

REVIEWS

Norse-Gaelic Contacts in a Viking World. Colmán Etchingham, Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, Máire Ní Mhaonaigh and Elizabeth Ashman Rowe. Brepols Publishers: Turnhout, 2019, xii + 435 pp. ISBN 978-2-503-57902-3. €65.00 (Hardback).

This volume offers an exciting collaboration between four well-established experts on medieval Scandinavia, Iceland and Ireland. Despite the title and cover photo of a Manx runestone, this book deals not with the Viking Age as conventionally identified but with the ‘long thirteenth century’, defined as 1169 × 1334. It provides a detailed analysis of literary links between the North Atlantic and the Irish Sea region through a range of case studies. There is detailed discussion of *Konungs skuggsjá*, *Baile suthach síth Emhna*, the Battle of Clontarf in Icelandic sources and claims of Gaelic ancestry in *Landnámabók*. The book provides an important analysis of cross-cultural contacts in the later Middle Ages and it will be of interest to a broad range of literary and historical scholars.

The first chapter provides commentary on contacts between the Norse- and Gaelic- speaking worlds in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Within the Irish Sea region the focus is on Ireland and the Isle of Man. Perhaps a missing piece of the jigsaw, only occasionally alluded to in the book, is the role of the north-west-English coast in this ongoing network of contacts. Norse and Gaelic influences can be perceived in the *Life of St Bega* of St Bees, Cumbria, c. 1200 (which offers some close parallels to the hagiography of St Sunniva) and in the works of Jocelin of Furness, which are touched on briefly. Indeed, Jocelin’s *Life of St Patrick* or tales derived from it may have been familiar to the author of *Konungs skuggsjá*, although possible borrowings (such as Jocelin’s account of Tara being swallowed into the ground) are not discussed.

The ‘Wonders of Ireland’ in *Konungs skuggsjá* are the focus of chapter two. This chapter provides a detailed evaluation of key sources of the work as well as text and translation of the relevant sections. The analysis highlights multilingual literacy in the Irish Sea region, as its author drew on a wide range of material. The political context in which *Konungs skuggsjá* was written is also discussed, although it is hard to know whether the flattering claim in *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* that the king was invited to rule Ireland was serious or exaggerated. Chapter three deals with the praise poem for Ragnall, King of Man, *Baile suthach síth Emhna*, providing text and translation with analysis. Both the genre of bardic poetry to which the praise poem belongs and its political context are discussed with thoughtful insights and ideas that goes beyond the useful work done on this king by R. Andrew McDonald.

Chapter four deals with Icelandic narratives of the Battle of Clontarf. As with previous chapters, editions and translations are provided for relevant

sections of text, complemented by well-informed discussion of the historical context. Following the work of others, including Goedheer and Hudson, the poem *Darraðarljóð* is seen to reflect a Norse perception that the Dubliners had the victory at Clontarf. This idea was explored previously by this review author in ‘Clontarf in the Wider World’, *History Ireland*, Clontarf issue, in 2014, but the article is not cited. Relevant texts to consider here would have been *Gesta Herewardi* and a poem composed by Cináed ua hArtacáin which claims that the *Gaill* were the victors at Clontarf. The discussion of a hypothetical *Brjáns saga* which underlay Icelandic accounts of Clontarf includes detailed analysis of the work done by Donnchadh Ó Corráin. I am not entirely convinced that such a text existed; *Cogad Gáedel re Gallaib*, or a lost written translation, or oral dissemination of its contents may have influenced the later Icelandic saga narratives of Clontarf.

The fifth chapter discusses tales of Gaelic ancestry in Iceland, focused on *Landnámabók*. This forms an excellent final case study for the book. It demonstrates that Irish links mattered to the redactors of *Landnámabók* working in the later decades of the thirteenth century and the first decade of the fourteenth century. A useful study is provided of the transmission of Gaelic names analysed on a case-by-case basis. A special study is made of Kjarvalr Írakonungr. Kjarvalr’s association with Cerball mac Dúnlainge (king of Osraige, d. 888) is challenged and Cerball mac Muirecáin (king of Leinster, d. 909) is put forward as a more likely contender.

The authors of the book conclude with an evaluation of the wider implications of this case-study-based approach to Norse-Gaelic literary contacts. Emphasis is placed on the interpretation of the texts as ‘political documents’ and it is proposed that the text-based, historically grounded approach be applied to a wider range of sources. It will be interesting to see what fruits this rallying call bears in future.

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The Correspondence of Thomas Stephens: Revolutionising Welsh Scholarship in the Mid-Nineteenth Century through Knowledge Exchange. Edited by Adam Coward. Celtic Studies Publications XXIII. Celtic Studies Publications, Aberystwyth, 2020, xxxii + 287 pp. £19.95. ISBN 978-1-891271-30-4.

This volume, the twenty-third in the Celtic Studies Publications series, is an edited selection of the correspondence of Thomas Stephens (1821–75). Stephens, a pharmacist from Merthyr Tydfil, was an amateur scholar of Welsh literature and history. He is, perhaps, best known for his *Literature of the Kymry* (1849), though he was also renowned for his contributions to local and national eisteddfodau. As this publication demonstrates, Stephens’s reputation was not limited to Wales, and he contributed greatly to nineteenth-century European scholarly networks. The correspondence included in this volume has been carefully selected to fulfil two aims. The first is to promote Stephens’s