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This year's Student Conference by the Viking Society of Northern Research was held February 23rd, in Oxford, under the promising title *Eco-Norse: Land and Landscapes in Old Norse-Icelandic Literature*. The event took place at the Faculty of English and was organised by a small committee of local staff with Prof. Carolyne Larrington and Prof. Heather O'Donoghue as their spokeswomen. Special thanks must be given to Caitlin Ellis and Timothy Bourns who skilfully organised and advertised the conference. The one-day event began with opening remarks by the organisers. What followed were six individual speakers with forty minutes each presenting on eco-theoretical issues and environmental concepts within Old Norse studies. Thus, the conference touched on a set of new ideas and questions elaborated for the first time in such an extent within the field. The papers were divided up into two sessions with three papers each, the first session called 'Genres of Eco-Norse,' the second 'Eco-Human Relations.' A keynote address by Eleanor Rosamund Barraclough (Durham) brought the conference towards its end.

The first session began with a paper by Carl Phelpstead (Cardiff): 'The Archipelagic Sagas.' Phelpstead introduced his perspective on Eco-Norse as critical landscape study by referencing important scholars and recent publications as framework to his approach, providing a helpful ground for further studies. After claiming that Old Norse studies are typically resistant to political and theoretical readings, Phelpstead specified his own interest to lie in the relation between place and time to genre. Combining Bakhtinian insights in

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place and genre with an ecocritical earth-centred approach, he went on to discuss *Orkeneyinga saga* and *Fáringa saga*. Following up earlier issues in classifying these sagas Phelpstead used the sagas' atypical interest in landscape to propose a new classification as archipelagic sagas. Even though the sagas rarely stress the archipelagic setting, it is always in moments crucial to the narrative, and thus the environmental features of the sagas may provide a better alternative in classifying the sagas. Finally, Phelpstead added that even the transmission in *Flateyjarbók*, divided up between other texts, would make them in another way archipelagic, although in a more controversial way.

As the conference's second speaker, Michael Bintley (Birkbeck), presented his paper 'Fluid Dynamics: Aquatic Agency in the Poetic Edda.' He introduced his own perspective of viewing the human as enmeshed in environment, followed by an explanation of his own theoretical framework based on recent developments in New Materialism or Object-Oriented Studies. Here, Bintley glanced especially into Material Engagement Theory, or Ian Hodder's concept of entanglement, only to look more closely into Merlin Donald's concept of the 'exogram' (an external memory record of an idea). Inscribed in the brain, these exograms would create mind in past, present, and future, comparable to the process of reading working like loops. From here, Bintley went on with his hunt for water in the *Codex Regius* of the Poetic Edda, analysing it for occurrences of various aquatic forms in different numbers. As Bintley considered more closely the role water has here, he concluded that primordial aspects are the dominant amongst mythological concepts about water's obscure origin, or reflections on water being part of us and not. Building a bridge back to the idea of entanglement, Bintley closed a thought-provoking paper.

The last paper of the first session was by Hannah Burrows (Aberdeen): 'Weatherscapes in Early Skaldic Poetry.' In her talk, Burrows went to look specifically into late tenth-century poetry from the circle around Hákon *jarl* Sigurðarson, led by her interest in exploring the artistic possibilities within the tradition of skaldic poetry and to what degree they allow for creating vivid weatherscapes. The literary milieu of Hákon, she stated, was deliberately chosen,

not only because Hákon himself is associated with weather magic several times in the literary transmission, but also since the poetry produced around him shows a prominence of weather. To exemplify her claims, Burrows chose to analyse poems by Eyvindr *skáldaspillir* Finnsson, Einarr *skálaglamm* Helgason, and Þorleifr *jarlsskáld* Rauðfeldarson for instance. In conclusion, poets were interested in exploring possibilities of their language, and Hákon seems to have provided extra inspiration in doing so.

After a lunch break, the conference proceeded with its second session and Tim Bourns (Oxford) presenting his paper ‘Heart of Human, Flesh of Wood: the *trémaðr* of *Þorleifs þáttr jarlaskálds*.’ Bourns focused on the gendered *trémaður* of the *þáttr*, which, he stressed, appears as more than an object. The strangeness of the *trémaður* served Bourns as a case to study thirteenth-century Icelanders’ perspectives on pre-Christian belief. Mentioning more instances of actual *trémaður* occurrences, amongst them the naked *trémenn* in *Hávamál*, who receive clothing, or birch-bark wearing *trémenn* in *Órvar-Odds saga*, these latter examples served Bourns to suggest a certain connection between bark and clothing in the minds of medieval Icelanders. In the second part of his paper, Bourns shifted focus to driftwood. Discussed were Askr and Embla in *Völuspá*, and a case for driftwood possessing its own agency in *Grettis saga*. Driftwood, in comparison to other Nordic areas, then, was concluded to be a distinctively Icelandic eco-phenomenon; a mysterious resource, inspiring the minds and beliefs of the local people in a variety of ways.

Harriet Evans Tang (York) began her paper ‘Animal Farm: Animal-Human Spaces in the *Íslendingasögur*’ with the assumption that animals were considered as destructive forces and at the same time vital partners. Inspired by the episode of Skarpheðinn in *Njáls saga* pretending to be an animal on the roof only to kill two other characters of the same saga, she limited her paper to animals on the roof. Raising questions whether for instance certain times or seasons, any laws, or significant parallels were associated with the studied phenomenon, Evans Tang could not confirm any of them. In the second part of her paper, Evans Tang departed from Heiðrún in *Gylfaginning*, said to be a

goat standing on *alfǫðr*'s hall gnawing from the branches of *Læráðr*. For this certain mythical motif she found parallels like an ewe in *Grettis saga*, or the dog *Sámr* in *Njáls saga* that led her to conclude that animals served as providers of integrity of society, not as invaders but rather comparable to *Heiðrún*'s example.

The last speaker of the second session was Jane Harrison (Oxford) with her paper: 'Vikings and Their Landscapes: Land and Home in Northern Britain.' Viking-Age people, she claimed, thought their living imbued landscape with meaning, which allowed her to refer back to Mike Bintley. A first term she introduced was 'cultural landscapes' as places where humans engage through events and memory in landscape. She went on to discuss examples from Orkney, where Bay of Skail for example provides a good example where new Viking-Age longhouses ignored or neglected the past by landscape use. Another strategy was shown for the East Mound where frequent re-building of houses every thirty years, interpreted as deliberate references to previous buildings, respects the past but also looks forward in time. In the end, Harrison concluded that the new Viking settlers clearly carrying on their own past into their new future on the Orkneys.

The final presentation of the conference was the keynote address by Eleanor Rosamund Barraclough (Durham): 'Got Wood? Living with the Forest and Imagining the Forest in Old Norse Culture.' Speaking about the world as both real and imagined, she focused on human understanding, recognition but also remembrance. Wood in this regard was introduced as a thing you can touch but also a mythological-cosmological object. Her particular interest here was on the intersection of physical and imagined wood. The settlement history of Iceland leads necessarily to practical discontinuations, Barraclough stated, with increasing lack of timber but its continued presence through cultural heritage into the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries. First, she looked into the *Eddas*, where she could point out cases like *Yggdrasill* as an ash tree being non-native to Iceland. Mentioning kennings for men in *Snorra Edda*, she observed that they were using trees no matter which kind from all over the Scandinavian diaspora. This inspired her to speak of a diasporic cultural memory, which however was specific to the *Eddas* and different to other genres. Looking into the

Íslendingasögur, Barraclough reconsidered the common notion of Iceland being a treeless country. Even though archaeological studies pointed rather to non-native trees used in many cases, Barraclough stressed the evidence from different sagas, mentioning both driftwood and woodlands used by Icelanders painting a picture of their time being richer in trees than usually assumed. All in all, Barraclough provided fascinating stories and helpful references to medieval Icelandic accounts and their dealings with the given ecological conditions and issues.

Thus, the conference came to an end, providing the audience with a great day full of food for thought. Speaking of food and the kind provision of coffee and tea, however, as only drop of bitterness to an otherwise great eco-theoretical conference it could be mentioned that single-use plastic unfortunately was not absent from it. The overall topic of Eco-Norse, nonetheless, showed its great potentials, even in bringing the field a great step closer to current debates in academia and society.