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Katherine Cross, *Heirs of the Vikings: History and Identity in Normandy and England, c.950-c.1015*. Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer/York: York Medieval Press, 2018. xii + 262 pp. Maps, notes, appendices, bibliography, and index. \$115.00 U.S./£75.00 (hb). ISBN 9781903153796; \$37.50 U.S./£25.00 (pb). ISBN 9781903153970; \$29.95 U.S./£24.99 (eb). ISBN 9781787442207.

Review by Benjamin Pohl, University of Bristol.

First published in 2018 and re-issued in paperback in 2021, Katherine Cross's debut monograph *Heirs of the Vikings* appeared at a time when interest in medieval Scandinavia--and specifically medieval Scandinavians--witnessed something of a resurgence in both academic and public discourse. Whilst Cross and others turned their attention, and their pens, to producing critical reassessments of the past and scholarly perceptions thereof, less critical yet extremely popular cinematographic adaptations such as *The Northman* and TV shows like *Vikings* (History Channel; Amazon Prime) and *The Last Kingdom* (BBC; Netflix) presented very different narratives to the masses. Meanwhile, examples of the darkest side of this renewed fascination with and increasing politicisation of the vikings amongst their self-styled heirs included sights of horned headgear, fur coats, and runic symbols during the storming of the U.S. Capitol in January 2021. Here and elsewhere, "viking heritage"--or rather whatever was imagined by different individuals and groups under this umbrella term--became closely entangled with identity politics and perceptions of ethnicity. As Cross's fine book sets out to demonstrate, and successfully so, the "politicization of viking identity" is not an invention of modernity but can already be detected in the historical periods following the first regular inroads and eventual settlements of Scandinavian raiders in the British Isles and the northern European Mainland, when, as Cross shows, "varied perceptions of Scandinavian ethnicity...arose from processes of settlement and assimilation in different regions" (p. 3).

Contrary to its indiscriminate and indistinct usage as referring to early medieval Scandinavians of diverse origins encountered in various contexts, peaceful and/or warlike, Cross, in keeping with current scholarly practice, emphatically advocates "a more specific use of the word 'viking' [spelt with a lower-case 'v'], to mean raiders and armies intent on gaining tribute, slaves and plunder" (p. xiii). Her focus and testbed are the two regions of viking activity that later would become England and Normandy, respectively. At the heart of the book's careful enquiry is a key question formulated in the introduction: "Why and how did viking identity come to mean such different things in England and Normandy?" (p. 2). Addressing this question from different angles across five subsequent chapters, "[t]he central problem," to borrow Cross's phrase, "is that of ethnicity" (p. 17). This is not a novel observation in and of itself, of course, but a challenge that has been acknowledged more than once in previous scholarship, though few have taken it on

as directly, and certainly not as comprehensively, as does Cross in her book-length study. Following the pragmatic and clearly structured introduction that includes, amongst other headings, a concise and well-pitched discussion of “Ethnicity and identity in medieval studies” (pp. 17-21), the book goes on to discuss, in this order, the narrative and ideologically charged construction of genealogies on either side of the English Channel (chapter one); the creation of relevant origin myths for different viking groups as well as for a single “Norman people” (*gens Normannorum*) (chapter two); the significance of so-called hagiography—specifically saints’ lives—as an exceptionally powerful yet frequently underestimated catalyst for the formation, negotiation, and dissemination of ethnic group narratives in both Normandy and England (chapters three and four); and, last but by no means least, the expression and utilisation of ethnicity in diplomatic sources like charters (Chapter five). This is followed by a substantial, and again well-structured, conclusion that draws together the book’s main strands of argument under discrete headings and makes some useful recommendations for future enquiries.

If we wanted to summarise succinctly and at the risk of undue oversimplification the main argument pursued and buttressed with various types of (predominantly textual) evidence throughout this articulate and coherently written book, we could do worse than to turn to the first pages of its conclusion, with Cross reasoning “[t]hat multiple narratives of the Viking Age and its contemporary significance emanated from the same political centres and even individual rulers underlines the situational nature of ethnic identities” (p. 201), and “[a] Dane or Dacian as presented by Dudo [of Saint-Quentin] to an educated Frankish audience was not the same Dane ascribed different legal rights from the English by Wulfstan [of York]” (p. 202). What might seem rather self-evident a statement is in fact the result of thoughtful and nuanced study of a commendable range of primary sources combined with a firm grasp on the existing scholarly literature. Indeed, the fact that conclusions like this are so compelling as to be unsurprising has much to do with how well they are supported by the evidence discussed in the preceding chapters, often involving close reading—and sometimes reading against the grain—of “familiar friends” such as Dudo and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle(s)*, at the same time as (re-)introducing some less frequently rehearsed voices into the conversation by drawing our attention to, for example, Fulbert’s *Vita Romani*, which, in addition to figuring prominently in chapter three, has one of the book’s two appendices dedicated to a discussion of its likely date (pp. 215-22; the other being devoted to discussing the respective dates of two *Lives* of St Neot, pp. 223-27).

All in all, this is an important and timely book that makes a genuine and original contribution to the field. This is not to say, of course, that it is without infelicities. To name but the most evident omissions, it is surprising to see no mention being made of the work on medieval ethnic identities by scholars such as Anthony D. Smith and Alan V. Murray, both of whom have done much to help inform conversations on how, why, and by whom ethnic identities and the narratives in which they are expressed were conceived in the Middle Ages.^[1] Turning to the primary evidence, the otherwise wide-ranging selection of written sources from both the Insular and Continental tradition surely would have stood to benefit from the inclusion of further vernacular texts such as the so-called Old English Battle Poems (“Battle of Maldon,” “Battle of Brunanburh,” and “Finnesburg Fragment”) that famously contextualise and contrast the ethnic self-perception of the early English with their perception of their Scandinavian adversaries. Likewise, it would have been good to see fuller consideration of non-written source types and artistic imaginations of vikings produced either side of the Channel like manuscript illuminations, visual art, and sculpture, the latter of which is, however, treated briefly. Finally, it would have been preferable—to this reviewer’s mind—to see some anachronistic names bestowed upon medieval sources by

their modern editors avoided in favour of their (likely) original titles, a case in point being Dudo's *Historia Normannorum* (or perhaps *Gesta Normannorum*), to which Cross refers throughout by its rather stilted and non-contemporary title *De moribus et actis primorum Normanniae ducum* (or a shortening thereof). In the end, however, reservations like these hardly outweigh the book's considerable strengths, and scholars interested in medieval England, Normandy, and Scandinavia--and the mutual perceptions of their respective inhabitants--are warmly encouraged to read and engage with Cross's rich and insightful study.

NOTES

[1] For example, see Anthony D. Smith's classic studies *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986); *Myths and Memories of the Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), and *Ethno-Symbolism and Nationalism: A Cultural Approach* (London: Routledge, 2009) and Alan V. Murray's volume of essays on ethnic identity in the crusader states, *The Franks in Outremer: Studies in the Latin Principalities of Palestine and Syria, 1099-1187* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015) and the edited volume (with Simon N. Forde and Leslie P. Johnson) *Concepts of National Identity in the Middle Ages* (Leeds: University of Leeds, 1995).

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