

Jón Viðar Sigurðsson and Timothy Bolton, eds.

*Celtic-Norse Relationships in the Irish Sea
in the Middle Ages 800-1200*

Brill: Leiden and London, 2014; pp.242 €109

ISBN 978900425111

THIS volume is a collection of papers from an important symposium held at Oslo University in 2005. The remit of this conference was to explore the breaking down of traditional disciplinary walls and to encourage further development of inter-disciplinarity in Viking studies. The contributors came from a variety of fields and countries, including Norway, Scotland, England, Ireland, Wales and Germany. If this publication is a true reflection of the event, the conference must surely have been a success, because it admirably exhibits inter-disciplinarity in its range of topics. There are important papers on history, archaeology and literature.

Claire Downham's chapter on Viking settlement in Ireland before 1014 is an excellent summary of the range, extent and impact of such settlement. Her discussion of the Old Irish term *longphort* and the maps of chronicle references to Viking encampments are particularly useful. Colmán Etchingham also deals with Old Irish terminology in his discussion of the differing names used by the Irish for the Vikings in the Irish Annals. His carefully argued case *contra* Dumville that the *Dubgenti* represent the opposition to *Amlaib* and *Ímar*, Viking kings of Dublin from the territory of *Laithlinn*, seems the most plausible reading of this difficult material. The Viking era in the Irish Sea area is also the focus of Fiona Edmonds, who explores the affinity of Scandinavian settlers along the Cumberland coast for Gaelic saints. This is an important insight into the cultural influences affecting Viking settlers.

The political differences between the Kingdom of Man and the Isles and the Earldom of Orkney, both heirs of earlier Viking settlement, are discussed by Barbara Crawford, and, as one would expect from such an expert, is an important and conclusive study. Another difference between the two, the

reasons why, unlike Orkney, Man and the Isles lacked a royal martyr and never generated an important saint, is discussed by Ian Beuermann. He suggests plausibly that, despite a Manx aversion to martyrdom, the real reason was a lack of cooperation between monarchy and Church at a critical time. Both these polities took slaves, so David Watt's exploration of slavery, power and cultural identity in the Irish Sea region, is a rude reminder that the past is truly a different country.

Material culture is well represented in this volume. Jan Erik Rekdal discusses the iconography on Viking Age cross-slabs and posits that the Norse used pagan motifs in an attempt to strengthen the similarities between their indigenous mythology and their new religion. This form of cultural adaptation made the new religion their own. Alan Lane, in another important chapter, describes the nature of the pottery record and its use as evidence for cultural change in the Hebrides between AD 500 and 1300. Two of his conclusions, which have direct relevance to how one views the Viking impact on the Hebrides, are that the use of modified pottery in the Viking period suggests something more complex than just simple continuity and that the use of pottery in the very earliest Hebridean Viking settlements remains to be demonstrated.

Cultural contact and borrowing is also discussed by Zanette Glørstad. She explores the formation and negotiation of identities expressed through the use of Insular objects, such as ring-pins and pennanular brooches. However, her scope is a good deal wider than that. She looks at nothing less than the formulation and definition of Viking ethnicities, both overseas in the colonies and at home in Scandinavia. I found her discussion of why pennanular brooches became a male symbol in the upper strata of Norwegian society particularly thought provoking. As was the implication that the Viking raids were a type of *rite de passage* for young men and that the objects they brought back were invested with mythic value. Myth and ritual also form part of Julie Lund's explanation for Viking weapon deposition in Ireland. She suggests objects were perceived as beings which for one reason or another were deposited when it was no longer seen as appropriate to use them. Both these chapters take us away from material, economic or utilitarian explanations for Viking activity and should be applauded.

The final chapter is by John Hines and is an expansion of his inaugural speech at the conference. This is the cultural-literary contribution to the volume and an excellent one it is. He traces the development of the Óláfr-*Anleifr-Havelok* legend across the Danelaw and the Irish Sea region. The Óláfr in question is probably Óláfr Cúarán who died in AD 980.

I have read and re-read this volume and it is full of excellent scholarship and genuinely interesting research. I would definitely recommend it to scholars and students of Viking studies. Indeed, I am sure lay people would also find much to engage them. One particular feature that I enjoyed, certain journals take note, was the fact that there were extensive, rich and fascinating footnotes; long may they continue to thrive in academia!

*Dr Andrew Jennings
Centre for Nordic Studies, University of the Highlands and Islands*