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Traversing the Inner Seas

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illustrations, maps and plans throughout, it again represents a hugely important contribution from a most luminary scholar.

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DUNCAN W. WRIGHT

Traversing the Inner Seas: Contacts and Continuity in and around Scotland, the Hebrides, and the North of Ireland. Edited by Christian Cooijmans. Edinburgh: The Scottish Society for Northern Studies. 2017. ivx + 290 pp. £14.95 (UK), £17.95 (international). ISBN 978 1 5272 0584 0.

Traversing the Inner Seas presents a collection of ten papers that were presented at three residential conferences in the Inner Hebrides (2012, 2015) and Northern Ireland (2014). Edited by Christian Cooijmans, the predominantly cross-disciplinary studies offer new insights into a wide range of topics and disciplines that highlight the interconnectivity of Scandinavian and Gaelic cultures in Scotland, the Hebrides and the north of Ireland. Grouped in three sections, they focus on places and areas along, across, and beyond the Inner Seas.

The first section 'Along the Inner Seas' starts off with two place-name studies. In 'Longhouses below the Waves: A Place-Name Analysis of the Norse Settlement of Tiree', John Holliday detects extensive and long-lasting Scandinavian influence on this western island of the Inner Hebrides. Contrary to the prevailing assumption that the island was only 'lightly brushed by the Norse wand' (p. 18), Holliday argues that the large number of Norse place names suggests prospering Scandinavian settlements on Tiree from the mid-ninth to the twelfth century, while Old Norse continued to be spoken into the fifteenth century. In a similar vein, Alan Macniven sees a strong Scandinavian presence on Islay in 'What's in a Name? The Historical Significance of Norse Naming Strategies in the Isle of Islay'. Macniven's detailed study of place-name evidence illustrates that Gaelic continuity on the Isle of Islay has been overestimated. According to Macniven, the absence of pre-Viking Gaelic toponyms, the spread of place names with Norse elements across the island, and the adaptation and preservation of Old Norse toponyms over time point to the existence of a dominant Norse-speaking population on Islay that was only gradually replaced by Gaelic-speaking immigrants.

In the third paper of the section, 'Gaming Material Culture and Hybridity: Finlaggan and the Kingdom of the Isles at Play', Mark A. Hall introduces the long tradition of gaming both for divination and

recreational purposes in the Hebrides from the early first millennium AD to the fifteenth century. Using both archaeological evidence and written sources, Hall convincingly argues that board games in particular contributed to and reinforced socio-cultural identities. While the flexible terminology for 'board-game' (*fidcheall*, *hnefatafl*, *tables*) is a case of cultural hybridity present in the Western Isles in the medieval period, Hall also stresses the prestige of board games like *fidcheall*, which 'social elites staked out [. . .] as their right and privilege, in part as an attempt to control freedom through access to free or leisure time' (p. 77).

Section Two comprises four essays that focus on cultural connectivity 'Across the Inner Seas'. In 'Scottish Affairs and the Political Context of *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh*' ('The Battle of the Gaels with the Foreigners'), Clare Downham addresses the commonly neglected Scottish presence in this early Irish saga narrative and its account of the recurrent Viking attacks on Ireland, which culminated in the Viking defeat by Brian Boru's forces at Clontarf in 1014. Downham highlights several instances of the text's fictive enhancement of Scottish involvement in Irish-Scandinavian affairs, and proposes that the deviations from the Irish chronicle accounts were intended to strengthen both the antagonism between Vikings and Scots and the alliance between Irish and Scots, perhaps 'with an eye to promoting Uí Bhriain rule in the Isles in the early twelfth century' (p. 102). (Drift) Geology and onomastics are the focus of Ryan Foster's 'The Use of the Scandinavian Place-Name Elements –*Sætr* and –*Ærgi* in Skye and the Outer Hebrides: A Site and Situation Study'. Foster's survey of the geological and topographical features of Viking settlements with the shieling names *sætr* and *ærgi* in the Outer Isles and Skye reveals that *ærgi* was adopted from the Irish *áirge* for dairy farms built on fertile soil, whereas the Old Norse form *sætr* was used for all sorts of farming including beef production.

Nicholas Evans's 'News Recording and Cultural Connections between Early Medieval Ireland and Northern Britain' returns to the Irish chronicles already mentioned in Downham's discussion. Evans offers an illuminating analysis of the chronicle record for northern Britain as it was shaped by the chroniclers' interest in specific social and political events, such as the ninth-century Viking raids in Ireland, Scotland and the Hebrides or the end of the Dál Riata kingdom. The section concludes with Alexandra Sanmark's 'An Exploration of *Thing* Sites in the Islands on the Scottish West Coast'. Incorporating archaeological evidence, topographical features (water location, mounds), place names derived from Old Norse, and written sources in her investigation, Sanmark identifies eight Scandinavian assembly sites in the Isles, including the site at Finlaggan on Islay, which became the inauguration place of the MacDonalds in the fourteenth century.

The third section of the book addresses locations 'Beyond the Inner Seas'. In 'The Norway to Be: *Laithlind* and Alvaldnes', Arne Kruse traces the place name *Laithlinn* in the Irish annals back to a powerful kingdom called **Leiðland* on the west coast of pre-unification Norway. The centre of this kingdom was Avaldness, which is situated at the starting point of the *Leið*, a commercial sailing route northwards along the coast of Norway. Kruse suggests that the term **Leiðland* fell out of use when a unified Norway ('the way to the north'/'the narrow path') was created in the late ninth century and concludes that 'both **Leiðland* and **Norðvegl* **Nórveg* could have existed as compound appellatives long before they became specific names of politically defined areas' (p. 226).

Shifting the focus from Norway to the British Isles, Jamie Barnes's paper 'Hammerhead Crosses of the Viking Age' focuses on syncretic crosses and religious hybrid practices in Cumbria and south-west Scotland. A particularly apt example of a syncretic sculpture is the Kilmore Cross and its complex Christian and pagan iconographies, which, according to Barnes, suggest recognition of different religions and which could also represent potential connections between hammerhead crosses and commercial settlements, the so-called beach markets. Interestingly, Barnes regards the smith scene below the Christ figure on the Kimorie Cross as an iconographic representation of the legendary hero Sigurd standing in the smithy of his foster father Regin. Although the scene can also suggest the legend of Weland the Smith, which is depicted on the front panel of the eighth-century Anglo-Saxon Franks Casket, Barnes's interpretation has the advantage that it highlights the religious syncretism of the scene with its allusion to Sigurd's destruction of evil embodied by the dragon Fafnir. Even the birds that Barnes cannot place (but that occur on the Franks Casket) fit into the scene, as it is the conversation of birds that makes the hero aware of his foster father's treachery and causes him to kill the traitor. Finally, Ian Peter Grohse's 'Late Medieval Vikings: The MacDonald Raids on Orkney c. 1461' discusses the history of continuous Hebridean aggression against Orkney in the fifteenth century. Grohse demonstrates that the 1461 attack by the MacDonald lords was only one particularly severe incident in a series of raids by the so-called 'Wild-Scots' that had afflicted the Orcadians for decades or perhaps centuries (p. 286). Grohse argues that the Hebridians went indeed 'a-viking' for material gain and an enhanced reputation and thus continued Viking practices into the late medieval period.

Grohse's study is a fitting conclusion to a collection of essays that provide new and sometimes surprising insights into various manifestations of material and cultural interconnectivity in the

Hebrides, Scotland and the north of Ireland over a period of seven centuries. In short, this volume has much to offer. It introduces the reader to a wide range of topics, which are explored thoroughly and with great lucidity. Summaries of the main findings at the end of the essays, tables, maps and illustrations make the content of the book very accessible; in fact, anyone who wishes to explore the presented material further can consult the extensive bibliographies at the end of the articles. This volume is certainly a significant contribution to the field of cross-cultural studies in the Inner Seas area.

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How the Anglo-Saxons Read Their Poems. By Daniel Donoghue. The Middle Ages Series. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. 2018. vi + 238 pp. \$69.95/ £56. ISBN 9780812249941.

This book is not a study of how the Anglo-Saxons interpreted poetry, nor of how they performed it, though it repeatedly (and usefully) emphasizes that written poetry must have been far less common than oral poetry throughout the period. Rather, it discusses how Anglo-Saxon readers of poetry took in the information on the page. How did someone who didn't already know a particular poem succeed in navigating the lightly punctuated text block? The manuscript presentation of poetry, including the curious reluctance of scribes to employ conventions of lineation and punctuation already well-developed for Latin poetry, is not a new topic, but Donoghue offers a synthesis of work in a range of subdisciplines, adding a distinctive element in his use of eye-movement studies. While the scientific element is extremely interesting, to my mind it is the lucid re-evaluation of previously available evidence that is the most valuable aspect of this excellent book.

The introduction provides a map of the argument and makes key claims: that the written poems make sense in relation to the 'dark matter' of Anglo-Saxon oral culture, invisible to modern observers but pervasively conditioning the reception of poetry; and that 'the conventions for copying out Old English poems are adequate to the task' (p. 9). This means that the way scribes presented these texts was not underdeveloped, but successfully transmitted poems to new readers. The first two chapters break down monolinear approaches in relation both to reading itself and the relationship of orality and literacy. Chapter 1 argues against the common view that early medieval