

*Iceland's Relationship with Norway c. 870-c. 1100. Memory, History and Identity.*  
The Northern World Series 8. By Ann-Marie Long. Leiden/Boston, Brill. 2017. 312  
pp. ISBN 978-90-04-33562-2

This monograph, which is based on a doctoral dissertation defended at University College Dublin, explores the relationship between Iceland and Norway in the two centuries or so following Iceland's settlement (*ca.* 870-930). This approach, the author claims, distinguishes this study from previous research in the field. These have tended to either focus on the Commonwealth Iceland's constitutional development or how a society without a central executive authority might have functioned. The author recognises from the beginning that her undertaking is affected by one inescapable fact, namely that it was only in the first half of the twelfth century that the Icelanders began to write down their own past. Indeed most of these accounts were composed in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and many of these are preserved in later manuscripts. Thus, whatever archaeology can contribute to our understanding of Iceland's and Norway's relationship at this time, its history in this chosen period must be reconstructed from written sources that, in some cases, are centuries removed from the events and developments they purport to describe. In comparison with the Icelandic material, the Norwegian corpus is quite limited in size and is largely confined to a few historical accounts from the decades flanking the turn of the thirteenth century. Accordingly, this study deals to a significant degree with how Icelanders of the twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth centuries perceived and presented the significance of their Norwegian background. The principal themes relate to Iceland's settlement, the establishment of the constitution, the conversion to Christianity and, more broadly, the role of Norwegian royal power in Icelandic matters. To aid this exploration the author seeks inspiration in the burgeoning field of 'memory studies', and in particular the work of Jan Assman on the transmission of societal and cultural memory (especially in ancient Egypt).

*Iceland's Relationship with Norway c. 870-c. 1110* includes five main chapters which are bookended by introductory and concluding chapters. The first of these, entitled 'Perspective Old and New', introduces the principal ideas and concepts of the aforementioned field of memory studies. This chapter also offers an overview of historiographical trends in the field of Icelandic medieval history as well as presenting the main Icelandic and Norwegian sources. The second chapter 'The Historical Mythology of Iceland' explores Iceland's settlement and here, not surprisingly, the focus is on Ari Þorgilsson's *Íslendingabók* ('Book of Icelanders') and the so-called 'Book of Settlements' (*Landnámabók*) whose various versions contain accounts of the earliest settlers in different parts of Iceland. The principal conclusion reached is that these accounts emphasise the Norwegian heritage which, in turn, reflects the concerns of Icelanders at their time of writing. The third chapter, 'The Legal Mythology of Iceland' highlights how, in particular, Ari Þorgilsson underlines Norwegian influence on the development of the Icelandic laws and the official conversion of Iceland to Christianity at the General Assembly (Althing) in the year 999/1000. The main thesis is that Ari (and later medieval writers) sought to place Icelandic history within a Norwegian context without, however, compromising Iceland's fundamental independence from the 'motherland'. The fourth chapter examines the so-called *Ólafs lög* 'Óláfr's laws' which details the rights and duties of Icelanders in Norway and Norwegians in Iceland. These laws were purportedly issued by King (and saint) Óláfr of Norway (1015-1028) although they are only preserved in *Grágás*,

a corpus of laws preserved in thirteenth-century manuscripts. The author, as before, interprets the preservation of these laws as revealing the desire of Icelanders to affirm their legal and political attachment to Norway while, at the same time, maintaining formal and actual independence. During the thirteenth century this became an impossible stance to maintain and in 1262/64 the Icelanders swore fealty to the Norwegian king. Fittingly, the last chapter, 'Icelanders and Norwegians', examines literary depictions of Icelanders visiting Norway and, perhaps more fruitfully, examples of Norwegians visiting Iceland.

*Iceland's Relationship with Norway c. 870-c.1100* is an ambitious and accomplished work which demonstrates the author's sure grasp of both the relevant source material and the scholarly literature on the history and literature of Commonwealth Iceland and medieval Norway. The author's application of social and communal 'memory studies' is commendable and should offer much food for thought. There is, however, arguably one weakness in the premise of the whole undertaking. This is that the author does choose to use the written sources as evidence for the early Icelandic period. In other words, she does not confine historical worth solely to the 'social' or 'cultural' memory of their authors and, arguably, their audience. Rather, as the title of the book suggests, the study is also concerned with the reality of the earlier period. This is a perfectly legitimate approach and, indeed, in many ways an admirable one. It does, however, run into the abovementioned problem of source criticism (a problem which, it must be emphasised, the author readily recognises). The result is that the analyses of the early period are unlikely to tell us much new or original, depending as they do almost exclusively on the testimony of Ari Þorgilsson and later Icelandic writers (the Christianization is here a particular case in point). On the other hand, to say something revelatory about how the later sources might reflect 'social or cultural memory' calls for a detailed literary and historical contextualisation of each written source. Apart from possibly *Íslendingabók* and *Ólafs lög*, the author eschews such contextualisation and close reading (in the circumstances there are surprisingly few direct quotes from the original sources) in favour of a more general approach which relies on repeated, but less than specific, references to 'memory'. Accordingly, the overall impression of this interesting study is made slightly less convincing by the unresolved tension between, on the one hand, the discussion of the period c. 870-c. 1100 and, on the other hand, the analysis of the period in which the written sources were composed.