

# H-Net Reviews

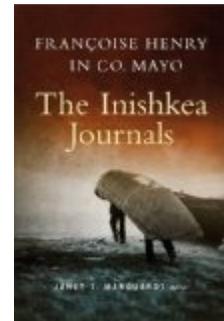
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Janet T. Marquardt. *Françoise Henry in Co. Mayo: The Inishkea Journals*. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2012. 172 pp. \$29.95 (paper), ISBN 978-1-84682-374-9.

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*Françoise Henry in Co. Mayo* traces the trips of the French art historian and archaeologist Françoise Henry (1902-82) to the island of Inishkea North (Co. Mayo) in 1937, 1938, 1946, and 1950, during which she scouted sites for excavations. Examining the writings of her personal journals, the book is the product of a collaborative effort led by Janet T. Marquardt, an art historian and professor at Eastern Illinois University who specializes in the historiography of medieval art. Marquardt was assisted in the compilation of this material by Barbara Wright, emeritus professor of French at Trinity College Dublin, who completed the transcription of the original French journals, and Huw Duffy, a graduate in French from Trinity College Dublin, who translated the journals. The book, the English iteration of the material, with a subsequent French edition being compiled by Wright, is composed of an edited translation of the journals accompanied by photographs, many of them Henry's own. The material was further enriched through field scholarship, which serves to illuminate many of the personal and idiosyncratic references throughout the journals, as well as a detailed and thorough introduction to the life and work of Henry, setting the stage for the journals themselves.

Throughout her work and travel, Henry kept scholarly and personal journals, with the archaeological and art historical material being far more familiar to the world of medieval art scholarship. Here, her personal ruminations provide new insight into this seminal figure in the field of medieval Irish art. Henry's foundational work on Early Christian Irish art emerged at a propitious moment in early twentieth-century Ireland, when the value of the Irish culture and heritage was undergoing revitalization in the hands of successful nationalist forces. Her interest was stimulated by the encouragement of her

teacher at the University of Paris, Henri Focillon (1881-1943), who realized the need for study in the area of Irish medieval art: Henry's field research in Ireland was, in fact, part of a small renaissance in this field of Irish studies. Following her initial research, Henry continued her all-encompassing work, dedicating her life to the study from her initial doctoral thesis *La sculpture irlandaise* (1933), to her corpus of medieval Irish art, *Irish Art in the Early Christian Period* (1964). Although later scholars have repeatedly challenged the work, her basic framework has been upheld, and the debt current art historians and archaeologists of Irish medieval art owe to her has never been in dispute.[1]

The journals, as revealed in this volume, provide a picture of Henry's personal narrative of her interactions with people on the Mullet Peninsula in preparation for her trips to the Inishkeas, and her time on the islands (primarily Inishkea North). They create an evocative vision of the far West of Ireland's landscape and people. The writing vacillates between stream of consciousness meditations on the beauty of the landscape and the dominant presence of the sea in island life, to the personal narrative of her time spent with a group of people, largely locals.

The material is organized into the four seasons of scouting and excavations, introduced by a comprehensive biographical sketch enhanced by Marquardt's insights into Henry's work. The 1937 journal starts with Henry's initial travels to the region to scout the site, and is followed up by her stay on the island for her initial excavation of Inishkea North in 1938. The journal entries vary in length and frequency, and focus on her impressions of the landscape and the people. Although the initial journal is translated from the original French, it

retains the poetic prose as described by Marquardt to be inherent in its original language. Henry chronicled her journeys back and forth from the Mullet to the island, moving in and out of historical moments of time, evoking a vivid picture of the country from the perspective of a cultural outsider. The writings humanize and give personality to one known primarily through the voice of her scholarship, although written with some sense of remove. Henry's reflections vacillate between brushing up against her work and the daily activities of the excavation narrative and a flow of seemingly disconnected thoughts and observations.

The 1938 journal, also translated from the original French, starts slowly with the musings of her initial planning trips and early excavations, and rises to an emotional peak with the description of Henry's time spent alone on the island during a raging storm. It details the gender politics played out between Henry and the workers; these relationships are more fully revealed through the exhaustive investigation of Marquardt as laid out in the footnotes and detailed background provided in the introduction. For Henry, the progressive role of being a single woman with sole responsibility of running an excavation and managing male workers was a position that was not always easily negotiated or received. This struggle came to the forefront in her insistence to stay on the island alone, a proposition met by fervent protests of all those in her employ. But Henry stood her ground and gradually won over most of her temporary community.

The 1946 journal is composed of shorter, sparser accounts that detail the deterioration of island life, and show Henry's eye for the details of the everyday aspects of people and place. The 1950 journal, originally in English and mixed with her scholarly archeological writings, was edited to concentrate on the personal reflections to give it coherence with the rest of the material. It brings focus to the personal relationships and labor details of her third excavation trip to Inishkea North.

Her writing betrays a bit of cultural condescension in

the description of the locals, but without hint of malice. Rather, it emanates from a culturally removed scholarly perspective, but one that still clearly romanticizes the place of her work. The core group of figures in the narrative repeats through her travels to Inishkea North, from her resident housekeeper/cook, to the group of workers and the local fishermen sheltering on the island. The Inishkea islands were some of the many of the West of Ireland evacuated by the government prior to Henry's stay. The pictures her journals evoke are of the deterioration of island life that came with the retreat of the regular residents and the lonely wildness of a temporary existence in the largely abandoned island village. The prose ranges from the almost poetic and descriptive visions of landscape, flora, and fauna, to an eye to the details of the mundane, with descriptions of cloth, texture, and color of the humblest of objects.

The journal material, although interesting and compelling, would have been stronger if placed alongside more information on the excavations. Although this material is available elsewhere to scholars, its addition in this context would have enhanced the experience of the personal narrative offered. Marquardt does illuminate the material through her own fieldwork and the addition of Henry's and her own photographs, as well as some original documents.

The book provides an excellent addition to the historiography of the field of medieval Irish art, and should be of interest to scholars of art and architecture as well. This easily readable and quite interesting compilation of materials is well worth the time for scholars with a vested interest in and debt to Henry's pioneering work in the field, but also to those who are intrigued by an outsider's point of view of a rapidly changing and historical moment of the West of Ireland.

#### Note

[1]. Hilary Richardson, preface to *Studies in Early Christian and Medieval Irish Art*, by Francoise Henry (London: The Pindar Press, 1985), 3:n.p.

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