CrossMark

and (primarily) Irish heroes that skilfully manipulated the concepts of the Ages of Man and Ages of the World; in doing so the author of *Cogadh* engaged in a self-conscious and self-declared *intamlugud intliuchta* ('learned interpretation') – itself a formulation that may reflect the terminology of twelfth-century scholastic philosophy (p. 155).

Lastly Ralph O'Connor (the editor), looks at the 'watchman device' in *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, a narrative device in which a character observes and describes a scene (frequently a person or group of people) to a companion, who then correctly interprets it. This is a common feature in discussions of Classical influence on medieval Irish literature, owing to its use in both traditions, and O'Connor uses it as a means of examining the issue of whether Classical imitation was necessary for the writing of large-scale Irish sagas. He concludes that while Classical influence was significant in some sagas (and played an increasingly important role as the Middle Irish period progressed), it is not the only explanation for the organisational models of the longer Irish sagas.

Classical literature and learning in medieval Irish narrative is an important contribution to the reception and influence of Classical literature in medieval Ireland and a welcome addition to D. S. Brewer's 'Studies in Celtic History' series, which has previously published important works in this area, such as Brent Miles's *Heroic saga and classical epic in medieval Ireland* (2011). It is to be hoped that this important field of enquiry – which has the potential to shed light on many aspects of medieval Irish culture – will continue to grow.

doi: 10.1017/ihs.2015.29

DENIS CASEY
Department of Early Irish, Maynooth University
deniscasey.temp@gmail.com

WOODSTOWN: A VIKING-AGE SETTLEMENT IN CO. WATERFORD. Edited by Ian Russell and Maurice F. Hurley. Pp xxiv, 413, illus. Dublin: Four Courts Press. 2014. €36 paperback.

THE CROSS OF CONG: A MASTERPIECE OF MEDIEVAL IRISH ART. By Griffin Murray. Pp xxxiv, 326, illus. Dublin: Irish Academic Press and the National Museum of Ireland. 2014. €40.50 hardback.

Woodstown is one of the most significant publications in medieval Irish studies – and indeed Viking-Age studies – for several years. It is the archaeological report of excavations that were undertaken at Woodstown (County Waterford), under the direction of one of the editors (Ian Russell), during the construction of the N25 Waterford city bypass in the early 2000s. The finds were of such significance that the bypass was rerouted, the site was declared a national monument (in 2005), and further excavations were undertaken.

What emerges from this publication is a partial picture of a substantial Viking settlement on the banks of the river Suir (in the form of a pair of associated D-shaped enclosures encompassing over 29,000 square metres), approximately nine kilometres upstream from the medieval core of Waterford city, which is all the more remarkable for having previously been unknown. There is no solid documentary evidence to point to a Viking settlement at Woodstown, nor does the documentary and archaeological evidence point to intensive native settlement in the vicinity during the immediate pre-Viking period (although small Neolithic and Mesolithic finds at Woodstown indicate settlement in the more remote past). The post-excavation archaeological picture is also far from complete, owing to the acidic nature of the soil, which has resulted in very poor survival of organic material (such as bones, textiles and domestic waste), while agricultural and commercial use of the land (including the construction of

https://doi.org/10.1017/ihs.2015.30 Published online by Cambridge University Press

a railway in the 1870s) has led to the disruption of possible landscape features and disturbance of soil layers (thus hampering stratigraphic dating). In addition, only a very small section of the site has actually been excavated. As illuminating as this study is, it is important to note that owing to the small portion of the site excavated, Woodstown almost certainly has much more to yield.

Despite all these hindrances, a remarkable assemblage of over six thousand objects was recovered from the Woodstown site, and at least one building was identified, whose construction type is unparalleled in the Irish urban archaeological record (our main source of information for Viking buildings). As the series of expert studies in this volume indicate, a broad spectrum of industrial activities occurred at Woodstown between the middle of the ninth century and the early tenth century, including iron smithing and smelting, jewellery production and boat repair. In particular, John Sheehan's and Patrick Wallace's analysis of the silver and weights finds (respectively) indicate that there was a substantial volume of small-scale trade at this site. On the social side, Stephen Harrison's excellent discussion of the excavated furnished Viking grave, found near a possible entrance to one of the enclosures, is an important reminder that although the site was subsequently abandoned we should not imagine that Woodstown was intended to be a temporary encampment. Indeed, he suggests that the act of creating such a high-status burial was 'a conscious expression of rank and authority created to mark the passing of an important member of an established community that intended to remain in the area' (p. 102).

The publication of the excavations at Woodstown is sure to be of international significance, placing the site on par with some of the most important excavated Viking sites in the world, including Repton and Torksey (in England), Kaupang (in Norway) and of course Dublin. Over thirty experts in a wide variety of fields (including burials, ceramics, textiles, numismatics and metallurgy) have contributed to this volume, and the editors and Four Courts Press are to be congratulated for producing a work that highlights the exceptional nature of the Woodstown site and its enormous significance for the study of Viking-Age Ireland and Europe.

The magnificent Cross of Cong, now housed in the National Museum of Ireland, was constructed in the 1120s as a reliquary for a fragment of the True Cross, and an inscription on it commemorates this shrine's powerful political and ecclesiastical patrons, Tairdelbach Ua Conchobair (Turlough O'Connor) and two members of the Uí Dhubthaig (O'Duffy) ecclesiastical family, as well as its artificer, Máel Ísu mac Bratáin Uí Echach. Despite its exceptional artistic and technical quality, it has not been the subject of sustained analysis heretofore; in his introduction Griffin Murray claims that this book will perform a number of firsts – including providing the first such analysis – and by and large he delivers.

Murray begins with an interesting account of the discovery and early study of the Cross of Cong (chapter 1), followed by an informed discussion of the early-twelfth-century political and ecclesiastical contexts of its construction (chapter 2). At this point readers might just as easily skip ahead to chapters 6 and 7, on the meaning and significance of the Cross of Cong respectively. In these latter chapters, just as in the introduction, Murray reminds us that it is only in the modern period that a change occurs from 'functioning religious relics used by communities, to objects of antiquarian curiosity to be placed in private cabinets' (p. 9), and that the Cross of Cong can be understood in a variety of contemporary contexts and fulfilled a number of functions. In particular, he anchors it within the patronage strategy of Tairdelbach Ua Conchobair (king of Connacht), whom he plausibly argues sought to have Tuam (County Galway) elevated to the position of archiepiscopal see during the first half of the twelfth century, and who subsequently succeeded in 1152.

The construction and decoration of the Cross of Cong receives extremely detailed attention in chapters 3–5; in the absence of a glossary, non-specialists might find it useful to read the final two sections of chapter 4 first (on construction and decorative methods), before attempting to read chapter 3 and the remainder of 4. Chapter 5 (on tradition in, and influences upon, the style of the

https://doi.org/10.1017/ihs.2015.30 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Cross of Cong) is particularly interesting and Murray makes a persuasive case for the influence of other True Cross reliquaries upon the form of the Cross of Cong (such as the Anglo-Saxon reliquary known as the Brussels Cross). Furthermore, he makes a reasonable argument that the Norse Urnes style of zoomorphic ornament used on the Cross of Cong represents a variation that might be considered an Hiberno-Urnes style of decoration.

In addition to the above, this study is accompanied by a catalogue of fifteen items that Murray believes were produced by the same workshop that constructed the Cross of Cong; the most significant of these (and the one which receives the most attention (catalogue no. 3; pp 230–61)) is St Manchán's Shrine (now located in St Manchán's Church, Boher, Ballycumber, County Offaly). This catalogue is an important work in itself and is followed by two appendices (by Paul Mullarkey of the National Museum of Ireland), on x-ray analysis and conservation work undertaken on the Cross of Cong in 2010.

Throughout this book, the author makes comparisons with a wide variety of media to support his claims, principally focusing on other examples of eleventh- and twelfth-century Irish ecclesiastical metalwork, and the volume is lavishly illustrated with high-quality colour images. The Cross of Cong is indeed a masterpiece of medieval Irish art and Griffin Murray has produced a very fine study of it.

doi: 10.1017/ihs.2015.30

Denis Casey
Department of Early Irish, Maynooth University
deniscasey.temp@gmail.com

The cold of May Day Monday: an approach to Irish literary history. By Robert Anthony Welch. Pp. 331. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2014. £20.

The late Bob Welch was a man of many parts: a poet, novelist and playwright, an editor, but above all an academic, professor of English at the University of Ulster in Coleraine for over twenty-five years, head of department, and dean of the Arts Faculty for eight years. He was pre-eminently a man of books, interested in the history of the book as well as in writing them. A much-published author himself, Welch had a mind with an historical as well as a poetical cast; he was author of *A history of verse translations from the Irish, 1789–1897* (Colin Smythe, 1988), as well as of a history of the Abbey Theatre (Oxford, 1999), while his *Oxford companion to Irish literature* (1996), edited with Bruce Stewart, clearly shows his wide interests in all periods of that field. Therefore, while this posthumous book is a bit of a surprise in some ways (the Early Irish chapter, the mythopoetic element all through) it is firmly based on a lifetime interest in Gaelic as well as Irish writing in English across many centuries. He was well equipped to undertake such a survey.

The title of the present book is enigmatic, and the word 'approach' in the subtitle is by way of apology. The title refers to the Hag of Béara, and it is this figure Welch uses as a key to his interpretations of Irish writing, both in Gaelic and in English. She is a multi-faceted figure with correspondences to ambivalent figures in other cultures and mythologies, a force of nature and yet supernatural, benevolent and also destructive, a kind of White Goddess but a kind of *magna dea* also; in the end she is a figure of Irish folklore whose lament in old age sums up the joys of sex and of nature in the light of the inevitability of death. She permits Welch to begin his history in the appropriately Celtic mists of time, and to select his narrative with a certain bias. He enters into this 'approach' determinedly, with eyes wide open, and so must the reader, for this is a highly original kind of history, not, I think, to be judged by conventional standards of historiography (which I shall not attempt to define).

https://doi.org/10.1017/ihs.2015.30 Published online by Cambridge University Press