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Landscape and Environment in Dark Age Scotland (review)

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(despite Charles-Edwards's introductory warnings) that this actually is the 'Chronicle of Ireland', and that no further study is necessary. This new publication will be excellent as a means of introducing the Irish chronicles to students of Irish and Scottish history; it is to be hoped that, after some of the problems are removed, it will appear in the future in a more affordable paperback form to give it the audience it deserves.

Nicholas Evans, Department of History, University of Glasgow

Landscape and Environment in Dark Age Scotland, ed. Alex Woolf, St John's House Papers no. 11: St Andrews, 2006. 90 pp. £10 pbk. ISBN 095125736 6

This volume, published by The Committee for Dark Age Studies at the University of St Andrews, consists of five contributions, four of which were presented at The St Andrews Dark Age Studies Conference held in February 2003. The conference was dedicated to environmental history and deals with a passage of time relatively understudied compared to its earlier prehistoric and subsequent historic counterparts. As Woolf states in his introduction, each paper demonstrates a different approach to understanding the landscape history of Dark Age Scotland.

Strat Halliday (Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland) considers whether there is a seamless join or dislocation moving from the Roman Iron Age into the early medieval period. After drawing on archaeological evidence from eastern Scotland, he concludes that there is no neat evolution. There appears to have been a complete dislocation of the Iron Age settlement pattern in the third century AD and there appears to be no tangible medieval landscape as such either.

Richard Tipping and colleagues (University of Stirling) present some selected pollen data from two sites in northern Scotland. Although evidence for woodland management is difficult to identify based solely on pollen data, they interpret the increase in *Quercus* (oak) pollen at both sites as a result of selective establishment and maintenance of woodland between cal AD 250 and cal AD 600. Tipping and his colleagues argue that oak was never a significant component of Holocene woodlands in northern Scotland yet at both sites *Quercus* pollen percentages increase. Despite the *Quercus* pollen percentages never exceeding 10%, these higher percentages represent a ten-fold increase. Their favoured explanation is that oak was managed as a cash crop for timber, paralleling similar practices common in medieval and later times. This is a plausible working hypothesis.

Anne Crone (AOC, Scotland) presents dendrochronological data derived from oak found in buildings in Scotland. The age distribution of these data highlights an anomaly in the tree-ring record between the

end of the early historic chronologies and the beginning of the medieval chronologies. The two earliest sites have oak dated to AD 750 and then a gap ensues until the reappearance of locally grown oak in Scottish buildings from the mid to late tenth century onwards. Anne describes this anomaly in the tree-ring record, which seems to indicate a non-sustainable phase of woodland clearance in the late pre-Viking Age.

Alasdair Ross (University of Stirling) discusses the *dabhach* of Moray. Ross uses the *dabhach*, a common unitary denomination of land, to reconstruct the internal geography of both the medieval earldom and the diocese of Moray. First he discusses some of the controversy surrounding the *dabhach*. This is clearly a painstaking and time-consuming piece of research but Ross manages to piece together a coherent picture of how Moray was subdivided into *dabhachean*. Hopefully research of this type will provide us with a more detailed picture of how Scotland's medieval landscape was divided and in turn help us interpret other kinds of data from this period in time.

The final contribution is from Simon Taylor (University of Glasgow). Taylor combines the use of toponymics (the study of place names) and documentary sources to reveal how place names can enable us to attain greater understanding of the history of agriculture, lordship and landscape in medieval Scotland. Taylor's research focuses on the Howe of Fife and, in particular, the disappearance of Rossie Loch is discussed. Rossie Loch was the biggest body of freshwater to lie entirely in Fife, until it was completely drained by 1805. Taylor argues that the place names of Kinloch and Rossie can only be understood in terms of this lost loch. This is followed by a review of the relationship between transhumance and place names. Many place names clearly reflect land use practices.

This volume will appeal to anyone who has an interest in the Dark Ages or the history of Scotland. Given its number of papers and length, which totals ninety pages, it certainly is not a definitive publication – Woolf correctly describes it as 'scraping the surface of a vast subject.' Many specialists in Dark Age Studies might simply purchase it because they have a greater interest in one of the papers but those who read all five contributions will appreciate those different approaches that can be employed to investigate various aspects of the Dark Ages and the role that cross-disciplinary collaboration could play in improving our understanding of many aspects of this period. It is clear from just these five papers, that there are still plenty of unresolved questions and gaps in our knowledge of the Dark Ages. It is reasonably priced at £10.00. The volume is well presented and the diagrams are well produced.

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