dublin.* The annual Medieval Dublin Symposium has been held at Trinity College every May since 1999, except for 2014 when it was replaced by the 'National Conference'.

The *Medieval Dublin* series is concerned firstly with public engagement. This is laudable. When academics are writing for a general audience, and even when we are writing for specialists, we must be careful to avoid uncritically repeating old tropes, anachronisms, and even (probably unwittingly) sexist, racist, or other inappropriate references. Therefore, I have held it to a very high standard in various regards.

Overall, the contributors make bold claims, present new interpretations, take risks, and do not agree with each other. This demonstrates the type of research that we should strive for. But there are some problems which I cannot ignore. 'Men' does not substitute for 'people'; Dubliners were/are not 'foreigners'; and analysing people's DNA to determine who is 'really Irish' and who is 'not' is unacceptable. This is not the place for a discussion of essentialism, but the arguments are well versed in books such as Anthony Smith, *Nationalism and modernism,* (Routledge, 1998). Finally, I noticed that despite repeated, minor references to mothers, there was almost no examination of women as people (the exception being Ní Úrdail, 288–9).

With those necessary remarks aside, this is an exceptional issue of *Medieval Dublin*. Most volumes in the series are not concerned with a sole event and therefore cannot address a topic with the detail found here. Bart Jaski opens the collection with an examination of the 'legendary' rise of the Dál Cais by mixing literary 'tradition' with the fragmentary histories. He notes the creation of ancient rights for the Dál Cais in *De raind hÉrenn* were reflective of Brian and Máel Sechnaill's agreement in 997 and not indicative of political or social realities of Munster in the eighth century. The *De raind* decreed that Ireland should be divided into two parts; that the Dál Cais held the lands free from tax because they took it by conquest; and that the 'kingship' of Cashel should alternate between the Eóganachta and Dál Cais. Interestingly, one of Jaski's genealogical sources is *An Leabhar Muimneach,* a book with which Catherine Swift takes great issue.

In a similar vein, Catherine Swift analyses the genealogies written for people who claimed to be descended from the Dál Cais. Her key focus is *An Leabhar Muimneach,* an eighteenth-century manuscript from Cork. She notes that it is full of revisionism and false antiquity, an important point to make. She highlights the linguistic evidence for these changes as earlier records used 'Uí' for the descendants of the sons of Cass, *Leabhar Muimneach* uses 'Muinter' and inserts later names onto earlier history.

Next there are some problems. In order to prove that the names in *Leabhar Muimneach* are not the real descendants of Cass, Swift labels some of these names as 'not Irish'. She claims that people with the surname 'Sexton' or 'Arthur' in Limerick in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were 'not Irish' despite contemporaries (firmly) labelling these people as 'Irish'. She then changes the thrust of the chapter to incorporate DNA studies of modern Irish people to 'prove' the legendary ancestors of some men. This is a dangerous line to take, and she notes that most academics are not pursuing this type of enquiry.

An Leabhar Muimneach cannot reveal details of fifth- or tenth-century genealogy or the origins of the formation of 'surnames', but it can tell us that that people in Munster in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were Gaelic Irish and felt that they needed to 'prove' that their Irishness was ancient and 'noble'. Later the author notes the problems with using modern DNA to construct early medieval history. She makes a minor note that people today with the surname 'Arthur' may have a Gaelic ancestor who changed his (since most surnames are patrilineal) name to 'Arthur'. Other historians have regularly noted that medieval people changed their 'surname', and many studies have been dedicated to analysing 'Anglicisation' and 'Gaelicisation' (but some of these studies are essentialist) in late medieval and early modern Ireland. She ends the chapter with a well-meaning quote by Dennis O'Brien, a genealogist for the 'O'Brien clan': DNA is not important to us … you're still an O'Brien.

Then there are four chapters on various perspectives (Laigin, Mide/Temhrach, Denmark/England, and the Irish Sea Region) of the lead-up and context of the actual Battle of Clontarf (Denis Casey's chapter is in the middle of these, but I will discuss it later). The first is Edel Bhreathnach's interpretation of the relationship between the 'kings' (*rígh*) of Laigin and the 'kings' (*rígh/konungar*) of Dublin in the fifty years before 1014. She begins with a quote from *Fianna bátar i nEmain*, which states that the Gaill were victorious at Tarbchluana, but that is not her focus. Despite her title ('Kings of Dublin and Leinster before the battle of Clontarf'), she uses discourse which frames the situation as 'Gáedhel versus Gaill', but her research results clearly show that contemporaries did not adhere to the historiographical construct. Máelmórda mac Murchada, *rí Laighin*, and Sigtryggr, *rí Átha Cliath/konungr Dubh Linn*, fundamentally supported each other for twenty years (994–1014) and their alliance was not unusual at that time. Slightly more problematic is her interchangeable use of *Gaill*, 'Norse', 'Foreigner', 'Dubliner', and 'Norse of

Waterford', and her translation of *Laigin* as 'Leinstermen' instead of Leinster people. Her chapter does demonstrate (along with Patrick Wadden's) that more attention should be given to 980 and the life of Óláfr Kvaran when examining the Battle of Clontarf.

Eoin O'Flynn analyses the medieval and modern problems of propaganda regarding the Uí Néill 'kings' of Tara and claims to a 'kingship' of Ireland. He is careful to note that the Uí Néill assertion to a legendary dynasty or dynasties were just that: a claim. The legendary backstory does not give us the facts of prehistoric Ireland, but it can tell us about the time in which it was written. He is careful to note that the only sources for the famous *rígdál* in 997 ('royal conference' between Brian and Máel Sechnaill) are pro-Brian records. O'Flynn provides an in-depth view into Brian's interactions with the Uí Néill, especially Máel Sechnaill, and Tara in the former's quest for greater power and conquest. His conclusion highlights a point regularly missed in general histories of the medieval period: after Máel Sechnaill's death in 1022, the Uí Máel Sechnaill used the title 'king [*rí*] of Tara [*Temhrach*]', but were never again the most powerful 'kings' in Ireland.

Colmán Etchingham outlines the formulae of medieval Gaelic annals for battle reporting and then uses this method to argue, convincingly, that the Battle of Clontarf was not viewed as a 'victory' for Brian mac Cennétig by contemporaries, but instead a stalemate at best, if not a defeat. He notes a figure which should be highlighted: that the people in medieval Ireland nowadays called 'vikings' were defeated in battle two or three times as often as they were victorious (and their victory-defeat ratio was even worse in the tenth century). One problem with this figure is that he later calls Dubliners and Waterfordians 'vikings', so the percentage may not be accurate. Vikings were a profession, not an ethnicity, and their profession was sea-based raiding. People protecting their homes or trying to conquer neighbouring lands were not 'vikings'. By labelling Dubliners and

Waterfordians as 'vikings', Etchingham is implying that they were not 'Irish'.

This work sets up his overview of the Scandinavian activities in the Irish Sea Region and Scandinavia in the late tenth century, an important context for determining whether the Battle of Clontarf was between Brian and Danes (or Norwegians or Islanders) or not. He argues that Sveinn of Denmark, after 994, fought Norwegians or their allies in Scandinavia and the Isle of Man; that Jarl Sigurðr of Orkney was allied with the Norwegians and tried to control the Isle of Man; that Ragnall, *rí na nInnsi*, was an ally of Brian (because Ragnall died in Munster, probably in exile from the Isle of Man); and that Sigtryggr of Dublin was also in the 'Norwegian sphere' for several reasons, but one of note is that Sigtryggr's oldest surviving coinage is from the same time as Óláfr Tryggvason's adoption of coinage in Æðelræd's *Crux* style. These are the premises to argue that if Knútr of Denmark had been able to (which Etchingham notes that Knútr was not), he would have sided with Brian in 1014. Finally, there is his argument that contemporaries thought Brian lost the Battle of Clontarf. It builds on the foundation of Clare Downham's earlier work on the same topic (Downham, 'Clontarf in the Wider World', *History Ireland*, xxii, 2 (March 2014), 22–6). Both are worth reading in detail.

Patrick Wadden traces the discourse used in regard to the Battle of Clontarf over the past one hundred years, specifically the change from Clontarf as 'the Irish nation fighting against the tyranny of evil non-christian vikings' to 'Leinster struggling to be free from Munster (or struggling to replace Munster)'. He agrees with Seán Duffy's call for a new interpretation: that an external 'threat' must have forced Brian to risk his life in battle and not 'petty, internal rivalries'. Patrick details Óláfr Kvaran's alliances and feuds with the *rígh* of Temhrach, Brega, and Laighin. He argues that the lack of recognition outside of Ireland of the Battle at Tara (Temhrach) in 980 — when Óláfr was defeated severely by Máel Sechnaill

— indicates that it was conceived as an 'internal' struggle by contemporaries despite its 'international' significance. He then traces the fortunes of the Meic Arailt (Guðfrøðr Haraldsson and Maccus Haraldsson), the sons of Haraldr Sigtryggsson, *konungr* of Limerick (d. 940). In direct contrast to Colmán Etchingham, Wadden argues that Amlaíb mac Lagmaind was the son of the *rí na nInnsi*, Lagmann/Lacman, and that this Lacman was Ragnall's brother and a son of Guðfrøðr Haraldsson. Also, he argues that Scandinavians fought at Clontarf and they had been part of Sveinn of Denmark's failed conquest of England. He then hints that the jarl of Orkney, Sigurðr, was sent to Clontarf by Knútr of Denmark to place Dublin, the Isle of Man, and the Hebrides under Orkney's, and therefore Denmark's, control.

In the middle of the political-context chapters is the work of Denis Casey. He examines, in great detail, the famous passage in the *Book of Armagh* which contains the phrase '*imperator Scotorum*'. His analysis indicates that two different scribes wrote the passage, probably at different times, the first half being older. He then searches for the scribe who named himself in the second half, Caluus Perennis (Máel Suthain). He traces the various men in tenth- and eleventh-century annals named Máel Suthain and concludes that the scribe who wrote in the *Book of Armagh* was not Brian's *anam chara*. He also concludes that the passage and Brian's actions demonstrate that Brian did not place all of the churches in Ireland under the power of Armagh. I must note, however, the odd translation of '*fer nErend eter Gullu 7 Goedelu*' as 'the men of Ireland, both Foreigners and Irish', when the medieval scribe is clearly intimating to us, the readers, that the people of eleventh-century Ireland included Gaels (Gáedhel) and non-Gaels (Gaill), and that all were *Irish*.

Máire Ní Mhaonaigh analyses medieval literature (some before 1014 and some centuries afterward) which frame Brian as the Octavian Augustus of Ireland, Conchobar mac Nessa (Ulaid) as Augustus, Murchad

mac Brian as Hector (and possibly Brian as Priam, Hector's father), Muirchertach mac Néill also as Hector, and Brian as the Judeo-Christian figures Solomon, David, and Moses. These other literary references are to contextualise the *Cogadh* and its inclusion of Conchobar mac Nessa and Cormac mac Airt. She argues that the *Cogadh* was a narrative 'of kings for kings' in that it is/was a sort of instruction manual for future rulers. Near the beginning, she notes her disagreement with Denis Casey's conclusion and believes that the Máel Suthain who wrote in the *Book of Armagh* was Brian's *anam chara.*

Andrew Halpin wrote the only archaeological chapter (a rarity for *Medieval Dublin*!). He begins his chapter honestly, by noting that there is no direct archaeological evidence for a battle at Clontarf in 1014, and makes his job exponentially harder. His certainty that Brian's 'objective' was to take the city of Dublin is concerning in the context of the previous chapters. His main source for the events of the battle is the *Cogadh*, which previous chapters have dismissed as a source for the actual details of the battle. From this, he describes a 'viking' side and an 'Irish' side at the battle, harking back to the early twentieth-century work of Hayes-McCoy, Curtis, and the de Paors (Wadden, 144). He is right to criticise earlier historians for completely dismissing literary sources in regard to medieval warfare, but fails to note that late-twelfth-century literature (*Táin Bó* in the *Book of Leinster*) should not be used to assume the armour worn in 1014. He concludes that Brian 'won' the Battle of Clontarf against 'the superiority of Viking military technology'.

Paul MacCotter examines the changes in dynastic politics in Munster between 1014 and 1170. He discusses the Uí Donnchada, and the name-change of Clann Donngaile to Clann Charthaig. Both groups were rivals in Eóganacht Chaisil. He then details how the formation of the Uí Bhriain in Thomond assisted the fall of the Uí Donnchada and the rise of Clann Charthaig. The Meic Carthaig then become the Uí Bhriain's

greatest rival in the following centuries. His use of 'Anglo-Norman', 'septs', and 'natives' is worrying. 'Natives' was the colonial term of domination and dehumanisation by the English and later British colonists around the world. 'Septs' is another derogatory term which the English used specifically for the 'tribes' of Ireland. And 'Anglo-Norman' was not a medieval term; it is a nineteenth-century concoction to argue that certain English people were not 'English' enough. It is very interesting that here McCotter calls the Uí Lonngargáin, Uí Chennétig, and Eóganacht families as 'natives' compared to the Uí Bhriain, but it is still very problematic to use 'native' and 'natives' to describe people.

The other chapter dealing with the fallout of 1014 is Marie Thérèse Flanagan's on the Uí Chonchobhair and the 'high-kingship'. She begins with the eighteenth-century history of Brian, written by a descendant of Ruaidrí Ua Conchobair, who criticised Brian for ending the Uí Néill succession to the 'high-kingship'. She notes the irony of Ruaidrí's descendant being displeased with the action that led to Ruaidrí becoming 'high-king'. Perhaps more importantly, she notes that contemporary annalists did not place much credit on Brian's taking of hostages from Máel Sechnaill in 1002, especially compared to the interpretation of that event by the *Cogadh* and later historians. She later notes that the *Cogadh*, while not a source for 1014, can shed light on battle tactics in the early twelfth century. In examining the eighteenth-century depictions of the life of Brian, Professor Flanagan has shown us the origins of the 'why/how did the Uí Chonchobhair become high-kings' question. She then presents us with a thorough and detailed account of the changes to warfare and political structures, mostly in Connacht, between 1014 and 1167 along with historiographical comments and critiques.

Next, there are two chapters on the literary legacy and remembrance of the Battle of Clontarf. Lenore Fischer presents an intricate overview of late medieval Gaelic poems and their depiction of Máel Sechnaill's

submission to Brian in 1002, and analyses their historiography. She detects that there are two major interpretations, which she calls Uí Néillite (only the Uí Néill should have been 'high-kings') and Dalcassian (Brian had the right to be 'high-king'). These two groups have persisted from the fourteenth century until today (and are still alive). Meidhbhín Ní Úrdail traces the modern (possibly sixteenth- but more likely seventeenth- and eighteenth-century) literary depictions of the Battle of Clontarf and their influences. She traces the influence of *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn* on the *Cath Cluana Tarbh* through repetition of mistakes, such as dating the Battle of Clontarf to 1034. It is an informative chapter on the modern act of remembrance of the Battle of Clontarf and how more recent scribes changed and added details to fit their purposes (Gormfhlaith, sister of Máelmórda mac Mhurchada and wife of Brian, was blamed for instigating the Battle of Clontarf, and her supposed motivation was the jealousy of 'an ambitious woman').

Hidden away at the back of the book is a chapter co-authored by Roman Bleier, Sparky Booker, Eoin O'Flynn, Cherie N. Peters, Christina Wade, and Caoimhe Whelan. They have presented a great introduction to the problems with creating a digital-humanities website: difficulties in designing graphics, rights to use images, accessibility of writing versus contextualising historical sources, tactics to maintain attention of the audience, and, probably one of the most overlooked problems, co-operating as a team. They discuss the various aspects of the Clontarf website, most of which match the topics of the chapters in the book, context before the battle, the people supposedly involved in the battle, the effects of the battle, and how it was/is remembered.

I have highlighted important arguments, disagreements, problematic 'translations' due to the fact that this book is important and may be assigned as undergraduate reading for modules on medieval Ireland. When we historians produce public-engagement outputs, extra

care must be taken in regard to terminology. The same care must also be used in the classrooms.

Stephen Hewer
Department of History
Trinity College Dublin
hewers@tcd.ie

RESPONSES

Reading the above review, it is clear that, for Dr Hewer, residence on a particular land-mass trumps all other forms of cultural identity. It is an interestingly revolutionary perspective for the study of the Viking era, a period which traditionally has focussed on invasions, migrations and the importance of linguistic diversity. Less unusual is an approach to reviewing which uses the opportunity to publicise the reviewer's own perspective as much or more as those whose material is being reviewed – one might even call that a commonplace. It is, however, uncommon for a reviewer to concoct his own phrases to paraphrase his understanding of a piece, place them within quotation marks and then criticise the original author for these very phrases (E.g. p.40: "analysing people's DNA to determine who is 'really Irish' and who is 'not' is unacceptable.") It is worth noting, therefore, that the concepts of "real Irish" (p.40), "not Irish" (p.41) and incorporating "DNA studies of modern Irish people to 'prove' the legendary ancestors of some men" (p.41) are all entirely of the reviewer's own devising and occur nowhere in the article being discussed. In the case of the Sextons, the original article discusses multilingual evidence for this surname and the family who bore it and argues that they were bilingual and promoted themselves in both Irish and English-speaking political contexts. In the case of the Arthurs, the article explores the way in which geneticists based in TCD have deployed contradictory documentary evidence in their investigation of ethnic affiliations in early Ireland.

Racism, sexism and nationalism have been subject to much media debate recently. On Facebook and Twitter, one can detect concerns, among younger scholars in particular, about ways in which medieval imagery is sometimes deployed in such popular discourse. For myself, however, I do not believe that using the terms "sexist" and "racist" in the context of academic reviews adds very much to scholarship in our field. It would be wonderful if we could discuss the role of early medieval women in far more detail than we tend to do but given the reality that our early medieval sources deal predominantly with the affairs of men, it is always going to be a difficult aspiration. (The Irish justiciary rolls of the later medieval period represents a rarely rare exception in their treatment of both genders). Similarly, the word racist does not seem to me to add much clarity to sources which so frequently refer to clashes between individuals

speaking different languages. Much early medieval scholarship is devoted to investigating the underlying realities of co-existence on a single land-mass behind such descriptions of mutual antagonism. For me, such scholarship is the hallmark of the volume on the Battle of Clontarf under review here.

I also believe that the use of such terms in academic reviews is dangerous for medieval Irish studies. It is a small but globalised field and the majority of those holding professional posts work in environments where they are the only such specialist in a particular institution and/or region. Having one's publications described in such terms could, in an academic world which spends increasing amounts of time online, have impacts on an individual's working conditions and promotional prospects undreamt of by the person who chooses to use them "probably unwittingly" (to quote p.40). All of us in Irish medieval studies have spent time defending the value of our research to those outside the field; it would be very foolish if, as a community, we wantonly made that task more difficult for those who will be seeking employment in our discipline in the future.

Dr Catherine Swift,
Department of History,
Mary Immaculate College,
University of Limerick
Catherine.swift@mic.ul.ie

Given that Dr Swift has emailed the editors of Óenach, TCD, and the Irish Federation of University Teachers stating that I have accused Dr Swift of 'promoting racism' (Swift, email) in my review of Medieval Dublin XVI, I would like to clarify that my opening comments about public history were of a general cautionary nature. It was not my intention to accuse her (or anyone else) of racism, nor do I believe that I did so.

As historians, especially medieval historians, we must remember that while we study the past, we also live in the present. The discourse we employ in our studies is not encased in an atemporal bubble which shields it from the context of today or any critique in that lens. Not being comfortable with discussing racism and sexism does not mean we can elide them from history. There was medieval racism and there currently is racism. There was medieval sexism and there is current sexism. Even more importantly, racism and sexism regularly 'intersect' (Kimberlé Crenshaw, 1989). Intersectionality refers to the experiences of groups (for example, Black women) who suffer more than one type of discrimination simultaneously or sometimes in uneven or unpredictable variations.

Regarding medieval racism, Geraldine Heng recently wrote a book addressing the denial of racism as a lens of study (*The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages*, Cambridge, 2018) and it follows the excellent work of Miriam Eliav-Feldon, Benjamin Isaac, and Joseph Ziegler (*The Origins of Racism in the West*, Cambridge, 2013) and R. I. Moore (*The Formation of a Persecuting Society: Power and Deviance in Western Europe, 950-1250*, Oxford, 1987). These books evince the presence of racism in medieval Europe.

For the use of racist discourse in the study of medieval Europe, see the works of Dr Rambaran-Olm (https://utoronto.academia.edu/MaryRambaranOlm). These works demonstrate that we cannot simply remove/ignore/deny the lenses of racism and sexism in any academic endeavour. Now if one were to read E.W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York, 1978) and G.C. Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' (in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, Basingstoke, 1988), it would be hard not to recognise the 'othering' language in the history and historiography of medieval Ireland (e.g. calling all Dubliners 'foreigners'). To ignore the context of such terminology and translations and then excuse the repetition of such language under the cover of 'academic tradition' is unrigorous at best. Due to word count, I

have left out a great deal, but ignoring racism and sexism in academic discourse is a dangerous path.

Here I must note that 'scare quotes' (above, I put 'intersect' and 'othering' in them) are a well-established academic practice. They are not in fact literal quotations. Scare quotes are regularly deployed to highlight problematic terms, but above I used them to note the lineage of those terms.

Studying the linguistics of eleventh-century Ireland is great. Studying naming practices in fifteenth-century Ireland is great. Studying twentieth-century DNA in Ireland is great. Combining the three is problematic. Even DNA scholars have rightly noted that linguistics and cultural identity are not transmitted by genetics. As a reviewer I felt it was necessary to raise this concern.

Dr Stephen Hewer,
Department of History,
TCD
hewers@tcd.ie