Gersum: The Scandinavian Legacy in Medieval Britain
Paper Abstracts

Lesley Abrams

Pagans and Christians: two baptisms and some funerals

How helpful is the concept of 'the conversion to Christianity' in understanding the political, religious, and cultural transformation experienced in Scandinavian England in the ninth and tenth centuries? The viking armies who came to Britain were followers of diverse forms of paganism, with polytheistic beliefs and practices which were sufficiently fluid to adjust to the condition of being far from home and in contact with Christian societies. Over time, however, the armies (and the settlers that followed) all adopted Christianity, although the process remains tantalisingly obscure. Alfred's baptism of Guthrum after the latter's defeat in 878 shows how English kings could use Christian ritual as a military and political tool; at much the same time, in northern England, churchmen lent their support to legitimise another viking, Guthred, as king, helping the Scandinavian invaders to strengthen their hold over their own followers and their new English subjects alike. In the East Midlands, however, smaller Scandinavian units based on *burhs* offer an interestingly different context, unencumbered by kings and major churches. Settlers integrated into the countryside across Scandinavian England and helped to develop a new religious identity, but the few sources that we have suggest that this was not a standardised process. My paper will aim to illustrate the diversity of experience through a number of case-studies.

Rhona Alcorn

The Old Norse component in the *Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue*

According to one analysis, 8.4% of the vocabulary of Older (i.e. pre-1700) Scots is of Scandinavian origin (Macafee & †Aitken 2002: §4.3, Table 1). It has been claimed that for general Older Scots (i.e. that found south of the Moray Firth) 'there exist *practically no Scots borrowings from Scandinavian which are not also Northern ME*' (Aitken ([1954], 2015: 3, emphasis original). This claim has been called into question by Kries, who argues that the Scandinavian influence on Scots 'is more independent of English mediation' than was then generally assumed (2007: 109). The main thrust of this paper, then, is to test the veracity of Jack Aitken's claim.

In the first part of the talk I consider how easy (or not) it is to find words of Scandinavian origin in the DOST component of the online *Dictionary of the Scots Language*. This will necessitate, first, a survey of DOST's language labels – including their significations and their visibility to automated searches – and, second, a good understanding of the structure of DOST etymologies. The second part of the talk will look at a one-in-five sample of DOST headwords that cite Old Norse in their etymologies. I will offer both an analysis and a characterisation of the portion of this sample that is (a) ascribed an Old Norse origin and (b) listed in DOST but not in OED Online.

References

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Jayne Carroll
Old Norse watery terms in English place-names and beyond

The ground-breaking work in the late 1980s of Margaret Gelling established just how precisely the Anglo-Saxons applied particular words to landscape features. Watery landscape terms – words for watercourses, bodies of water, and waterlogged land – are under re-examination as part of the Leverhulme-funded Flood and Flow project. This paper assesses the contribution made by Old Norse speakers to England's watery toponymicon, building upon the work by Gelling, who treated Old Norse landscape vocabulary in passing in her work on Old English, and by Gillian Fellows-Jensen's treatment of Scandinavian river- and lake-names in England.

Philip Durkin
Norse borrowings in the *OED*: a fresh examination

Until recently, it has been a difficult task to compile a list of all Norse borrowings in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*), because of the variety of different ways in which these were presented in the dictionary's first edition. The excellent survey by Hug (1987) is based instead on the much smaller selection of commoner Norse words included in the wordlist of the *Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*. Recent work on electronic tagging and data processing makes it possible now to provide data from across the full *OED* wordlist. Additionally, approximately 40% of the *OED* has now been fully revised, including re-evaluation of all etymologies based on re-examination of the core data and assessment of the research and scholarship of the past century.

This paper will present a survey of this *OED* data, including detailed analysis of the first dates of attestation of Norse loans in sources cited by *OED*, along with any restrictive labelling by region or subject field. It will examine how this *OED* data corresponds to analysis such as that by Pons-Sanz of the contrasting character of Norse loans first attested in the Old English period compared with those with Middle English or even later first dates of attestation (although probably borrowed into some variety of English much earlier).

Nik Gunn
Compounding the issue: Anglo-Norse language contact and word formation

The study of Old Norse loanwords in English has long been a staple area of study for the Viking and Middle Ages. Linguistic influence is rarely entirely one-sided, however, and this paper aims to shed light on a rather neglected issue in the field of Anglo-Norse language contact: the influence of Old English on the Old Norse lexicon. The first part of this paper will give a very brief overview of the history of the study of English loanword material before offering an up-to-date corpus of English-derived Christian lexis in Old West Norse, the first such wide-ranging attempt for over sixty years. The bulk of the paper will focus on some theoretical issues

that I hope will encourage lively debate: first, the concept of 'lexical polygenesis', which complicates the idea that identifying a definite donor language for some words is possible (or even desirable). Second, a case study of several parallel compound words in English and Norse where the source-recipient paradigm ceases to be useful due to the age-old problem of the close genetic relationship between the languages. I posit that a number of compounds may have been the product of close-knit Anglo-Norse religious communities.

Judith Jesch
Scandinavian runes in England: dating, distribution and contexts

It is well known, to runologists at least, that the small corpus of 19 (currently known) epigraphical inscriptions in Scandinavian runes found in England do not correspond very well, in either their date or their geographical distribution, to what we think of as England's Viking Age. In relation to its small size, this corpus comprises a surprisingly wide range of types of inscription and inscription-bearer. The inscriptions have linguistic importance as evidence both of Scandinavian language in England and of Anglo-Scandinavian language contact, and have beenoften been discussed in this context. Yet the corpus does not seem to have much to offer our understanding of what happened during the period of intense Scandinavian activity, settlement, and rule of the ninth and tenth centuries in particular. Is this purely a matter of chance survival, or do more complex processes lie behind the writing of Scandinavian runes in England? The paper will consider the salient features of this small runic corpus and attempt to reconstruct some of the historical situations which might have produced this interesting collection of inscriptions, with occasional glances at the broader insular context.

Jane Kershaw
Anglo-Scandinavian contact in the rural Danelaw: the physical setting

Linguistic evidence indicates high levels of Anglo-Scandinavian language contact following Scandinavian settlement in the Danelaw. Yet the specific site contexts of such encounters are largely unexplored. In this paper, I demonstrate how emerging archaeological data in the form of small finds enables a new assessment of the nature and location of Scandinavian rural settlement, focusing on evidence from Yorkshire. Here, new finds allow us to pinpoint likely locations of Scandinavian settlement, often in locations with Anglo-Saxon place-names. They suggest communities of Scandinavians and Anglo-Saxons living side-by-side, on long-lived sites, providing unique insights into the physical setting of Anglo-Scandinavian contact.

Máire Ní Mhaonaigh
The impact of the Scandinavian invasions on the Celtic-speaking peoples (almost) sixty years on

Almost sixty years ago in July 1959, a conference held in Dublin addressed the topic of the Impact of the Scandinavian Invasions on the Celtic-speaking Peoples, the proceedings of which were published three years later in 1962. Taking the methodologies underlying that volume as its starting point, this paper will address how our understanding of the Irish Sea as cultural conduit has changed in the intervening period, focussing on the evidence of specific texts.

David Parsons
The linguistic background to Gospatric's writ

This eleventh-century document is much the earliest medieval vernacular text of any length to survive from Cumbria. Its basis is Old English, but loanwords and names reveal the influence of Old Norse and both varieties of insular Celtic, Brittonic and Goidelic. My paper will briefly re-examine these features, and then set them in the wider context of evidence for the medieval languages of north-west England. This evidence is derived from place-names, personal names and inscriptions in a variety of scripts. Particular attention will be paid to the indications of linguistic borrowing and mixing that can be identified in the material. One of the various questions that arises from such an examination concerns the 'dominant' vernacular of the region. In the end, Middle English in Cumbria absorbed Norse and replaced the Celtic languages – but how inevitable was that process?

Sara M. Pons-Sanz
The Gawain-Poet's emotions

The development of a database recording and classifying the terms which have been identified as Norse-derived in a corpus of late Middle English alliterative texts from the North and North Midlands in terms of an innovative typology is the main output of the *Gersum Project*. However, in order to understand the impact of Norse-derived vocabulary on medieval English, we need to go beyond the identification and head-count of the terms, and study their integration into their respective lexico-semantic fields by analysing the semantic and stylistic relationships that these terms had with their near-synonyms. This way of approaching the material will be the focus of the present paper, where the make-up of the lexico-semantic field of EMOTION in the poems of attributed to the *Gawain*-poet will be analysed as a particular case study. Besides discussing the etymological origin of the terms in the various subfields in relation to the sociolinguistic situation in late Medieval England and the position of this field in scales of borrowability, the paper will discuss the semantic and stylistic interaction between the terms in their various subfields and what the poet's lexical choices can tell us about the way in which emotions were conceptualised and discussed in the various texts. As there will be not time to explore all the emotions in detail, particular attention will be paid to a related set of them (probably COURAGE and FEAR).

Elizabeth Ashman Rowe
Anglo-Scandinavian contact from a Scandinavian perspective: ecclesiastical and political contacts in Norway and Iceland *c*. 1000–1050

Considerable methodological problems beset the use of non-English sources to gauge the level of contact between western Scandinavia and Anglo-Saxon England in the late Viking Age. Icelandic sagas, for example, describe Norwegians and Icelanders in England during this period, but these accounts are suspect due to their historical errors, authorial agendas, and the gap of 150 years or more between the date of the purported events and the composition of the sagas. The present talk will take the somewhat easier path of examining the Anglo-Saxon presence in Norway and Iceland *c*. 1000 – 1050. Not surprisingly, these figures are generally ecclesiastical, such as the court bishops of the Norwegian kings and the missionary priests and bishops sent to Iceland, including a future abbot of Abingdon. Political figures include Ælfgifu of Northampton, the first wife of Cnut the Great and Cnut's regent in Norway from 1030 to 1034/5, along with their son Sveinn. The intermittent overlordship of Norway by Denmark and the desire of the rulers of Norway to maintain control of the developing Church

in the face of the mandate of the Archbishopric of Hamburg-Bremen intertwined political and ecclesiastical concerns and resulted in a small but significant Anglo-Saxon presence in Norway and Iceland.

Brittany Schorn
Gersum: lexis of Old Norse origin in the poetry of the Middle English Alliterative Revival

The *Gersum* Project (a three-year project, begun in January 2016 and funded by the U.K.'s Arts and Humanities Research Council; see www.gersum.org) has undertaken a detailed study of a large corpus of words for which Old Norse input has been claimed, by means of a freely available searchable online database (from January 2019). Our methodology involves a systematic reconsideration of the etymology of each lexeme and categorisation into types based on the nature and relative strength of the evidence for Old Norse input: phonetic and morphological evidence; the absence of a given root in (early) Old English; fractional differences in form or semantic evidence where a root is known in Old English; and instances in which the identification of a root itself is in question. Circumstantial evidence, such as chronological and regional distribution (including in the toponymic as well as lexical record) or association with a Viking-Age Scandinavian cultural artefact is also taken into account, as are textual variants and the history of scholarly interpretation to date. The aim of this paper will be to present our online resource as well as an overview of our results by means of a particularly illuminating case-study, comparing the lexicon of the Gawain-poet to that of the poet of the Middle English *Wars of Alexander*. As Duggan and Turville-Petre (1989: xlii– xliii) noted, the extensive similarities between them must be interpreted within the broader context of the alliterative tradition.

References

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Matthew Townend
The Vikings and the Victorians and dialect

'In the north of England, many words and phrases are preserved in the popular language, which are neither found nor understood in other parts, although they sound quite familiar to every Northman' (J.J.A. Worsaae, 1852). Philology, the revolutionary 'science of language', was one of the founding disciplines of Viking studies in the nineteenth century, and the study of English dialects lay at the heart of Victorian interest in the Vikings in England. In this paper I will explore how nineteenth-century philologists made pioneering collections of Norse loanwords in their contemporary English dialects, and used this evidence to reconstruct the history of the Viking Age in England. I will discuss the various approaches that dialect collectors took towards their material, from the austerely phonological to the enthusiastically folkloric, and I will examine the work both of regional figures (such as Mary Powley in Cumbria and J.C. Atkinson in Yorkshire) and of national and international ones (such as J.J.A. Worsaae and Joseph Wright).

Thorlac Turville-Petre
Topographical vocabulary in the *Wars of Alexander*

The Wars of Alexander is one of the masterpieces of the Alliterative Revival. The original dialect of the poem is of the north-west Midlands, probably Lancashire. The poem gives a history of Alexander, as he leads his army across Europe and into Africa, then into Persia, taking Thebes and crossing the Euphrates. Pressing on towards India, he encounters many exotic creatures and peoples before he reaches the Ganges. Travelling on through woods and over mountains, he encloses the kings of the lost tribes, comes to the ocean at the world's end, conquers Babylon, and constructs a throne inscribed with the names of his conquests.

The poem is remarkable for its rich descriptions of exotic scenery, full of vigour and vivid detail, of mountains reaching above the clouds, cliffs of adamant, impassable rivers. What vocabulary does the poet use to capture such marvellous features? This talk is a study of the topographical vocabulary available to a Lancashire poet of the late 14th century, comparing it with the diction of the *Gawain*-poet and other writers of the period, considering its poetic effect, and discussing the origins and histories of the words and their use in place-names.

George Walkden
Scandinavians and verb-second in Northumbrian Old English

Kroch & Taylor (1997) and Kroch, Taylor & Ringe (2000) claim that Northumbrian Old English shows signs of being a *strict verb-second* language like modern German, Dutch or Scandinavian languages. Their data are personal pronouns inserted in the Lindisfarne and Rushworth glosses, which tend to preserve verb-second order, unlike those found in West Saxon:

Latin:	*oculos habentes*		
Lindisfarne:	*ego*	*habbað*	***gie***
Rushworth:	*ego*	*habbas*	***ge***
	eyes	have	you

(Mark 8:18; West Saxon: *eagan ge habbað*)

Kroch, Taylor & Ringe also claim that this verb-second syntax is a result of contact with Scandinavian.

In this paper I put these two claims to the test. First, I present a more detailed survey of Old Northumbrian sources, in particular the Durham Collectar. Early Northumbrian sources are too scanty to provide decisive evidence, but the evidence from the Collectar seems to support Kroch, Taylor & Ringe's empirical picture. Secondly, however, I argue that the contact-induced change hypothesis is very unlikely to be correct, based on consideration of the type of contact situation, the status of Northumbria, and other linguistic evidence. I then offer some speculations as to how strict verb-second in Old Northumbrian may have arisen.