

doi:10.1017/S000358151600041X

*Viking Graves and Grave-Goods in Ireland.* By STEPHEN H HARRISON and RAGHNALL Ó FLOINN. 310mm. Pp xxiii + 783, 426 ills (some col), facsimiles, maps. Medieval Dublin Excavations 1962–81, Ser B, 11, National Museum of Ireland, Dublin, 2014. ISBN 9780901777997. €50 (hbk).

This very substantial volume presents itself as the first accurate and comprehensive catalogue of Viking graves and grave goods from Ireland. It is much more than a revision of Johannes Bøe's *Norse Antiquities in Ireland* (Bøe 1940), which scholars have had to rely on hitherto, being based on a fundamental re-examination of all relevant archives for the accessioning and cataloguing of artefacts thought to come from graves of the Viking Age. Much of the material was collected in the nineteenth century during construction work; there have been only a few Viking Age graves excavated archaeologically in recent years. However, with a fair degree of confidence, a minimum of 107 Viking Age graves have been identified for Ireland as a whole, of which eighty-one come from Dublin, largely from Kilmainham and Islandbridge, reflecting its status as the principal base for Viking raiders in the ninth century and, subsequently, as a major urban settlement.

The volume is divided into five chapters (and a number of concordances and appendices) beginning with an introduction that sets out the aims of the 'Irish Viking Graves Project' and summarises its methodology. Chapter 2 is a detailed survey of the archives that were interrogated for the project. Chapter 3 is a description and discussion of the various categories of grave good; 401 distinct grave goods were identified, of which weapons (principally swords and spearheads) were the most common. Chapter 4 is a discussion chapter entitled 'The Viking Graves of Ireland', which addresses the distribution of the graves in the country, aspects of burial practice and ritual and so on. Chapter 5 is the catalogue, which contains a detailed description of the objects and the location and circumstances of their discovery.

For the student of the Viking Age without a particularly local interest, Chapters 3 and 4 represent the meat of the volume, and I recommend that they be read alongside Patrick Wallace's *Viking Dublin* (Wallace 2015; also reviewed in this volume). Taken together, the two publications make a substantial contribution to research into one of the most important Viking

Age colonial ventures in western Europe. Relating the grave goods to distinct phases in this venture has not, on the whole, been possible, given the circumstances of recovery and an absence of associated human remains to provide samples for radiocarbon dating. Dating has had to rely largely on typology, which is not necessarily a very exact science in respect of most of the objects considered here. The authors' approach is, one might say, fairly conservative, with considerable weight placed on Jan Petersen's two studies of Scandinavian grave finds: *De Norske Vikingesverd* (Petersen 1919) and *Vikingetidens Redskaper* (Petersen 1951). There is nothing wrong with these as a starting point; for sword hilts, for example, Petersen's classification is still widely accepted as valid. For the assemblage as a whole, Petersen, and other authorities, guide us to the second half of the ninth century, which on historical grounds would seem entirely appropriate for most of the grave groups. However, we are also asked to accept other comments on the character of the weaponry with which I was less happy. Unfortunately, most early iron objects, including the spearheads, arrowheads and knives featured here, are difficult to classify, usually being fairly simple in form and subject to wear and corrosion which alter that form before and after deposition, respectively. Deciding what constitute real differences in the form of objects, which can then be related to chronology or cultural factors, rather than being the result of random factors in the forge or in use, is therefore problematic. The authors comment (p 182) that my own classification of Viking Age knives from York (Ottaway 1992, 558–82) would be difficult to use on their material because those from York were much better preserved. In fact, the point is that study of the York knives was aided by their all being X-radiographed. There are references to X-rays of some of the Irish iron grave goods, but it is not clear if all were X-rayed. If not, then given the resource evidently put into the graves project this would seem a curious omission. In any event, X-ray plates were evidently not routinely supplied to the illustrator, which is probably one reason why some of the ironwork drawings are not particularly helpful. For example, we are asked to accept that the two arrowheads in Illus 67 both belong to Halpin's 'Type 1' with relatively long tangs, but this is far from evident in the drawing. As for spearheads, we are told about a distinctive 'Dublin type', suggested originally by Bøe, examples of which, *inter alia*, have 'rounded shoulders that curve back to the socket neck'. Frankly, those depicted in Illus 50,

evidently fairly corroded, look little different in this respect from large numbers of Viking spearheads from elsewhere, but perhaps additional drawings based on reconstructions from X-rays would have made the point more clearly. Also on the subject of the Dublin type of spearhead, reference is made (p 103) to their being relatively short and their blades being relatively narrow compared to others in the Scandinavian world. These sorts of assertions are, however, rather meaningless without a more rigorous statistical analysis of dimensions and relationships between them (see, for example, Ottaway 2013). In fact, as the authors admit (p 107), ‘there is no absolute division between Dublin-type spearheads and other contemporaneous forms’, which rather undermines much of the previous five pages of discussion. This is not to say that there were no local stylistic features in Dublin’s ironwork, whether tools or weapons – the case in regard to shield bosses seems much clearer – but teasing them out will probably require more detailed analysis of morphology (using X-rays), as well as metallurgy, and one accepts this will need consideration of the much better preserved finds from the excavations as well.

In a brief review of a large volume it is always difficult to do it justice, but in spite of my comments in the previous paragraph let there be no doubt that this is a great achievement which will probably be the standard work for far longer than Bøe’s seventy-four years. What is now needed is for similar reviews of the evidence from England and Scotland. If perhaps, Messrs Harrison and Ó Floinn have a little time on their hands ...

Bøe, J 1940. *Norse Antiquities in Ireland* (trans T Gleditsch), H. Aschehoug, Oslo

Ottaway, P 1992. *Anglo-Scandinavian Ironwork from Coppergate. The Archaeology of York. The Small Finds 17/6*, Council for British Archaeology, York

Ottaway, P 2013. ‘“All shapes and sizes”, Anglo-Saxon knives c 700–1100’, in A Reynolds and L Webster (eds), *Early Medieval Art and Archaeology in the Northern World: studies in honour of James Graham-Campbell*, 111–38, Brill, Leiden

Petersen, J 1919. *De Norske Vikingesverd*, J. Dybwad, Kristiania

Petersen, J 1951. *Vikingetidens Redskaper*, J. Dybwad, Kristiania

Wallace, P F 2015. *Viking Dublin: the Wood Quay excavations*, Irish Academic Press, Sallins, Co Kildare

PATRICK OTTAWAY

doi:10.1017/S0003581516000408

*Viking Dublin: the Wood Quay excavations*. By PATRICK F WALLACE. 310mm. Pp xxiii + 568, 468 ills (chiefly col), maps, plans. Irish Academic Press, Sallins, Co Kildare, 2015. ISBN 9780716533146. €70 (hbk).

Patrick Wallace, former Director of the National Museum of Ireland, has spent much of his distinguished career studying the archaeology and early history of Dublin. This volume is subtitled ‘The Wood Quay Excavations’, which were directed by the author in 1974–81, but it is much more than that, being a detailed study of all aspects of the city from the time of its foundation in the 840s to the early years of the Anglo-Norman era in the late twelfth–early thirteenth century. It takes account of pre-Wood Quay, and many subsequent excavations, which mean that Dublin is now the most extensively excavated early medieval urban centre in western Europe. This has allowed detailed reconstruction of its layout, which Wallace regards as the most important single result of the excavations (pp 32 and 478). Reconstruction of layout, and other aspects of the early city, is, of course, aided by the ground conditions, which ensure the archaeology is remarkably well preserved.

*Viking Dublin* is divided into thirteen chapters, eleven of which tackle different aspects of the material culture from the buildings, through metalwork, leather, textiles and so on to the many artefacts that illustrate the various art styles practised in the city. Even if one is already familiar with the archaeology of Dublin, one will be impressed once more by its richness and variety, admirably illustrated here by numerous excellent drawings and stunning colour photographs.

Throughout the volume Wallace links the chapters together with discussion of a number of overarching themes of considerable interest, often relevant well beyond the confines of the city itself. I can only refer briefly to two of them here. First, there is the question of Dublin’s origins. Unlike England, Ireland has no Roman towns to which later citizens had to adapt and it