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Celtic cosmology: perspectives from Ireland and Scotland

Borsje, J.; Dooley, A.; Mac Mathúna, S.; Toner, G.

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Celtic Cosmology

From the deep sea to the waters above the sky, from the world beneath our feet to the promised land across the ocean – this volume represents a search for traces of cosmologies in Celtic sources, especially those of Ireland and Scotland. These cosmological traces are investigated for their Indo-European and Semitic parallels and influences. The broad world orderings – Celtic tripartition (earth, water and sky) and Christian bipartition (this world and the next) – are explored, and the cosmological meaning of specific demarcations in the landscape is analyzed. The world was mapped with words, as signposts for contemporary and future generations. These written “maps” are not only geographical, they also constitute ethical and mythological guidelines. Through storytelling, landscape and social space are processed in a framework of cosmic good and evil. In a Celtic mental world roads, rivers, mountains and hills are vital markers. Hills and caves were used in rituals and were seen as entrances to a subterranean otherworld where supernatural beings dwell and knowledge of the cosmos was believed to reside with these supernatural or subterranean beings. This knowledge is connected with protection and violation of the landscape and waters, and is often associated with the king, truth and justice. In the socialized landscape features of periphery and centre are closely related to kingship: thus, looming tragedy can be deduced from the route that a mythical king takes; royal capitals are outlined in landscape and architecture as ritual centres. The naming of significant places is a human act of creating order. In the Celtic literary tradition of explanatory and etymologizing stories, place-names serve as signifiers and warning signs (taboos) and some Celtic narratives on naming places appear to function also as performances of atonement for disruptions of the cosmic order.

PAPERS IN MEDIAEVAL STUDIES 26

Celtic Cosmology

Perspectives from Ireland and Scotland

Edited by

JACQUELINE BORSJE, ANN DOOLEY,
SÉAMUS MAC MATHÚNA, *and* GREGORY TONER

Editorial assistance by

Nancy McGuire,
Nioclás Mac Cathmhaoil, *and* Tino Oudesluijs



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59 Queen's Park Crescent East

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www.pims.ca

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Abbreviations

AT	Aarne-Thompson classification
ATU	Aarne-Thompson-Uther classification (Uther 2004)
<i>Blathm.</i>	<i>The Poems of Blathmac</i> (Carney 1964)
CCCM	Corpus christianorum continuatio mediaevalis
<i>CCellaig</i>	<i>Caithréim Cellaig</i> (Mulchrone 1971)
CCSL	Corpus christianorum series latina
CG	<i>Carmina Gadelica</i> (Carmichael 1900–71)
CSEL	Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum
CW	Edinburgh University Library Carmichael Watson
<i>DIL</i>	<i>Dictionary of the Irish Language</i> (Dublin http://www.dil.ie/)
<i>LL</i>	<i>The Book of Leinster</i> (Best, Bergin & O'Brien 1954)
<i>LU</i>	<i>Lebor na hUidre</i> (Best & Bergin 1929)
NRS	National Records of Scotland
PL	Patrologia latina
SCA	Scottish Catholic Archives, Columba House, Edinburgh
SLH	Scriptores latini Hiberniae
Sg.	St Gall glosses on Priscian (Stokes & Strachan 1903)
<i>SR</i>	<i>Saltair na Rann</i> (Stokes 1883)
SSS	School of Scottish Studies, Edinburgh
<i>TBDD</i>	<i>Togail Bruidne Da Derga</i> (Stokes 1902)
TDD	Túatha Dé Danann
Wb.	Würzburg glosses on the Pauline epistles (Stokes & Strachan 1901)

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