Revisiting Dingesmere

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Dingesmere is a place known only from the Old English poem *The Battle of Brunanburh*, found in versions of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle for the year 937 (A, Corpus Christi College Cambridge 173; B, London, British Library Cotton Tiberius A. vi; C, Cotton Tiberius B. i; and D, Cotton Tiberius B. iv and one manuscript now lost, but copied and published before 1731 when the original was destroyed, Cotton Otho B. xi). After the resounding victory of Æthelstan and Edmund at *Brunanburh*, the coalition of Dublin Norse, Strathclyde Welsh, Picts and Scots split up, with the survivors making their own way home. The Dublin Norsemen sailed away *on dinges mere*.

Gewitan him þa Norpmen nægledcnearrum,
dreorig daraða laf, on Dingesmere,
ofer deop wæter Difelin secan,
eft Ira land, æwiscmode. (53–6)
(Then the Northmen, dreary survivors of the spears, went in the nail-studded ships on *Dingesmere*, over deep water, to seek Dublin, went back to Ireland ashamed.)

This is Campbell’s text (Campbell 1938), and with minor variations of word-division, punctuation and spelling, the text of more recent editors. The manuscript variants of the phrase *on dinges mere* found in the A and C texts are as follows: *on dyngesmere* in B, *on dynigesmere* in D and *on dinnesmere* in Otho.

There are two main lines of interpretation in relation to this phrase. One is that it is not a place-name at all, but that *dinges*, or more particularly *dinnes*, is a noun in the genitive which qualifies *mere* and thus means ‘sea of noise’ (Bosworth-Toller 1898, s.v. *dynge*), i.e. ‘noisy sea’ (see, for example, Cockburn 1931). A corollary of this interpretation is that the phrase has no particular relevance to the localisation of *Brunanburh*: it could be any sea. The other approach is that *dinges mere* is a name, with a personal- or place-name in the
genitive for the first element and poetic mere 'sea' for the second. Most scholars
take this line, though only John Dodgson has given the meaning of the name
serious consideration (see below). A recent book spends an entire chapter on the
location of Brunanburh without reference to dinges mere beyond translating it
as 'Ding's Mere' (Hill 2004).

Our purpose here is to point to certain difficulties in both of these lines of
interpretation, and then to suggest another which resolves some difficulties,
though it doubtless raises others.

Dinnes
The first line of interpretation can perhaps be relatively quickly dismissed. As
Campbell (1938: 115) notes,

In view of the agreement of A, B-C and D on a form with g, the form of
the Otho MS., Dinnesmere, must be regarded as an alteration by the
scribe. He may have meant dinnes as gen. s. of dyne, 'noise' . . . or he
may have had some other name in mind, such as those quoted from
charters by B.-T., Supp., s.v. dynge.

In other words, this interpretation privileges a spelling of the phrase which is
likely to be that of a scribe trying to make sense of an unfamiliar word, or
indeed substituting an alternative name for it. If dinnes mere is to be taken as
'sea of noise' (Bosworth-Toller 1898, s.v. dynge), the fact that the noun or
adjective is not in the accusative, as it would otherwise be in the phrase on x
mere, indicates that it should probably be understood as an appellative, i.e. 'Sea
of Noise'. At any rate, 'noisy sea' as a translation ignores the grammatical
problems, and 'sea of noise' does not make overmuch sense as a name at all,
though it might suffice to get a scribe out of a corner.

Bosworth-Toller Supplement (1921) s.v. dynge 'a storm' adduces several
charter references, some also attributed to the element din, dyn 'Geräusch,
Getön, Klang, Rauschen' by Middendorff (1902 s.v.). Those of particular
interest here are a *dinmere in Thanet, which, according to Wallenberg (1931:
259) may be from dynn, dyne 'noise' or possibly from a reduced form of denu
'valley'; but the charter context of the name fram dinmeres mufan . . . op
dinmeres fleot . . . op dinmeres mufan leads Cullen (1997: 525–6) to suggest
that the form dinmeres might be the possessive of a personal name, *Denemēr.
However, the din- element here is clearly not genitive, and therefore has no
direct bearing on the interpretation of dinnes (or dinges) mere. Two others have
a form dinnes, however: to dinnes hangran S 437, BCS 712, a grant of land
probably in Water Newton, Huntingdonshire, and on dinnes hlinch S 696, BCS
1072, a grant of land in Ebbesborne, Wiltshire. The former has been identified as Deanshanger, containing the personal name Dynne + hangra ‘slope’, PN Nth 101–2; the latter is also most likely a personal name, translated by Grundy as ‘Dinn’s Lynch’ (Grundy 1920: 68).

The evidence briefly reviewed here shows that despite the best efforts of scholars to find a sense for dinnes or dinges or dynges as common nouns or adjectives in the versions of the poem on Brunanburh, neither the syntax of the phrase nor the proposed parallel expressions give unequivocal support to the notion. In fact, the evidence points towards the expression being a toponym. A further problem with this first line of interpretation also obtains with the second, and is treated below, namely that mere in the phrase dinges (or dinnes) mere may not be poetical mere ‘sea’.

Ding
The second line of interpretation is that published over the space of 40 years in various places by John Dodgson. Since the course of his argument will be unknown to many, it may be best to outline it here. Dodgson argued for the identification of Brunanburh as Bromborough on the Wirral in his article ‘The background of Brunanburh’ in 1957; at that point he had nothing to add on the ‘sea-name Dingesmere’. In 1967, as a footnote to his article ‘The English arrival in Cheshire’, he wrote:

In the light of my argument hereafter about the importance of the -ing-suffix formations in English place-names, it is of almost ironical interest to note that such a formation appears as clinching evidence for the identification of Brunanburh with Bromborough. In the Saga-Book review of this historical problem I committed myself to A. H. Smith’s identification of the battle-site and the Wirral place-name as against the identification with Burnswark in Dumfriesshire: but there remained a loose end — there was no explanation of the sea-name Dingesmere ... a water across which the defeated Norsemen escaped back to Dublin. I now think that Dingesmere is a poetic and figurative invention of a name for the Irish Sea, from OE mere, ‘a lake, a body of water’, here ‘the sea’, compounded with a form Ding which is the genitive singular of a name-form Ding. This form is not explicable as any known Old English personal-name, but it would be quite easily explicable as a kind of place-name form, i.e. as an OE -ing-suffix derivative of the river-name Dee (OE *Deīng > Ding), so that Dingesmere would mean ‘the water of Ding’, and Ding would mean ‘that which is named after or is associated with or which belongs to, R. Dee’.
Dodgson ruefully withdrew this promising idea in 1972 in PN Ch 4 240, where he wrote:

OE *Dē-ing* would contract to *Deng* rather than *Ding*, and the poem-text is too early for the late OE, eME change -eng > -ing, so this attempt cannot be maintained.

But in the Addenda and Corrigenda of PN Ch 5:2 xxi of 1997, this was finally revised by adducing an example of the sound change:

The objection can now be countered by citing the analogy of Margaretting Ess 258 and its base OE *Gīgingas, *Gēgingas (> ME Ginge(s), Genge(s)) from ēgē ‘district’ and īnas. Here the resultant OE *Gē-ing-* formation has contracted to *Gēng- and *Gīng-.*

Dodgson’s argument is a strong one, but on this account, the name would be in some senses a double tautology. If *Ding* means ‘that which is called after Dee, the Dee water, the sea into which the Dee flows’ (PN Ch 4 240) then we would expect neither a genitive construction, nor mere as a generic. It is clear that singular -ing names occur in the genitive, as Smith (EPNE s.n. ing2) and Ekwall (1962) demonstrate, and as Coates (1997) also suggests, but this is not common in pre-Conquest sources, and rarely appears in what Tengstrand (1940) calls ‘secondary compounds’ such as Dingesmere would be if we followed this line of interpretation. This is at least partly because singular -ing in Old English names already has a quasi-genitival function, meaning something akin to ‘place of ~’, and an additional genitive implies that the name has become an appellative. And then if *Ding* means ‘the sea into which the Dee flows’ and mere also means ‘the sea’ here, then the latter element simply duplicates the meaning. That in itself might suggest that by the time Dingesmere came to be formed as a place-name, *Ding* had become an appellative which had lost association with the Dee.

Of course, place-names are peculiarly susceptible to duplication and tautology of the sort mentioned above. But the formation of the name would imply that *Ding* was an appellative used of some land or river feature, perhaps originally and later loosely associated with the River Dee, and that mere was added as an explanatory generic for a particular place in relation to *Ding*. That then raises the question whether the mere generic would be understood as a ‘sea-name’, and we consider this further below.
Dingemere

Our suggestion is that *Ding does not refer to the Dee or to the Irish Sea except indirectly. Rather, that the element refers to the \textit{ping} of Thingwall. Thingwall is one of a series of eleven names in Britain deriving from Old Norse \textit{ping-vollr} ‘place where the assembly meets’ (Fellows-Jensen 1993). Although the name here is not recorded before 1086 DB, in the nature of the case it must have arisen soon after the settlement of the Wirral by the Scandinavians early in the tenth century, along with the other Scandinavian names in the area. Like the Lancashire Thingwall, it is situated at some distance from a place called \textit{rá-býr} (Raby in Wirral and Roby in Lancashire), a farm marking the boundary of the main Scandinavian enclave. The significance of the place is not as a settlement, but rather as the political and administrative centre of the region: Thingwall in Wirral is geographically central to the peninsula, about three miles from Raby and only eight miles from the extreme north-western tip at Wallasey (see map). It is on relatively high, gently sloping ground just over two miles from the Dee at Heswall (there is a steep incline at Heswall itself), or three miles from the Dee west of Thurstaston (avoiding the incline). The Mersey is something over four miles distant east at Bromborough, or slightly less north-east at Tranmere.

The early spellings (all post-Conquest) of Thingwall on the Wirral have initial Z- or Th-, the normal Anglo-Norman way of rendering names with an initial \textit{p-}. We want to argue that these spellings represent both later spelling conventions and later pronunciation. For our suggestion to carry conviction, evidence is needed first that a place-name deriving from \textit{ping} could be pronounced \textit{ding}; and second, that place-names associated with a \textit{ping} could have this element as the specific with the genitive inflection. This evidence is available, though it is often late.

Dingwall in Ross-shire, Scotland (first recorded 1227 as \textit{Dingwell in Ross}, Johnston 1934: 156, Watson 1904: 93), derives from \textit{ping-vollr}, but it is only recorded in spellings with initial D-. Fellows-Jensen 1993 suggests two possible reasons for this. Gaelic speakers replaced the initial Norse /p/ with /t/, a process demonstrable in several of the other names from this compound, Tinwald, Tingwall, and so on. Then she goes on to remark,

The initial D- in all the recorded forms of Dingwall probably reflects the fact that the Gaelic starting-point for the subsequent adoption of the name into English was the dative case, probably dependent on the preposition \textit{in} (later \textit{ann}, \textit{an}{}^{(n)}) ‘in’. The \textit{n} of the preposition would have the effect of voicing the initial /t/ of the Gaelic form of the name to /d/.
She also suggests that nasal mutation may also be a factor, and mentions English pronunciations with initial /d/ of Gaelic names with initial /t/. Whatever factor or combination of factors gave rise to *ping being pronounced *ding in Dingwall, it is clear that it happened in a Gaelic linguistic environment.

The inhabitants of the Wirral in the tenth century were very varied. The place-names indicate Brittonic/Welsh-speaking people (among others, Pensby, Landican, Macefen, and probably Wallasey), as well as Norse, Danes and English. But a good number were Irish or Hiberno-Norse, if we may trust the Irish and Welsh sources discussed by Wainwright (1948) and evidenced by place-names (and see also the discussion in Cavill et al. 2000: 3–4). Arrowe SJ 2686 (‘shieling’, ON *áergi, from Common Gaelic áirge, VEPN s.n.), Noctorum in Woodchurch SJ 2887 (‘dry hillock’, OIr cnoc tírim, PN Ch 4 268) and Irby SJ 2584 (‘farmstead of the Irish’, ON Íra-býr, PN Ch 4 264), the main Irish-related names in Wirral, are all places within a mile and a half of Thingwall. This suggests a local linguistic environment heavily influenced by Gaelic which could give rise to the pronunciation of *ping- as *ding- in the place-name. In passing, it is also of interest that Landican SJ 2885 (‘Tegan’s church’, PrW lann + OWelsh Tecan or an otherwise unknown Welsh saint *Tegan, PN Ch 4 266–7) is within the same range of Thingwall as the names discussed above, and illustrates the voicing of /t/ after /n/ above posited: the sound-change itself is not peculiar to Gaelic. We may conclude, then, that the initial syllable of Thingwall could have been pronounced *ding- by those likely to use it most often.

The Old Norse neuter noun *ping in the genitive singular is *pings. It rarely takes the genitive inflection in place-names, but the inflection occurs often enough to make it plausible in the case of *dinges mere. Fellows-Jensen (1993: 62) notes a late-recorded village name in Sweden, *Tingsvallen in Säters parish in Dalarna, which is especially interesting in the absence of any example in Britain of *ping-völlr with *ping in the genitive. And Fellows-Jensen (1993: 55) and Bridget Gordon (1963: 88–91) argue that the Glen Hinnisdal, Isle of Skye (Glen Tinesdale 1804), derives its name from ON *pings-dalr ‘valley of the thing’.

The toponym *ping-haugr ‘thing mound’ occurs several times in England, but in Deerness, Orkney, there is a Dingishowe (Fellows-Jensen 1993: 60, Marwick 1952: 121), now Dingieshowe. The initial D- in this name reinforces the earlier point about *ping being pronounced *ding, but in this case, and more interestingly, the linguistic environment is Norse and subsequently Norn. Marwick (1929: xlvii) notes that ON b is usually t in the Orcadian dialect, but that ‘occasionally’ it is d: he gives the words droo for ON práðr and pronominal forms du for ON *bu, and his glossary turns up several more.
This evidence is sparse and late-recorded, but is suggestive enough. The two examples of ON pings- from Norse or Gaelic-speaking areas (Dingieshowe and Hinnisdal) give the genitive form an intrusive vowel. This is non-grammatical, a meaningless sound to aid pronunciation. The important matter for our argument is that there are toponyms with ping in the genitive, and that the genitive of this element in the mouths of Gaelic and other speakers is often disyllabic. There is good reason, then, to suppose that a putative pings-pronounced by locals of the Wirral could have been heard by an English speaker as dinges-, with the dings- interpreted as an English noun with the OE strong genitive singular inflection -es.

The habit of applying the English genitive when it does not properly belong to the name-element can be paralleled in many early spellings of Scandinavian names or hybrid English-Scandinavian names. These show 'secondary genitive' forms, that is, they decline the Scandinavian noun as if it were an English strong neuter or masculine with genitive -es. The Domesday Book forms for Basford (Berchesford, probably from ON Barkr, PN Ch 3 48), Knutsford (Cunetesford, from ODan Knut, PN Ch 3 73) and Rostherne (Rodestorne, from ON Rauðr, PN Ch 2 56) are among the many examples in Cheshire of this phenomenon. Thurcaston has a series of spellings from the 12th century onwards with an intrusive vowel in the penultimate syllable, and these are the first recorded spellings with the genitive inflection (Turtaniston, Turstaniston, PNCh 4 279–80). If the personal name here was that of an original Scandinavian settler, then this also has a secondary genitive in the later spellings.

One final possibility is that the whole name dinges mere was an English name. If this were the case, we would have a grammatically regular OE pinges mere ‘mere of the thing’, or possibly even ‘mere of Thingwall’, with omission of the second element of the compound name Thingwall. This could have been heard as dinges mere when pronounced by the local population, and recorded in the poem in that form.

**Mere**

There are two quite different senses for OE mere. In verse, as a simplex and as first element of many compounds, it means ‘the sea, the ocean’. In prose and place-names it has a range of meanings listed by Gelling and Cole as: ‘pond, lake, pool, wetland’ (2000: 21). Mersea in Essex may be the only exception to this two-fold pattern, though on examination this seems unlikely. Jacobsson (1997: 66) interprets the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle’s phrase ‘on an igland þæt is ute on þære sæ, þæt is Meresig haten’ (A, s.a. 895: ‘on one island that is out in the sea, called Mersea’) as ‘the only instance where mere is used about the sea (the ocean)’. But as Jacobsson goes on to say in the next sentence, it may not
actually mean the sea: ‘More specifically, [mere] is probably used about the major inlet from the sea formed by the estuaries of the Colne and the Blackwater.’ Gelling and Cole, if we interpret their hint correctly (they conclude a discussion of Sturmer, Essex thus: ‘so Sturmer is probably “(place overlooking) the Stour wetland”. This may be the sense in Mersea ESX.’), surmise that Mersea might mean something more like ‘the island of (or by, or overlooking) the wetland’ (2000: 22). Jacobsson on reflection interprets mere here as an estuarine feature; Gelling and Cole interpret it in line with other wetland features. At any rate, none of them think that the specific of Mersea necessarily means ‘sea’; and the geography of the island, cut off by water, but closely surrounded for two-thirds of its periphery by land, certainly militates against the interpretation of mere as ‘ocean’.

The question that naturally arises now is which of the two ranges of meanings is appropriate for dinges mere in the poem.

Dodgson proposed that Dingesmere was a ‘poetic and figurative invention of a name for the Irish Sea’, and Campbell also understood the phrase in this sense: ‘It seems most likely, in view of the other place-names introduced in the passage, that Dingesmere is the name of part of the sea’ (1938: 115). This interpretation is not without difficulty (see below), but in several ways it fits the syntax and style of the poem. In relation to sea-journeys, adverbial phrases with on and ofer in close proximity, such as on Dingesmere, ofer deop weter, are usually examples of variation, the iterative stylistic feature of Old English poetry. We might notice The Seafarer 58, on hwelweg . . . ofer holma gelag ‘on the path of the whale, over the expanse of the seas’; or Christ 850 on lagufloste ofer caldweter ‘on the sea-flood over the cold water’. This stylistic feature implies that the two phrases refer to the same feature imaged in different ways. On this interpretation, the phrases on Dingesmere, ofer deop weter would refer to the departure of the Norsemen to Dublin via the Irish Sea, where the sea was named after the area controlled by the ping of Thingwall. This could plausibly have been anywhere towards the end of the peninsula, the Scandinavian enclave in the western and northern areas of the Wirral, perhaps with the Dee estuary being the most likely, because closest to the ping-site.

It remains a possibility that mere in dinges mere should be translated as ‘sea’, having its full poetic sense, thus:

Gewitan him þa Norðmen nægledcnerrum,
dreorìg daraða laf, on Dingesmere,  
ofer deop wæter Difelín secan,  
eft Íra land, æwiscmode. (53–6)
(Then the Northmen, dreary survivors of the spears, left in the nail-studded ships on the sea of [controlled by?] the ping, over the deep water to seek Dublin, went back to Ireland ashamed.)

But when we reviewed the evidence for the formation of the expression *dinges mere* earlier, we concluded that it was coined as a name, a toponym, and this brings a different range of evidence into play in interpreting the phrase, the evidence of names. The simple and dominant fact here is that there is no example in Old English verse or prose or names of *mere* with a genitive singular qualifier where the element *mere* refers to the sea. In other words, if *dinges mere* is a toponym like others in Old English, it almost certainly does not have the element *mere* with the meaning ‘sea’.

There are abundant examples of *mere* as a name generic with a genitive singular qualifier, but they all refer to specific water-features in the landscape, and not to the sea in general. The qualifiers vary from animals and birds (*culfran mere* ‘dove’s ~’ S 786, BCS 1282) to flora (*secges mere* ‘sedge ~’ S 142, BCS 219), to officials (*kingesmere* ‘king’s ~’ S462, BCS 749), to a god (*Tyes mere* ‘Tiw’s ~’ S 1272, BCS 455), to more ordinary and very frequent personal names (37 times excluding doubtful cases, counted by Jacobsson 1997: 216). While this does not make it impossible that *dinges mere* refers to the Irish Sea as Dodgson suggests, it does give us pause for thought; certainly we would wish for some parallel to support the notion.

The second element of *dinges mere* in the Old English poem could then have been understood as *mere* ‘pond, lake, pool, wetland’ (Gelling and Cole 2000: 21). Gelling and Cole (2000:22) remark:

In so far as *mere* had a specialized meaning this was probably that the pond or lake was not a part of a larger feature. For a land-locked bay of the sea, a wide estuary, or a pool in a major river, the Anglo-Saxons were more likely to use *pōl*.

Though the Dee itself is not part of a larger feature, it cannot reasonably be referred to as a *mere* by this definition. At the north-western end of Wirral is the much smaller estuarine/river pool feature of Poulton, with OE *pōl*. In this particular part of the country, near the great estuary of the Dee, Cole’s identification of *mere* as ‘wetland’ (Cole 1993: 40), and Jacobsson’s as ‘land liable to flood’ (1997: 218), is the likeliest feature to be referred to by the element. The topography of the current Wirral coastline is not the same as that of the tenth century, of course, but there is a substantial area of wetland, between Gayton Sands and offshore of Heswall, just over two miles south-west
of Thingwall. This might imaginably have been referred to as 'the mere of the thing': it is rough marshy land subject to flooding by tide and river.

The syntax of the poem and Old English poetry more generally, as mentioned earlier, seems to militate against such an interpretation. The noticeable thing about the on . . . ofer expressions discussed is that they are general. There are examples of this type of syntactic structure which refer to different places. When names are introduced, it is apparent that although a voyage is still the focus, the names can and do specify places where different water features are in question. This passage from Solomon and Saturn is similar in many ways to the Brunanburh one:

\[\ldots \text{gif } \delta u \text{ gewitest on Wendelsæ} \]
\[\text{of}er \text{Coforflod } \text{cyðđe secean } \ldots \text{(Krapp and Dobbie 1942: 38, lines 204–5)}\]
\[(\text{if you go on the Mediterranean Sea, over the [River] Chabur to seek your homeland } \ldots )\]

This passage picks up Saturn's declaration earlier:

\[\text{wende mec on willan on wæteres hricg} \]
\[\text{of}er \text{Coforflod Caldeas secan. (Krapp and Dobbie 1942: 31, lines 19–20)}\]
\[(\text{I shall go gladly on the water's surface over the [River] Chabur to seek the Chaldeans.})\]

As in Beowulf 471, wæteres hricg refers to the sea, as plainly does Wendelsæ. Coforflod in this poem has been identified variously as the biblical River Chabur or Chebar (Krapp and Dobbie 1942: 161, note to line 20), but it seems reasonably certain that it is a river name. The passages apparently refer to two different but connected maritime locations. So on . . . ofer expressions do not always refer to the same piece of water. With this in mind, the related passage from the Brunanburh poem might then be plausibly glossed as follows:

\[\text{Gewitan him } \text{þa Norþmen nægledcnearrum,} \]
\[\text{dreorig daraða laf, on Dingesmere,} \]
\[\text{of}er \text{deop wæter Difelin secan,} \]
\[\text{eft Ira land, æwiscmode. (53–6)}\]
\[(\text{Then the Northmen, dreary survivors of the spears, went to [or in] the nail-studded ships on the wetland by the thing, [went] over deep water to seek Dublin, back to Ireland ashamed.)}\]
One final possibility might also be considered. If, as we suppose, *dinges mere* was the wetland by the *ping*, the original name might have been Norse, and interpreted in both its parts as English. The ON element *marr* frequently interchanges with OE *mere* in English place-names (EPNE 2 36), and could easily be confused with it in the present instance. There is, moreover, considerable overlap in meaning between ON *marr* ‘marsh, fen’ and OE *mere* ‘wetland’. Whether the original generic of this name was OE *mere* or ON *marr*, the purpose of the name would be clear to those who used it: it would locate the feature near the important *ping* site; and it would alert travellers using the shallow tidal waters of the Dee estuary of the danger of marshland.

Conclusion
We would like to suggest that the *ding* of *dinges mere* in the Old English poem of *Brunanburh* refers to the *ping* of *Thingwall*. There can be little question that the *mere* refers to a water feature, and we further suggest that the name refers to water overlooked or controlled by, or associated with the *ping*. This might be the Dee estuary and the Irish Sea. But the name probably derives ultimately from the hybrid Norse-OE *pings-mere* ‘wetland by the thing’, or possibly from a pure Norse compound, *pings-marr* ‘marshland by the thing’. In our view this name was spoken with a Gaelic inflection and heard by a speaker of English. The process producing the form *dinges mere* from the posited *pings-mere* or *pings-marr* is undoubtedly complex, but there is sufficient contextual and comparative evidence to make it plausible.

We return to and close with the poem. The poem is a propaganda piece which intends to exalt the exploits of the West Saxon and Mercian forces and humiliate the enemy coalition. All kinds of rhetorical devices are deployed to these ends (Carroll 2001: 125–40 gives a particularly acute analysis of the linguistic structure of *Brunanburh*). In this context, and with the awareness that *dinges mere* would not be widely known as a place to most of those who would hear or read the poem, the poet very likely had some specific purpose in mind when mentioning the place. If our interpretation of the place-name *dinges mere* is correct, the poet’s purpose becomes clearer. *Dinges mere* was not necessarily a poetic reference to the Irish Sea, but the name of a place at some distance from the site of the onset of the battle. For those who understood the name and were familiar with the area, this name was used to emphasise the desperation of the fugitives, in that they had to depart as best they could from an unsuitable place, wetland or coastal marshland (*mere* in Old English, *marr* in Old Norse), before they could make the safety of the deeper water and escape to Dublin. But the name would especially highlight the brutal fact that the Norsemen fled from a
place close to the centre of Scandinavian power and the symbol of Scandinavian independence and self-determination, the ping.

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