

not confined to the texts. There cannot be an absolute divide between the reality *in* the text and the reality *behind* it: while they are not one and the same, they are certainly linked by symbiosis and dialectic, informing and counter-informing each other” (p. 165). Indeed, friendships are to be understood in an economic sense as vehicles for the assertion of political and economic strength and a structural mechanism for a functional society, where gift-giving and the hosting of feasts are socio-political actions of an exchange economy, in which behaviour, values, and authority are performed and publicly demonstrated, and through which ‘friends’ are established, defined and constrained. *Language of Power* certainly challenges historians and literary scholars of Icelandic texts to think again about what they are reading, and to think again about the kind of social values that are reflected in these narratives. As such, this is an important and original contribution to the ever-expanding library of social, political, and economic scholarship on northern Europe.

Roderick McDonald
Independent Scholar

Wycherley, Niamh, *The Cult of Relics in Early Medieval Ireland*

Studies in the Early Middle Ages 43 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015) hardcover, xi + 254 pages, RRP €75.00; ISBN: 9782503551845

This is a book based on a PhD thesis, and displays the strengths and weaknesses of that genre. The book presents and discusses an impressive range of documentary evidence, supported by reference to material evidence, relating to relics and their treatment in early medieval Ireland. It claims to concentrate on the fifth to seventh centuries but draws on evidence up to the ninth century and beyond. There are signs of carelessness in referencing and translation, particularly from early Irish. More seriously, there is a tendency to build arguments out of carefully referenced known facts mixed with the occasional unreferenced and unsupported claim which is subsequently represented as a reasoned conclusion.

The first chapter discusses relics in the late antique context, helpfully laying out a good deal of evidence not necessarily familiar to scholars of Ireland and therefore useful.

The second chapter focusses on the early Christian period in Ireland. There is some overstating of the evidence. Patrick’s claim that Coroticus’s soldiers are not ‘*ciuibus sanctorum Romanorum*’ is presented as an application by Patrick of that label to Christians (p. 39). Columbanus’ acknowledgement of the primacy of Rome is presented as an acknowledgement by that non-existent entity, the Irish church (p. 39). The assertion “*basilica* implies that it was an early foundation containing relics” (p. 42) refers us to the appendix for substantiation, where no argument to this effect is made. The fact that Armagh sought to annex a few churches is presented as “acknowled[ing] their respected and superior—or at least ancient—status within the Irish Church” (p. 44), when it merely acknowledges that they had some value (perhaps economic) to Armagh. In a discussion of miraculous powers surrounding saints’ tombs, we are given the story of the miraculous millstone at Kildare as though in support of the assertion (p. 60), when the millstone has no connection to a tomb. We are told that the crowds seeking to attend Columba’s funeral on Iona are evidence of a “tomb cult” (p. 60), when they are merely

seeking to attend a funeral. The ‘profugorum uel noxiorum’ Bede suggests may seek (legal) refuge on Lindisfarne after Cuthbert’s death are turned into ‘pilgrims’ (p. 60). Adomnán’s report that Columba’s body is visited by heavenly lights and angels is said to “indicat[e] a relic cult” (p. 61). The report that bones were visible in Temple Cronan in 1966 is taken as evidence of the unlikely proposition that those same bones were present in the early Christian period (p. 62). This is the only evidence offered of a slab shrine containing putative human remains, and yet we are informed that ‘it is clear’ (p. 64) that slab shrines are evidence for tomb cults in early Ireland.

Chapter 3 deals with *translatio*, and again overreaches. Cogitosus tells us that the church of Kildare is rebuilt to accommodate a growing congregation: we are told that this implies the translation of relics (p. 74). Patrick’s prophecy that Monesan’s body would be removed to a chapel ‘cum honore’ is presented as “indicat[ing] that bodily remains were venerated, translated and enshrined”: this might well have been the case, but it also might not. The section on material evidence which concludes this chapter is a good, careful, and thoughtful interpretation of the evidence.

The fourth chapter deals with the role of relics in the consecration of churches, and contains a good deal of competent textual analysis. It is again marred by some overreaching, particularly in the latter part of the chapter. We are told of Colmán’s voyage with relics to Inis Bó Finne where he founded a church that the “implication is clearly” (p. 113) that the relics were intimately connected with the foundation: it is a possible interpretation, but hardly a clear implication. We are told that Adomnán’s placing of Columba’s vestments and books on the altar to invoke the saint’s assistance with their prayers (p. 112) shows that he “clearly appreciated that relics were customarily associated with altars”, when it merely shows that praying was associated with the altar; indeed that the items have to be brought to the altar implies a disassociation. A discussion of altars (page 116) fails entirely to consider the difference in form and function between a fixed altar in a church and a saint’s portable altar.

Chapter 5 deals with the formal use of relics, and shows significant problems of interpretation. In a paragraph giving a reasonable summary of the role of ancestral graves in legal procedures, the only sentence lacking a citation is the important one that claims, without argument, that saints’ graves appropriated the legal functions of ancestral graves (p. 132). A sentence from *Additamenta* is cited as evidence that “oaths were also clearly taken inside churches” (p. 134), but this rests on mistranslating the word *iter* as ‘between’ rather than its correct meaning here of ‘as to’, transforming the clause from a specification of the content of the bequest to an unwarranted attempt to physically locate the act of bequeathing. A discussion of law is badly flawed: the suggestion that codification may have begun with *cána* ignores the existence and probable dating of *Senchus Már* and its contents; the entire discussion of the term *cáin* is highly problematic and appears to ignore scholarship of the last five decades, relying inter alia on MacNeill’s unreliable 1923 translation of *Críth Gablach*.

The sixth chapter on relics and identity exhibits the same combination of useful presentation of sources combined with sometimes inappropriate and unjustified assertions. Selective reading of the possible meanings of *sárugud*, whose semantic range spans from disobedience to laying waste, gives rise to a speculative paragraph (p. 183), wherein the term is said to be “reserved for the most intimate of intrusions”.

A conclusion and an appendix attempting (with limited success) the difficult task of defining the Hiberno-Latin and Irish terminology associated with relics complete the book.

For anyone working in the field of early Christian Ireland, the material presented in this book will be valuable. Reading it for its collection of source material while treating its conclusions rather as tentative suggestions will repay any interested scholar.

Pamela O'Neill,
University of Sydney

Zupka, Dušan, *Ritual and Symbolic Communication in Medieval Hungary under the Árpád Dynasty (1000–1301)*, Julia Sherwood and Peter Sherwood (trans.)

East Central and Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages, 450–1450 39 (Leiden: Brill, 2016)
e-book, ix + 224 pages, 6 b/w illustrations, RRP €112.00; ISBN:9789004326392

Medieval Hungary is not as common a subject of English-language publications as it could be, given the country's significance to the history not just of central European countries, but indeed all European countries, and *Ritual and Symbolic Communication* is a welcome addition to a growing body of studies on the lands and people of medieval central Europe. In fact, this work is a translation of an earlier 2011 Slovak language publication, *Rituály a symbolická komunikácia v stredovekej strednej Európe (Árpádovské Uhorsko 1000–1301)*, which was itself drawn from Zupka's 2009 PhD thesis undertaken at Comenius University in Bratislava. Julia and Peter Sherwood have clearly done an excellent job in rendering Zupka's own polished and eminently readable prose into English, though, as with all translations, the danger remains that something of the nuance and subtlety of the original can be lost. Even from the title itself, we can see that the Slovak book promised to contextualise the centuries of (Christian) Árpád rule in Hungary within the broader language of symbolic communication in medieval central Europe, a focus that is not quite there in the English title. And yet, this is precisely what is contained within *Ritual and Symbolic Communication*, so perhaps some of the criticism of this book may be a case of the translation not entirely capturing the essence of the original.

Zupka begins with a methodological overview and eminently useful literature review which in turn details the historical and current scholarship on the study of ritual within the humanities, medieval studies, and works on medieval Hungary. The chapters themselves are arranged thematically, rather than chronologically. Therefore, chapter 2 details the rituals of kingship and investiture with the ritual of girding with a sword, coronations, 'festive' coronations, and crown-wearing. It also includes rituals where the king interacted with others, or was the subject of ritual activity as with ceremonial liturgical acclamations; the rituals of court festivities, such as the royal hunt, feasts, and gift-giving; as well as the swearing of oaths, and acts of ritual penitence and humiliation. Chapter 3 examines the rituals of conciliation, submission, and supplication of Hungarian kings and nobles to other Hungarian kings, as well as to German and Byzantine emperors. The *adventus regis*, where the foundation of the relationship between the king and the city was formalised and legalised with the exchange of gifts and the swearing of oaths of loyalty by the *de jure* representatives of the city, its leading