

- Furholt, M. 2017. Massive Migrations? The Impact of Recent aDNA Studies on our View of Third Millennium Europe. *European Journal of Archaeology*. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1017/ea.2017.43>
- Kleijne, J.P.; Brinkkemper, O.; Lauwerier, R. C.G.M.; Smit, B.I. & Theunissen, E.M. eds. 2013. *A Matter of Life and Death at Mienakker (the Netherlands): Late Neolithic Behavioural Variability in a Dynamic Landscape* (Nederlandse Archeologische Rapporten 45). Amersfoort: Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed. <https://doi.org/10.17026/dans-xea-twac>
- Kossian, R. 2007. *Hunte 1: Ein mittel- bis spät-neolithischer und frühbronzezeitlicher Siedlungsplatz am Dümmer, Ldkr. Diepholz (Niedersachsen). Die Ergebnisse der Ausgrabungen des Reichsamtes für Vorgeschichte in den Jahren 1938 bis 1940* (Veröffentlichungen der archäologischen Sammlungen des Landesmuseums Hannover 52). Hannover: Landesmuseum Hannover.
- Nobles, G.R. 2016. *Dwelling on the Edge of the Neolithic: Investigating Human Behaviour through the Spatial Analysis of Corded Ware Settlement Material in the Dutch Coastal Wetlands (2900–2300 cal BC)* (Groningen Archaeological Studies 32). Groningen: Barkhuis. <http://hdl.handle.net/11370/d8a2a7ec-ca4b-4b06-83ce-b6d75dcc1d8a>

JOS KLEIJNE

Christian-Albrechts-Universität zu Kiel,  
Germany

doi:10.1017/ea.2018.23

Leszek Gardeła. *(Magic) Staffs in the Viking Age* (Studia Mediaevalia Septentrionalia 27. Vienna: Verlag Fassbaender, 2016, 347pp. 24 b/w figs., 37 plates, numerous tables, hbk, ISBN 978-3-902575-77-7)

Dr Leszek Gardeła's book *(Magic) Staffs in the Viking Age* is a quite remarkable and impressive achievement. The entire book is very well written, the sources are skillfully chosen and the knowledge of the literature—not only in English and in Polish (the mother tongue of the author), but also in German, Icelandic, Norwegian, Danish, Swedish, and Russian—is commanding. To my knowledge, it is the only study of its kind, dealing with Viking Age staffs in their own right as magic or ritual tools, surveying both the written and material record in a truly interdisciplinary manner—I will return to the possibilities and limitations of this kind of interdisciplinary approach below.

The book consists of six chapters and a catalogue of the staffs under scrutiny. Chapter 1 is an introduction to the concept and research history of the important term *seiðr* (a much-discussed form of magic or ritual in the Old Norse

world) along with the various categories of sources used throughout the book. Chapter 2 presents the archaeological sources for the study of the users of the staffs, while Chapter 3 presents the staffs and their archaeological context, both chapters including discussions of past interpretations. Chapter 4 examines the Old Norse textual evidence for staffs and their use, and Chapter 5 is a synthesis of the source material examined in the previous chapters, where Gardeła offers his interpretations. This leads into the comparative material in Chapter 6, which ends with a short conclusion.

As mentioned, this is an impressive interdisciplinary book dealing with staffs as a tool of magic and ritual and, in the following, I will highlight some of the work's many positive aspects. Often, as Gardeła rightly points out in his Introduction (p. 12), these staffs and their bearers have been linked to the practice of *seiðr*.

Navigating the substantial research dealing with *seiðr* competently, Gardeða introduces the reader to the term, its research history, and the main textual sources dealing with the *seiðr* in Chapter 1.

With reference to the growing acknowledgement within the study of pre-Christian Nordic religion of the inherent diversity within the religion of this time and area, the methodological problems of working with staffs in the Viking Age are highlighted. Gardeða draws on the Danish historian of religion Jens Peter Schjødt's (2009; 2012) suggestion for a methodologically sound approach to studying pre-Christian Nordic religion when writing that 'It is essential to emphasise that Schjødt's observations also find their reflection in various forms of archaeological evidence [...] [t]he notion of diversity, as we shall see in the chapters that follow, also applies to the different forms which alleged magic staffs from archaeological contexts acquire across the Viking world' (pp. 40–41).

Chapters 2 and 3 focus on the archaeological context of (magic) staffs and their users, surveying all the relevant finds and engaging with the scholarship on the subject convincingly. Gardeða corrects some of the limitations of past research, being very sober in his criticism, for instance when amending the shortcomings of Neil Price's (2002) otherwise pioneering work—specifically with the Norwegian and Icelandic staffs (pp. 55–59). Gardeða has gone to great lengths to ensure the soundness of his analyses and during the more than ten years of underlying research the author has travelled across northern Europe, visited collections and museums, and personally examined, photographed, and measured ninety-five per cent of the thirty-six staffs treated in *(Magic) Staffs in the Viking Age*. A very tangible result of this thorough work is not only the main text of the volume, but also the Catalogue

(pp. 268–374) of all the (magic) staffs from the Viking Age, which includes detailed descriptions and measurements, information on find contexts (when known), and new photographs—also available for download from the Pre-Christian Religions of the North project's online database ([www.abdn.ac.uk/pcrn](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/pcrn)). In addition, Gardeða has engaged in experimental archaeology with full size replicas of some of the staffs in order to test hypotheses—both his own and those of others (see e.g. p. 113 on these staffs as possible distaffs and pp. 210–12 on handling, travelling with, and storing staffs).

In Chapter 4 Gardeða gives a full account of staffs and staff-like objects in the written sources. This is done convincingly and with much critical attention to detail. For instance, the author disputes two of most common assumptions about staffs and their use. Firstly, the apparent connection between the Old Norse term for staff, *vǫlr*, and seeresses known as the *vǫlur* (pl., sg. *vǫlva*) is critically examined (pp. 154–55); secondly, the assumed importance of staffs in the performance of *seiðr*, which does not figure explicitly very often—if at all—in the textual sources, is also doubted.

Chapter 5 is to my mind where Gardeða does his most remarkable work. Here he synthesizes and interprets all the textual, archaeological, and iconographic sources analysed in the previous chapters with flair and scholarly brilliance. Section 5.2 deserves a special mention; this part deals with the staff as *axis mundi* and is indeed compelling and interesting. Particularly interesting is the interpretation of the staff from Klinta, Sweden as representing the cosmos through the depiction of a longhouse in its upper end and various animal representations along the handle, especially if one pairs it with the suggestion by Terry Gunnell (2004) that the hall or longhouse could represent a

micro cosmos of the pre-Christian Nordic worldview.

Few books are perfect, and *(Magic) Staffs in the Viking Age* is no exception. Here, I will mention some minor shortcomings. The structure of the book is relatively straightforward. However, as a non-archaeologist reader, I was slightly confused when reading Chapter 2 and would have appreciated a short introduction to the different types of staffs and their manufacture, since terms such as ‘a typical basket handle construction’ (p. 77) are mentioned numerous times but not explained in the first chapters—perhaps a shortened version of Section 3.3, where some basic descriptions are given, would have been helpful to readers unfamiliar with the typology of staffs. Owing to the interdisciplinary approach and aim of the book, non-archaeologists may in fact be the typical reader.

Occasionally, as in Chapter 4, Gardeła offers interpretations that seem less likely and thought-through than the general meticulousness of the book might indicate. Specifically, I will mention one example pertaining to the very old discussion of the use of blood in the *blót* in *Hákonar saga góða*. In my opinion, the suggestion made by Gardeła (and many before him) of the Christian provenance of the sprinkling of blood with the *blauttein* known from *Hákonar saga góða* 14 (p. 146) disregards the importance of blood in Old Norse culture. The specific use of a tool reminiscent of the *aspergillum* may be Christian, but there is every indication that the ritual use of blood and even its sprinkling is genuinely pagan.

When a scholar works interdisciplinarily and uses terms and concepts from other disciplines, they always leave themselves open to criticism from specialists in those disciplines—criticism that may seem pedantic to many outside these disciplines. This last general point may seem to fall

into that category, since I am an historian of religion reviewing a book by an archaeologist who uses theories and terminology from the study of religion. However seemingly pedantic, I feel that it is necessary to address this, since it may in fact be a case in point for some limitations of a truly interdisciplinary approach. While *(Magic) Staffs in the Viking Age* is very well researched and contains an abundance of relevant references, some seem to be missing, for instance in Section 5.2. Dealing with the term *axis mundi* or world axis, which is a fundamental category in the phenomenology of religion, one would expect a reference to Mircea Eliade, who introduced the term in 1956. Similarly, when working with structural cosmology in the same section it would have been relevant to mention Kirsten Hastrup’s (1990) work on the topic. Another example from a different part of the book is the mention of liminality (p. 81) and the phrase ‘betwixt and between’ used by Victor Turner in his essay ‘Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in *Rites de Passage*’ (Turner, 1967: 93–111), but without a mention of or reference to this seminal work. This is by no means a criticism of interdisciplinarity as such, because it is an approach that should be applauded and encouraged—it is simply a statement of some minor limitations of such an approach.

Gardeła’s book is a truly interdisciplinary effort—and an impressive one—but naturally, no-one can know everything about everything, and I have no doubt that, however thorough one tries to be in one’s use of other disciplines, it will always be lacking in one way or another. Besides the examples mentioned above, Chapter 2, for instance, which deals with ‘The Archaeology of Ritual Specialists’—that is, the Viking Age graves that have been identified or interpreted as containing magic workers—should be mentioned in

this context. Gardeła states early on (footnote 1, p. 9) that '[t]he term "ritual specialist" will be used throughout this book to refer to people dealing with different kinds of magic.' As an historian of religion, I am ambivalent of this choice of terminology. On the one hand, the term is neutral and avoids invoking the idea of full-time professionals that for instance the term *priest* does, and this should be applauded. On the other hand, it is seemingly used specifically to refer to magic workers and magic workers only, and one could wonder why a term like 'magic worker' or 'magic user' is not applied. In the study of religion, individuals working with various forms of magic—like diviners, seers/seeresses and sorcerers/sorceresses—are generally understood as ritual specialists (Malefijt, 1968: 229–45), and I appreciate Gardeła's desire for a neutral term without connotations of broomstick, crystal orbs, and tarot cards, as well as one free from contaminations from other cultures (see Section 1.3). But owing to the rich tradition of 'ritual specialist' as an umbrella term in the study of religion, choosing a term like magic worker, which is actually used several times in the book (e.g. p. 43), would have functioned just as well if not better.

However, these minor shortcomings and terminological disputes certainly take nothing from the overall picture of the book: an impressive, thorough, truly interdisciplinary volume, showing the archaeologist's commanding knowledge of the sources—textual, archaeological and iconographic—about staffs in northern Europe in the Viking Age. This is a book that puts Leszek Gardeła's work on the archaeology of pre-Christian Nordic religion and ritual practice on a par with

work by the most well regarded scholars in the field.

## REFERENCES

- Eliade, M. 1956. *Le Sacré et le Profane*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Gunnell, T. 2004. Hof, Halls, Goðar, and Dwarves: An Examination of the Ritual Space in the Pagan Icelandic Hall. *Cosmos*, 17(1): 3–36.
- Hastrup, K. 1990. *Island of Anthropology: Studies in Past and Present Iceland* (The Viking Collection 5). Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark.
- Malefijt, A. de Waal. 1968. *Religion and Culture: An Introduction to Anthropology of Religion*. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press.
- Price, N. 2002. *The Viking Way: Religion and War in Late Iron Age Scandinavia* (AUN 31). Uppsala: Uppsala University, Department of Archaeology and Ancient History.
- Schjødt, J.P. 2009. Diversity and Its Consequences for the Study of Old Norse Religion: What Is It We Are Trying to Reconstruct? In: L.P. Słupecki & J. Morawiec, eds. *Between Paganism and Christianity in the North*. Rzeszów: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Rzeszowskiego, pp. 9–22.
- Schjødt, J.P. 2012. Reflections on Aims and Methods in the Study of Old Norse Religion. In: C. Raudvere & J.P. Schjødt, eds. *More than Mythology: Narratives, Ritual Practices and Regional Distribution in Pre-Christian Scandinavian Religions*. Lund: Nordic Academic Press, pp. 263–87.
- Turner, V. 1967. *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

SIMON NYGAARD

*Department of the Study of Religion, Aarhus University, Denmark*

doi:10.1017/eea.2018.24