

The background of the cover is a photograph of the interior of a large, ancient stone building, likely a cathedral or abbey. The architecture features high, vaulted ceilings with intricate ribbing and a series of pointed arches. A central doorway with a decorative glass panel is visible, flanked by windows with iron grilles. The lighting is warm and dramatic, highlighting the textures of the stone.

**BRITAIN AND
IRELAND
900-1300**



**Insular Responses
to Medieval
European Change**

EDITED BY BRENDAN SMITH

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Britain and Ireland, 900–1300

Insular Responses to Medieval European Change

There is a growing interest in the history of relations between the English, Scottish, Welsh and Irish as the United Kingdom and Ireland begin to construct new political arrangements and become more fully integrated into Europe. This book brings together the newest work on how these relations developed between 900 and 1300, a period crucial for the history of the formation of national identities.

The conquest of England by the Normans and the subsequent growth of English power required the inhabitants of Britain and Ireland to reassess their dealings with each other in the face of self-confident and expansionist francophone culture. Old ties were broken and new ones formed. Economic change, the influence of chivalry, the transmission of literary motifs and questions of aristocratic identity are among the topics tackled here by leading scholars from Britain, Ireland and North America. Little has been published hitherto on this subject, and the book marks a major contribution to a topic of lasting interest.

BRENDAN SMITH is Lecturer in History, University of Bristol. His publications include *Colonisation and Conquest in Medieval Ireland: The English in Louth, 1170–1330* (1999).

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Preface

... it is well to remember that the unity of our civilisation does not rest entirely on the secular culture and the material progress of the last four centuries. There are deeper traditions in Europe than these, and we must go back behind Humanism and behind the superficial triumphs of modern civilisation, if we wish to discover the fundamental social and spiritual forces that have gone to the making of Europe.

(Christopher Dawson, *The Making of Europe: An Introduction to the History of European Unity 400-1000 A.D.* (London, 1932))

Asked to identify the fundamental forces which made Europe in the centuries between 900 and 1300 most historians would mention population expansion and urban growth; the dominance of French aristocratic culture and the chivalric code it spawned; the renewal of religious fervour which found expression in the rise of papal power, the spread of new religious orders, and the crusading movement; the appearance of new institutions such as universities and representative assemblies; and an increased sense of national identity among some of Europe's peoples. Britain and Ireland constitute a particularly interesting region in which to examine these developments, since here was to be found a remarkable variety of reactions to European change.

In mainland Europe the tenth century saw the end of the era of defeat at the hands of Slav, Magyar and Arab attackers from the east and south, but Britain and Ireland remained at the mercy of enemies from the north. The depredations of the pagan Vikings disrupted older patterns of communication within the British Isles, and between the British Isles and the mainland, but also served to strengthen the shared Christian identity of those who endured and survived. The commercial element in Viking involvement also resulted in the creation of new trading links in the region and encouraged its rise to unprecedented levels of economic prosperity in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Furthermore, the continued involvement of Christianized Scandinavian rulers in the Irish Sea zone to the end of the thirteenth century shaped the politics of the region in decisive ways. It is easy to overlook the

extent to which the character of Norman conquest in England, and the subsequent expansion of Norman-English power throughout the British Isles, was conditioned by this sustained Scandinavian influence.

Norman-English culture was born in military conquest and thrived because of the willingness of victor and vanquished thereafter to compromise and adapt. It is not surprising that in its dealings with its neighbours in Britain and Ireland this culture demonstrated both the violent intolerance and the deep respect of which it was itself a product. The cults of Celtic saints could be vigorously promoted in England at the same time as the Christian aristocracies of Wales and Ireland were treated with the barbarity reserved for those excluded from the ranks of the chivalric. English control of the southern reaches of the Irish Sea from the 1170s quickly eliminated previous types of contact between Wales and Ireland, but further north the situation was more complex. The history of the Isle of Man, ruled at different times in the three centuries after 1000 not only by its own kings but also by kings of Ireland, Norway, Scotland and England, encapsulates the tumultuous nature of politics in this area. The career of John de Courcy at the end of the twelfth century, with its northern English, Scottish, Manx and Ulster dimensions addresses many of the same themes and brings into focus the central importance of the shared religious identity of all those concerned in the politics of this region.

It was Scotland which benefited most from the fast-changing conditions of the north Irish Sea zone. In seeking to fulfil their ambitions to join the Anglo-French culture-club while retaining political independence from England, the kings of Scotland found it useful to draw upon their country's historical associations with Ireland. The incorporation of the Norse-Gaelic dynasties of the Western Isles into the mainstream of Scottish political life in the course of the thirteenth century was greatly facilitated by this acknowledgement of the Irish element of the country's identity. Scotland's resilience in turn provided opportunities for aristocratic English Border families such as the de Vescys to pursue regional ambitions in the North which at times threatened the stability of England as a whole. The fortunes of the de Vescys were eclipsed in the reign of Edward I, and his reign saw the dismantling of many other features of the history of the British Isles constructed in the previous four centuries.

In approaching the medieval history of Britain and Ireland in a way which transcends traditional boundaries of chronology, geography and historiography, this collection has been inspired by a number of volumes which have appeared in the last fifteen years. *The English in Medieval Ireland*, ed J. F. Lydon (Dublin, 1984) contained the proceedings of the

first joint meeting of the British Academy and the Royal Irish Academy, held in Dublin in 1982. Not the least significant feature of this volume lay in the fact that it brought together in print for the first time the two historians who were subsequently to do most to encourage new ways of thinking about the medieval history of Britain and Ireland: Rees Davies and Robin Frame. Lydon's volume was followed by *The British Isles 1100-1500: Comparisons, Contrasts and Connections*, ed. R. R. Davies (Edinburgh, 1988). This resulted from a conference held at Gregynog in 1986 and was crucial in widening the focus of discussion to include Wales and Scotland as well as Ireland and England. It also served to prepare the way for two single-author volumes of utmost importance, both published in 1990. R. R. Davies', *Domination and Conquest: The Experience of Ireland, Scotland and Wales 1100-1300* (Cambridge, 1990) contained his Wiles lectures, delivered at The Queen's University of Belfast in 1988, while Robin Frame's, *The Political Development of the British Isles 1100-1400* (Oxford, 1990) provided, at last, a general survey on which undergraduate teaching of medieval 'British Isles history' could be based.

This volume also originated in a conference, held at the University of Bristol in September 1996, and it is a pleasure to thank the various bodies and individuals whose support made this project possible. Within Bristol University, the Centre for Medieval Studies, the Arts Faculty Research Fund and the Alumni Foundation all gave generous financial support, while outside funding was also gratefully received from the Economic History Society, the Royal Historical Society, and the Royal Irish Academy. The advice of Professor Bernard Alford and Dr Kieran Flanagan in arranging the conference is gratefully acknowledged, as are the efforts of the Warden of Clifton Hill House, Mrs Annie Burnside, and her staff. Finally, it remains to express my sincere thanks for their assistance to Professor James Lydon, Professor Rees Davies, and Professor Robin Frame.

Brendan Smith

Abbreviations

- AC* *Annála Connacht, The Annals of Connacht (A.D. 1224–1544)*, ed. A. Martin Freeman (Dublin, 1944)
- Acta Sanctorum* *Acta Sanctorum Quotquot Toto Orbe Coluntur*, ed. J. Bolland *et al.* (Antwerp, Tongerlo, Paris, Brussels, 1643–in progress)
- AFM* *Annála Rioghachta Éireann; Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland by the Four Masters from the Earliest Period to the Year 1616*, ed. and trans. J. O’ Donovan, 7 vols. (Dublin, 1851, reprint, New York, 1966)
- AI* *The Annals of Inisfallen (MS Rawlinson B 503)*, ed. and trans. S. Mac Airt (Dublin, 1951, reprint 1977)
- ALC* *The Annals of Loch Cé: A Chronicle of Irish Affairs, 1014–1690*, ed. W. M. Hennessy, 2 vols. (RS, London, 1871)
- Anderson, *Early Sources* *Early Sources of Scottish History 500–1286*, ed. A. O. Anderson, 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1922; reprint Stamford, 1990)
- AT* ‘The Annals of Tigernach’, ed. W. Stokes in *Revue Celtique* 16–18 (1895–7); (reprinted in 2 vols., Felinich, 1993)
- AU* *The Annals of Ulster (to AD 1131)* ed. S. Mac Airt and G. Mac Niocaill (Dublin, 1983).
Annála Uladh: Annals of Ulster, ed. W. M. Hennessy and B. MacCarthy, 4 vols. (Dublin, 1887–1901)
[Unless otherwise stated, references to entries in *AU* dating from before 1132 are to the Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill edition.]

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|---------------------------|---|
| <i>BBCS</i> | <i>Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies</i> |
| <i>Bk Leinster</i> | <i>The Book of Leinster, Formerly Leabar na Nua-chongbála</i> , ed. R. I. Best, O. Bergin, M. A. O'Brien and A. O'Sullivan, 6 vols. (Dublin, 1954–83) |
| BL | British Library |
| <i>Brut</i> | <i>Brut y Tywysogyon or the Chronicle of the Princes. Peniarth MS. 20 Version</i> , ed. and trans. T. Jones (Cardiff, 1952) |
| <i>Brut (RHB)</i> | <i>Brut y Tywysogyon or the Chronicle of the Princes. Red Book of Hergest Version</i> , ed. and trans. T. Jones (Cardiff, 1955) |
| <i>Cal. Doc. Ire.</i> | <i>Calendar of Documents Relating to Ireland</i> , ed. H. S. Sweetman, 5 vols. (London, 1875–86) |
| <i>Cal. Papal Letters</i> | <i>Calendar of Entries in the Papal Registers Relating to Great Britain and Ireland: Papal Letters</i> (London, 1893–) |
| CCR | <i>Calendar of the Close Rolls</i> (London, 1900–) |
| CDS | <i>Calendar of Documents Relating to Scotland</i> , ed. J. Bain <i>et al.</i> , 5 vols. (Edinburgh, 1881–1986) |
| CGH | <i>Corpus Genealogiarum Hiberniae</i> , ed. M. A. O'Brien (Dublin, 1962, reprinted 1976) |
| CGS | Johannis de Fordun, <i>Chronica Gentis Scotorum</i> , ed. W. F. Skene, <i>Historians of Scotland</i> , vol. i (Edinburgh, 1871) |
| <i>Cl. R.</i> | <i>Close Rolls of the Reign of Henry III</i> , 14 vols. (London, 1902–38) |
| CPR | <i>Calendar of Patent Rolls</i> (London, 1906–) |
| CS | <i>Chronicon Scotorum</i> , ed. W. M. Hennessy (RS, London, 1866) |
| <i>Econ. Hist. Rev.</i> | <i>Economic History Review</i> (London, 1927–) |
| EETS | Early English Text Society |
| EHD | <i>English Historical Documents</i> |
| EHR | <i>English Historical Review</i> (London, 1886–) |
| EYC | <i>Early Yorkshire Charters</i> , ed. W. Farrer (vols. i–iii: Edinburgh, 1914–16) and C. T. Clay (vols. iv–xii: Yorkshire Archaeological Society, Record Series, extra series, 1935–65) |
| <i>Foedera</i> | <i>Foedera, Conventiones, Litterae et Cuiuscunque Generis Acta Publica</i> , ed. T. Rymer, 4 vols. in 7 parts (London, 1816–69) |

- Giraldus Cambrensis, Opera* *Giraldus Cambrensis, Opera*, ed. J. S. Brewer, J. F. Dimock and G. F. Warner, 8 vols., RS (London 1861–91)
- Giraldus, Expugnatio* *Giraldus Cambrensis, Expugnatio Hibernica: The Conquest of Ireland*, ed. A. B. Scott and F. X. Martin (Dublin, 1978)
- Giraldus, Topographia* *Giraldus Cambrensis, The History and Topography of Ireland*, ed. J. J. O'Meara (Mountrath and Harmondsworth, 1982)
- Hist. & Mun. Doc. Ire.* *Historic and Municipal Documents of Ireland, 1172–1320*, ed. J. T. Gilbert, RS (London, 1870)
- IHS* *Irish Historical Studies: The Joint Journal of the Irish Historical Society and the Ulster Society for Irish Historical Studies* (Dublin, 1938–)
- ITS* Irish Texts Society
- MGH* *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*
- Misc. Ir. Annals* *Miscellaneous Irish Annals (AD 1114–1437)*, ed. S. Ó hInnse (Dublin, 1947)
- MPL* *Patrologiae Cursus Completus. Series Latina*, ed. J. P. Migne (Paris, 1841–64)
- NHI* *A New History of Ireland, under the auspices of the Royal Irish Academy*, 9 vols. (Oxford, 1976–)
- NUI* National University of Ireland
- PRO* Public Record Office, London
- PRS* Pipe Roll Society, 38 vols. (1884–1925), new series, 41 vols. (1925–67)
- RIA Proc.* *Royal Irish Academy Proceedings*
- RLC* *Rotuli Litterarum Clausurarum in Turri Londinensi Asservati*, ed. T. D. Hardy, 2 vols. (London, 1833–4)
- RRS* *Regesta Regum Scottorum*, ed. G. W. S. Barrow *et al.* (Edinburgh, 1960–)
- RS* Rolls Series
- RSAI Jn* *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* (Dublin, 1892–)
- s.a.* *sub anno / sub annis*
- Scotichronicon* *Scotichronicon by Walter Bower in Latin and English*, gen. ed. D. E. R. Watt, 9 vols. (Aberdeen/Edinburgh, 1987–98)
- SHR* *Scottish Historical Review*

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| STS | Scottish Text Society |
| <i>Song of Dermot</i> | <i>The Song of Dermot and the Earl</i> , ed. G. H. Orpen (Dublin, 1892) |
| TRHS | <i>Transactions of the Royal Historical Society</i> |
| ZCP | <i>Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie</i> (Halle, 1896–1943, 23 vols.; Tübingen, 1953–) |

1 The effect of Scandinavian raiders on the English and Irish churches: a preliminary reassessment

Alfred P. Smyth

Assessments of the effects of Scandinavian raiders in the ninth and tenth centuries have focused for over three decades on an agenda set by revisionist historians – an agenda which has obscured and sometimes trivialized many of the complex issues involved in an analysis of annalistic and other records. An over-zealous approach, driven by a desire to show that Scandinavian raiders were not numerous and that they were no more destructive to church property and personnel than were the native Christian opposition, has too often led to conclusions which fly in the face of historical evidence and common sense. Revisionists must also take responsibility for polarizing historical arguments in relation to the destructive power of the Northmen. In their zeal to promote an image of Scandinavian raiders as yet one more political, cultural and religious grouping in Western Europe – little different from their Christian neighbours in most respects – they either minimized evidence which did not fit their preconceptions or else they distracted historians' attention away from those negative effects which Vikings wrought on Western society, to concentrate on the economic and material benefits which later Scandinavian colonists supposedly brought to a conquered people. At best, the books in 'Viking' studies fail to balance: at worst they are intellectually cooked.

The self-congratulatory mood of post-revisionists in medieval Irish studies gives cause for concern, not least because of serious shortcomings in the intellectual debate.¹ There is little disagreement over the fact that in all parts of the Christian West, indigenous violent elements existed long before Northmen arrived in the ninth century, and I have long ago shown how several aspects of Norse kingship and warrior cults

¹ See P. Holm, 'Between apathy and antipathy: the Vikings in Irish and Scandinavian history', *Peritia*, 8 (1994), p. 168, for an uncritical and embarrassing appraisal of an Irish historian who in that writer's opinion had 'introduced the essential historical methodology of source criticism (*sic*) in this and later valuable revisionist work'.

appealed to elements within the native Christian aristocracies.² This rapport between warriors led, in turn, to military alliances and intermarriage from the earliest stages of the Norse invasions. It is also possible to contrast the hostility which the churches in Wessex and Ireland showed against the Northmen, with the very definite evidence for cooperation between the churches of York and Chester-le-Street (Lindisfarne) with Danish rulers in Northumbria. Different political circumstances dictated different approaches, but whenever a native Christian aristocracy survived to resist Scandinavian attack, the church invariably backed its own kings – even to the point of Frankish, West Saxon and Irish churchmen personally going into battle against the pagans. In Northumbria, on the other hand, where native Anglian Christian kings had been annihilated by the Northmen, the archbishops of York were left with no choice but to do business with the invaders, just as Christian bishops in Francia had been forced to come to terms with earlier Germanic barbarians in the fifth century.³ As for the intermonastic violence for which there is definite evidence in Ireland prior to the Viking age, this is a subject which has not been properly evaluated by historians on any side of the debate. By the eighth century some Irish monasteries had not only become very rich, but they had also grown to fill a vacuum in Irish economic and social life – a life which had hitherto been exclusively agrarian. The monks had inadvertently triggered the growth of monastic townships from the seventh century onwards, thereby giving monasticism a monopoly on urban development – with all the economic and political advantages that implied. Monasteries had attracted communities of craftsmen, agrarian tenants and serfs, and of course, merchants. This must have created a conflict of interest *vis-à-vis* the warrior aristocracy, which unlike their counterparts in England, for instance, had no coinage to control and no traditional rights over markets in these novel and burgeoning monastic townships. When, therefore, we read of battles between Irish monasteries and of Irish kings attacking monasteries, it would be naïve to conclude that professed monks or ordained clergy had begun to slay each other out of personal spite. However unedifying such violent engagements may have been, they were unquestionably the result of dynastic rivalry and economic tension at a *secular* level within the church and in society at large. The situation was unquestionably aggravated by the fact that senior church

² A. P. Smyth, *Scandinavian Kings in the British Isles 850–880* (Oxford, 1977), pp. 128–33, 149–53; Smyth, *Scandinavian York and Dublin: the History and Archaeology of Two Related Viking Kingdoms*, 2 vols. (repr., Dublin, 1987), i, pp. 49–53.

³ Smyth, *Scandinavian York and Dublin*, i, pp. 41–6; ii, pp. 91–4; J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, *Early Germanic Kingship in England and on the Continent* (Oxford, 1971), pp. 18–20.