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about how to respond to Viking invasion' (p. 14); yet the contemporary context is similarly troubled. The Scandinavian settlement should remind us of the significant contributions of migrant peoples, and that England, and the rest of the United Kingdom, has always been a nation of immigrants.

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ATLANTIC OUTLOOKS ON BEING AT HOME. GAELIC PLACE-LORE AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF A SENSE OF PLACE IN MEDIEVAL ATLANTIC OUTLOOKS ON BEING AT HOME. By MATTHIAS EGELER. *FF Communications* 314. *Academia Scientiarum Fennica*. Helsinki, 2018. 324 pp. ISBN 978-951-41-1125-9.

Egeler's stated aim is to 'ask whether the medieval Icelandic sense of place, as reflected in Icelandic narrative culture, has been influenced by the close contacts that existed during the Viking Age between Iceland and the Gaelic-speaking world of Ireland and Scotland' (p. 13). He extends this to the further question, 'what was the role of Gaelic approaches to place and landscape in the genesis of an Icelandic sense of place?' (p. 30). He approaches these questions by dividing the book into three sections (referred to as chapters with sub-chapters). The first is a very useful summary of recent research and theorising on concepts of space and place. Egeler draws out the helpful distinction between 'space', denoting an area that is unmarked, empty, meaningless, and, on the other hand, 'place' as a locality or topographic feature that has been ascribed 'meaning and significance' (p. 22).

The second section is a comparative analysis of nine 'Icelandic place-narratives that seem to be borrowings or adaptations of place-stories otherwise known from medieval Irish literature or upon which Gaelic motifs and practices have at least had a formative impact' (p. 14). The third is a summary of the previous analyses, intended to highlight the 'Christian religious semantisation of the land and a pervasive focus on the creation of "home"' (p. 15). Egeler also aims to address past scholars' 'regrettably cursory presentation of the [Gaelic] material' (p. 15).

Whilst the book includes interesting comparative and speculative discussions about the flow of Gaelic and Norse narrative influences, the expectations raised by the title and foreword do not match the content. A more accurate title would have referred to it specifically as a comparative analysis of Gaelic (predominantly Old Irish) texts and *Landnámabók*. Seven of the nine Icelandic stories are taken from *Landnámabók*, one is from *Eyrbyggja saga* and the remaining example is a folktale recorded in the late seventeenth century by Thomas Barroliin the Younger. As Eleanor Barraclough notes in 'Naming the Landscape in the Landnám Narratives of the *Íslendingasögur* and *Landnámabók*' (*Saga-Book* XXXVI (2012)), the Hauksbók redaction of *Landnámabók* 'has a particular interest in all things Irish' (p. 91). With little acknowledgment of the great breadth and depth of geographical and topographical material in Old Icelandic literature,

the *Íslendingasögur* in particular, Egeler is attempting to stretch his case from an interesting study of the Gaelic influences on *Landnámabók* to make it cover the ‘Sense of Place in Medieval Iceland’.

In addition to the reference to Bartholin, there are two further temporal diversions from medieval Iceland, both into the twentieth century. In a chapter on ‘cliffs opening’ (pp. 91–98), Egeler makes use of a twentieth-century recalling of an Irish folktale about cliffs that open in comparison with a superficially similar incident in *Njáls saga* (ch. 14). The purpose of this is to set up the Irish tale as a ‘straw-man’ against which he can illustrate his rules of correspondence to determine coincidence or interdependence (p. 97). The second Irish folktale recorded in the twentieth century is analysed in relation to the story of Auðun the Stutterer and his magical horse from Lake Hornsvatn (pp. 99–109). The purpose of this comparison is to illustrate the longevity of such tales, and thus that they could travel to Iceland over time; this digression into the continuity of folklore, however, somewhat weakens Egeler’s well-argued comparison with Cú Chulainn’s magical water horse from *Bricriu’s Feast* (pp. 104–07).

Egeler’s potentially interesting reinterpretation of Þórólfr’s settlement of Þórsnes and his regulations about Helgafell (*Eyrbyggja saga*, ch. 4) in a section on *dritsker* and bodily matters is undermined by overstatement and omission (pp. 76–81). Relying on Cleasby and Vigfusson’s interpretation of *drit* to mean dirt, especially bird guano (*An Icelandic–English Dictionary*, 1874), Egeler concludes without further justification that *dritsker* should be understood as ‘guano skerry’ and that

there is a massive discrepancy between the toponym and the tale of human excrement associated with it . . . I would suggest that this again is a strategy to create a tension between the story’s plot and its most central place-name, a tension which suggests ironic distance and an element of the grotesque . . . in this way the whole construction of a pagan sacred landscape is given an ironic twist (p. 79).

Furthermore, he adds that the reference to bodily matter in *Eyrbyggja saga* is used to ‘mark a tongue-in-cheek approach to the landscapes of pagan antiquity [that] is not restricted to *Dritsker*, the tale’s guano-lubricated narrative pivot’ (p. 79). No Gaelic parallels are presented nor, more significantly, is there a reference to a similar place-name scene in *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss* (ch. 4) which, if taken into account, might have led Egeler to adopt a more restrained tone. Bárðr Dumbsson moors his ship in Djúpalón: *Síðan settu þeir upp skip sitt í vik einni. Þar á lóninu höfðu þeir gengit á borð at álfreka, ok þann sama vallengang rak upp í þessarrí vik, ok því heitir þat Dritvik (Íslenzk fornrit XIII (1991), 111)* ‘Then they beached their ship in a small bay. Those on board had relieved themselves in the lagoon, and the same excrement washed ashore in this inlet; so it was called Dritvik [‘Shit Inlet’]’ (Trans. Sarah M. Anderson, *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders* II (1997), 241).

Egeler’s extensive knowledge of both vernacular and Latin Irish literature and Old Norse is evident throughout, enabling him to propose new interpretations on

intercultural influence. His most detailed discussions relate to Christian narratives such as that of Auðr the Deep-Minded (pp. 156–68), where he suggests that in erecting crosses in the landscape Auðr is attempting to recreate her Hebridean home. Whilst this is Egeler's sole substantive example of 'home', he is at his most interesting when discussing the Hebridean–Icelandic socio-cultural relationship; positing a Gaelic influence on Norse culture, he takes the opposite view to that argued for in Magne Oftedal's 'Norse Place-Names in Celtic Scotland' (in Brian Ó Cuív, ed., *The Impact of the Scandinavian Invasions on the Celtic-speaking Peoples c.800–1100 A.D.* (1975, repr. 1983), 43–50).

If taken as a study about *Landnámabók*, Egeler's book does show that 'what seems to be circulating between the North-West Atlantic cultures are, in a manner of speaking, not specific, identifiable texts but stock motifs' (p. 140). He also illustrates the distinction between meaningless 'space' and meaningful 'place' and, significantly, the claim that 'place-names are ideological statements of identity, marking a place (and, by implication, its inhabitants) as belonging to a certain culture' (p. 185).

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LAUGHING SHALL I DIE. LIVES AND DEATHS OF THE GREAT VIKINGS. BY TOM SHIPPEY. *Reaktion*. London, 2018. 365 pp. ISBN 978-1-78023-909-5.

In at least three different ways Tom Shippey's new and eminently readable book differs radically from all modern scholarly surveys of the Viking Age. First of all, it centres almost exclusively on the Vikings as warriors, invaders and plunderers, not on their more peaceful activities as farmers, traders, explorers, lawmakers or settlers. Second, it is primarily concerned with heroic mentality in the face of death and warfare, a subject that has not been seriously considered by academic historians since Thomas Bartholinus published his book about 'the causes of the contempt for death among the still pagan Danes' (*Antiquitatum danicarum de causis contemptiae a danis adhuc gentilibus mortis libri tres*, Copenhagen, 1677). Third, Shippey is departing from the principles of *Quellenkritik* adhered to by most modern historians by shamelessly using Icelandic sagas, Eddic poems and other literary texts as his most important primary sources.

In doing so Shippey will undoubtedly annoy several distinguished experts on medieval history while at the same time gladdening the hearts of young Viking enthusiasts brought up on popular TV programmes and heroic fantasy literature like *The Lord of the Rings* and *Game of Thrones*—works that Shippey himself, in his capacity as Tolkien scholar, is fully familiar with and often refers to in the course of his very entertaining history. Should I be shocked by this as a medievalist and senior scholar? Yes, I probably should, and I am in fact irritated by several things in *Laughing Shall I Die*. I must confess, however, that I have also read Shippey's book with great pleasure, mainly for his wit and slightly provocative style, but