

**BYRNE, Aisling, & Victoria FLOOD (ed.): *Crossing borders in the insular Middle Ages*. Turnhout: Brepols, 2019 (Medieval texts and cultures of Northern Europe series, ISSN 1784-2859, vol. 30). VIII + 332 p., ISBN 978-2-503-56673-3, eISBN: 978-2-503-56712-9, doi: 10.1484/M.TCNE-EB.5.109277. € 80.**

This collection of essays constitutes the first publication – of hopefully many – stemming from the project ‘Crossing Borders in the Insular Middle Ages’, more precisely, from its first conference, held at the University of Marburg in 2015.<sup>1</sup> The book opens with a chapter, written by the editors, that serves as an introduction to the entire volume: ‘Insular Connections and Comparisons in the Later Middle Ages’. In it, Aisling BYRNE and Victoria FLOOD present the main theoretical principles underlying the contributions making up the volume. They also delineate the purpose of the book to ‘explore lines of textual transmission, translation, and cultural contact in a particular corner of north-western Europe in the later Middle Ages’ (p. 1). This Insular world is understood not as a periphery but rather ‘as a centre of literary exchange’ (p. 17) and ‘part of a vibrant network of cultural contact and exchange’ (p. 9), which facilitated the crossing of linguistic, political, generic, and cultural borders.

The comparative study of the medieval literatures of northern Europe is a steadily growing field, as scholars increasingly recognise the shared interests, influences, and patterns of literary and cultural exchange across Ireland, Scandinavia, and Britain. This collection of thirteen articles reveals new connections, not only within this rich Insular system, but also with the continent. The individual contributions cover a wide scope of subjects and are informed by a broad spectrum of theoretical and methodological approaches. They follow a broadly geographical order, moving from Wales to England, Ireland, and finally to Iceland.

Helen FULTON, in ‘The Red Book and the White: Gentry Libraries in Medieval Wales’, argues that the *White Book of Rhydderch* and the *Red Book of Hergest* exemplify the ownership of significant book collections by gentry families in Wales in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.<sup>2</sup> Such *compendia* of texts, Fulton asserts, were possible thanks to a closely interrelated secular and monastic network of patrons, scribes, and scriptoria, which facilitated their movement across the borders. Several nodes of co-operation are examined in more detail: the family of Ieuan Llwyd, his wife Angharad, and their son Rhydderch in Ceredigion; Hopcyn ap Tomas ab Einion of Ynysforfan near Swansea; and, finally, a number of fifteenth-century book collectors. This discussion reinforces the key role that the *uchelwyr* played in preserving and

---

<sup>1</sup> For further details about the project see <https://digitalcultures.ncl.ac.uk/projects/crossingborders/#/>.

<sup>2</sup> This chapter may be read as a companion-piece to FULTON 2019.

supporting Welsh cultural capital within a multilingual and multicultural context. They sponsored poets and commissioned manuscripts with a wide array of texts, both original and translated, thus helping to shape the literary canon of Welsh literature. Moreover, their literary interests place these members of the gentry securely within the broader cultural networks of Western Europe. This investigation therefore resituates the Welsh production and ownership of books within Britain's larger book history.

In 'Medical Texts in Welsh Translation: *Y Pedwar Gwlybwr* and *Rhinweddau Bwydydd*' Elena PARINA examines a text on humours and diet, composed of two distinctive parts, *Rhinweddau Bwydydd* ('Virtues of Food') and *Y Pedwar Gwlybwr* ('The Four Humours'), which survives in several fourteenth- and fifteenth-century manuscripts. Parina investigates how different medical traditions reached Wales. She posits that the treatise draws on a body of knowledge that can be traced to much wider and earlier sources. These include, for instance, the Greek physicians Hippocrates and Galen, both of whose work was integrated into Latin medical *compendia* in Late Antiquity. Moreover, medical writings in, and translated from, Latin circulated in Britain, as well as texts emanating from the highly influential medical school in Salerno. Parina suspects that the text is a fairly close rendering of a Latin original, the *Flores dietarum*, itself a text with a complex history of transmission. However, Parina also reveals the influence of another popular composition: the *Regimen sanitatis Salernitanum*. This veritable piece of detective work, in which a wide-reaching network of cultural exchanges is reconstructed, greatly contributes to our understanding of Middle Welsh translations and medical traditions.

A different aspect of the political and literary agency of the *uchelwyr* is addressed by Victoria FLOOD in 'Early Tudor Translation of English Prophecy in Wales', namely, their multiple cultural investments. This is illustrated by their active engagement with English political culture and language during the War of the Roses. Flood addresses the background of the prolific dialogue between the English and Welsh prophetic traditions, concentrating on *Proffwydoliaeth y fforddlys*, a Welsh translation of *Lily, Lion, and Son of Man*, itself a rendering of *Lilium regnans*. Since the intended audience was in all likelihood able to read the English original, the purpose behind the Welsh translation is somewhat perplexing. However, Flood explains it as an act of cultural reclaiming and a revindication of Welsh political, linguistic, and cultural legitimacy favoured by the commonalties between both prophetic traditions. The genre of political prophecy in Wales has yet another significant aspect, since it generated the earliest recorded use of English in a Welsh manuscript (i.e. Peniarth 50), demonstrating the emergence of English as a literary language and as a source for translations by the middle of the fifteenth century. Flood's article brings to the fore the deep connections between the English and Welsh literary histories and throws light on cross-border literary and political influences in the early Tudor period.

Joanna BELLIS's discussion of two elusive and complex mid-fourteenth-century Anglo-Latin poems in 'Propaganda or Parody? Latin Abuse Poetry from the Hundred Years War' addresses, as the author contends, a fresh aspect of "cross-bordering": the crossing of formal and generic boundaries. In the first part of her contribution, Bellis highlights that these poems, *The Dispute between the Englishman and the Frenchman* and *An Invective against France*, challenge scholarly notions of genre, medieval politics, and cultural and linguistic identities. Reviewing the previous literature on these two compositions, Bellis provides a rich and well-informed interpretative framework for addressing the difficult nature of their purpose and interpretation. They can be associated with multiple traditions, belonging simultaneously to Anglo-Latin invective poetry, with elements from Goliardic literature, and to the English vernacular tradition of "flyting", a game of insults. Some of these aspects may seem mutually exclusive, but Bellis argues that the poems, while seeking to engage in local politics pertaining to the Hundred Years' War, also belong to the international Latinate context. Key to this double affiliation is language choice, rhetorical artifice, thematic strands, and the monastic transmission of the poems. Bellis stresses that the texts resist any straightforward interpretation; rather, they inspire multiple readings: as genuine propaganda, satire, and parody of nationalism as well as providing an example of it. Bellis concludes that the poems present themselves as both humorous and serious at the same time, and suggests that their intended audiences did not draw rigid lines between genres, contexts, and traditions, as we do now.

In 'Contrapuntal Alliteration in *Piers Plowman* and Skaldic Poetry', Rory McTURK crosses disciplinary boundaries himself. He explores patterns of alliteration in both William Langland's *Piers Plowman* and skaldic poetry, which are hardly ever read side by side. The author argues that the alliterative line of Langland's poem resembles, despite of its apparent difference, the couplet or line-pair in skaldic poetry. Both patterns are characterised by their use of "contrapuntal alliteration". This indicates the complementary alliteration between a stressed syllable other than the initial one in the second half of the line and a "spare" stressed syllable, that is, not part of the main sound correspondence, in the first half. This, together with the standard alliterative arrangement – two stressed syllables in the first half of the line alliterate with the initial sound of the first stressed syllable in the second half – and various other forms of alliteration, creates a very particular, interweaving effect. McTurk concludes that skaldic poets were well aware of the literary potential of this special form of alliteration, but employed it to a limited degree only. The common use of the particular literary device revealed by McTurk highlights the many commonalities of the Insular world and leaves open plenty of comparative lines of research.

Erich POPPE's and Aisling BYRNE's chapters nicely complement each other in their study of the reception of Charlemagne material in Ireland. Whereas POPPE in '*Gabháltais Shearluis Mhóir* in its Irish and Insular Contexts' concentrates on

the Irish *Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle*, Byrne's chapter 'Translating the Crusades in Late Medieval Ireland' features another Charlemagne text, *Sdair Fortibrais* ('The Story of Fortibras'). Poppe, first, establishes the relative distance, in terms of translation, between *Gabháltais Shearluis Mhóir* ('The Conquests of Charlemagne', hereafter *GSM*) and its immensely popular Latin source text. It appears to differ markedly from other medieval Irish treatments of source texts, which can usually be characterised as 'creative acculturation[s]' (p. 134) or rewritings. This observation leads him to discuss, on the one hand, the Irish contexts of the text and, more particularly, its manuscript context and its relationship to other contemporaneous Irish translations. Poppe explores the range of translational choices available to translators in the fifteenth century by means of a model based on the axes of relative distance (close to the source / rewriting) and style (unadorned / florid). Thus, he can categorise *GSM* as an unadorned close translation, as well as detect hitherto unnoticed affinities to other texts. On the other hand, Poppe examines the Insular cultural context, in which the vernacular versions of *GSM* were very successful. The Insular versions in Early Modern Irish, Middle Welsh, Old Norse, Middle English, Anglo-Norman, and Latin (in TCD, MS 667, which is further discussed by Byrne) can all be traced to the same family of manuscripts. Their comparison reveals a shared interest in heroic and religious concerns as well as in material for devotional and moral reflection. Together, they go a long way towards explaining the widespread appropriation of the *Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle*. In addition, Poppe's contribution brings to light similarities and correspondences between different Insular cultural contexts in their response to the Charlemagne legend.

Aisling BYRNE connects the interest in the Crusades in late medieval Ireland to several factors, most especially to a revived attraction sparked by the fall of Constantinople in 1453. This interest resulted in a series of translations into Irish of Middle English, French, and Latin romances and chronicles during the second half of the fifteenth century. In her overview of crusading narratives in Ireland, Byrne draws attention to the number of Latin religious and crusading texts in TCD, MS 667, including the translation of the French *Fierabras* and a distinctively Insular text of the *Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle*. A Latin version close to the one found in TCD 667 served as the model for *Sdair Fortibrais*, around which Byrne then identifies a cluster of interconnected Irish tales. *GSM* is paired with *Sdair Fortibrais*, while the "Finding of the True Cross and Relics of the Passion" is integrated into it as its prologue. Byrne considers two possible ways of interpreting this particular textual arrangement, pondering whether it constitutes an inchoate Charlemagne-cycle in Irish or only a loose assemblage of texts. This last hypothesis connects the Irish translations to the Middle English Charlemagne texts, which themselves never formed a cycle but were instead arranged in diptychs or companion pieces. This connection would further parallel the broader reception history of crusading narratives in Ireland, since most of these reached the island through the medium of English: *Stair*

*Bibuis* (from *Bevis of Hampton*), *Stair Gui* (from *Guy of Warwick*), and *Sechrán na Banimpire* (from *The Wanderings of the Empress*, the Middle English *Octavian*). Thus, Byrne's chapter illuminates the north-westward movement of texts in the Insular world and the many parallelisms and contrasts in its appropriation of Charlemagne material.

The next two chapters examine, from different standpoints, the reception of classical Latin texts and traditions in Ireland. Mariamne BRIGGS, in 'Removing the Muses: Responses to Statian Subjectivity in the Middle Irish *Thebaid*', studies the translator's response to Statius' subjective voice, focusing her attention on the invocations to the Muses. The Irish *Thebaid*, remarks Briggs, attests to the popularity and cross-cultural movement of Statius' poem throughout the Middle Ages. In Ireland and elsewhere it was perceived as the precursor narrative to the Trojan legend, which, as Briggs shows, is further confirmed by the reworking of the introduction by its Irish translator. The treatment of the invocations to the Muses, argues the author, throws light on the development of the objective style in the text, that is, a detached narrative mode that tends to suppress the subjective voice of the narrator. However, Briggs' analysis reveals a varied response to the Latin tale. While the impulse to objectify Statius' subjectivity is certainly predominant, an occasional subjective tone can also be discerned throughout the text. When the invocations to the Muses are replaced instead of omitted, the translator draws on the available vernacular conventions, such as the use of *tituli* or division headings. Such strategies underscore the mutual influence between adaptations of classical literature and vernacular narratives, a topic elaborated on in this same volume by LeBlanc.

In 'Heroic Traditions in Dialogue: The *Imtheachta Aeniassa*', Julie LEBLANC analyses four episodes introduced by the redactor of the Irish *Aeneid* to Vergil's text. LeBlanc assesses the extent to which he deviates from the source text and, in doing so, explores the thematic connections between Irish literary tradition and classical literature. From these additions she extracts several instances of localization within Irish tradition in terms of theme, setting, and character. Significantly, some of them have direct parallels in Briggs' findings. For example, LeBlanc stresses the interest shown in world history and events from classical antiquity, which could be used as a model for narrating the past. Another discovery is the Irish text's emphasis on friendship and companionship, which are themselves important topics in Irish vernacular narratives. LeBlanc argues that the redactor is not in pursuit of linguistic adequacy but rather of acceptability to the target culture, and thus the result 'is more than a mere translation or sufficient adaptation: it is a work of Irish literature in its own right' (p. 220). Although perhaps the oppositions between translation / adaptation and redactor / translator are too rigid given the varied approaches to the source text at different points in the text - a problem which the author recognizes - LeBlanc's main point is, however, clear. Her approach moves beyond such oppositions in order to understand the multiple cultural layers of the Irish *Thebaid*.

With Matthias EGELER's chapter, 'Iceland and the Land of Women: The Norse Glæsisvellir and the Otherworld Islands of Early Irish Literature', the setting changes to the Old Norse cultural context. Building on previous work on the impact of Irish narrative culture on Icelandic literature and mythology, Egeler compiles old and new evidence to support a case of direct influence. He analyses a set of detailed correspondences between the motif complex of Ódáinsakr ('Field of the Un-Dead') and Glæsisvellir ('Shining Fields') and similar regions from the Irish *immrama* or voyage tales. These parallels are conveniently outlined in table 2 on p. 239. Ódáinsakr and Glæsisvellir are two closely associated paradisiacal regions occurring in numerous Old Norse texts, predominantly in legendary sagas, but also indirectly attested in Icelandic folklore dating from the eighteenth century onward, which Egeler compares with the Land of Women in *Immram Brain meic Febail* ('Voyage of Bran son of Febal'). The depiction of the Land of Women in this Irish text, as well as of other otherworldly places in many different *immrama*, resembles the Norse motif complex remarkably closely. Egeler also pinpoints a further connection between a story in the *Landnámabók* ('The Book of Settlements') and the *immrama*, which could suggest that the otherworldly islands known from Irish voyage tales were adopted by Norse mythology. According to Egeler, all these correspondences strongly suggest that the Ódáinsakr and Glæsisvellir complex possibly derives directly from Irish narratives.

In 'Empire of Emotion: The Formation of Emotive Literary Identities and Mentalities in the North' Sif RÍKHARÐSDÓTTIR investigates the reconfiguration of narrative representations of emotions ("emotive scripts"), and the literary identities codified in them, across linguistic and cultural borders. The translation of the Tristan story into Old Norse during the reign of King Hákon IV Hákonarson of Norway (reigned 1217–1263) furnishes multiple examples of the reinterpretation of literary emotion. Since emotive scripts depend on language, genre, and the cultural meaning assigned to them by the communities producing them, they are subject to modification every time the cultural frame of reference changes. This means that emotive scripts are accommodated to their new sociocultural and historical context, where they might clash with pre-existent narrative conventions and expectations. To illustrate this, Sif Ríkharðsdóttir mentions the well-known preference in Old Norse texts for an objective narrative style and the avoidance of emotive expressions, in favour of action-driven scenes in many genres. A case in point is the translation of French courtly romance into Old Norse, in which the literary model of courtly behaviour and gender conceptualisations, allocating specific emotive scripts to female and male roles, is markedly different from pre-existing patterns found in Icelandic sagas and Eddic poetry. Sif Ríkharðsdóttir argues, however, that alternative emotive literary identities emerge during the transference of emotive scripts by means of translation, as in other forms of cross-linguistic, cross-generic, and cross-cultural movement. In this way she demonstrates the role of emotive scripts in the configuration of cultural identities. Her approach consti-

tutes a fruitful interpretative model for the analysis of other, similar medieval textual exchanges.<sup>3</sup>

In the following chapter, 'The Latin Connection: Geoffrey of Monmouth in Iceland', Sarah BACCANTI examines the Old Norse-Icelandic translation of Latin historiographical texts. She analyses in particular the Old Norse translation of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, *Breta sǫgur* ('Saga of the British People'), produced under the auspices of, again, King Hákon IV of Norway, as many of these translations were. Baccanti characterises the translator as a 'creative redactor' (p. 284), concerned with adapting the material to his audience. The translator's purpose clearly emerges from her survey of the different responses to Geoffrey's authorial interventions and to the moral and religious tone of the original. In addition, she analyses the way in which Christian and moral elements are downplayed in the resulting text, and considers the incorporation of references to other Icelandic texts. All this evidence supports Baccanti's claim that the changes introduced by the translator reveal a primarily historical interest in the text. *Breta sǫgur* thus bears testimony to the participation of Iceland in European Latin literary trends and firmly situates Scandinavian literary culture within a pan-European context.

Sabine Heidi WALTHER, finally, analyses the Old Norse translation of a historical Latin text in a similar vein in 'An Ideal Nobleman: Transformations of the Classical Hero Hercules in the Old Norse *Trójumanna saga*', dealing with classical matter. This *Saga of the Trojans* is an Icelandic rendering of Dares Phrygius' *De excidio Troiae historia* ('The History of the Fall of Troy') in which the role of Hercules is significantly developed. Walther's analysis shows that the character of Hercules is introduced into several episodes, therefore playing a hitherto unknown role in the story. She argues that the  $\alpha$ -version, which constitutes the latest of three different extant versions, constitutes a rewriting of the alleged original translation of the Latin text into Old Norse. According to Walther, the text's linguistic features and meta-textual references suggest that the reworking took place around 1500, and that vernacular sources were used. In addition, the translator has transformed Hercules into a courtly hero and a model for aristocratic virtue and behaviour. For Walther, the new and creative depiction of the hero suggests the influence of the prose version of Benoît de Sainte Maure's *Roman de Troie*. Nonetheless, *Trójumanna saga* differs from Benoît's prose version in significant ways, and Walther therefore suggests that different sources were used by the translator. Since similar elements are found in the fifteenth-century French stories about Jason and Hercules emanating from the Burgundian court, she hypothesises that the translator might have had knowledge of them. Thus, this study showcases diverse traditions about Hercules and, in doing so, unearths previously unnoticed links between French and Old Norse literature.

<sup>3</sup> The author has developed some of these ideas in RÍKHARÐSDÓTTIR 2012 and 2017.

The volume closes with a useful manuscript index, as well as a general index of personal names and individual works cited. Here and there, some minor typographical errors can be spotted, and there is a slight inconsistency in the treatment of many quotations in footnotes in the last chapter, which have been left untranslated. The book will certainly be of interest to scholars from a wide range of fields, thereby facilitating comparative academic interests and fostering interdisciplinarity. In addition, the collection offers insights into poorly-known and often neglected texts. The preference for an objective narrative style in Middle Irish, Middle Welsh, and Old Norse for example, noted by several contributors, is one specific element that would probably repay further comparative study. Thus, it poses multiple challenges and research questions that will doubtlessly stimulate novel and innovative lines of enquiry.

FULTON, Helen, 2019: 'Literary Networks and Patrons in Late Medieval Wales'.

In: Geraint EVANS & Helen FULTON (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Welsh Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 129–154.

Sif RÍKHARÐSDÓTTIR, 2012: *Medieval Translations and Cultural Discourse. The Movement of Texts in England, France and Scandinavia*. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer.

Sif RÍKHARÐSDÓTTIR, 2017: *Emotion in Old Norse Literature*. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer.

Philipps-Universität Marburg  
luciana.cordorusso@uni-marburg.de

Luciana CORDO RUSSO