scepticism before taking the information presented as undeniable facts. The book is highly recommended with that caution.

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Simms, Katharine, Medieval Gaelic Sources

Previous volumes in this series included guides to the use of census records, maps, estate records, and photographs. This is the first volume to deal with Irish-language sources and the second to deal specifically with medieval materials. Katharine Simms deals in five competent chapters with the principal types of sources for the medieval period: annals, genealogies, poems, prose tracts, and the final catch-all, “legal and medical material, colophons and marginalia.” The descriptions of each category of material are targeted very clearly to the local historian or genealogist, and include helpful tips on how to extract the most useful information from the materials. They also include very useful summaries of the nature of the materials in both their original manuscript form and their edited and/or translated forms, which would be useful to the more academic historian engaging with these sources for the first time. A clear and well-written introduction sets out what the book aims to achieve, and clarifies that the book’s focus is the period following the Norman invasion of Ireland in 1169. There might thus seem to be limited appeal to an early medieval scholar, but in fact a number of the sources discussed also span the earlier period, and the book would be a useful introduction for the early medievalist familiar with other geographical areas and turning his or her attention to Ireland for the first time. Simms points out that in order to engage with the texts in their original form a fairly advanced knowledge of the Irish language would be needed, as well as Latin: this may well understate the case, and indeed Simms acknowledges that even the fluent speaker of modern Irish might expect to have difficulties with earlier forms of the language. She does, however, give a thorough explanation of the availability of translations, and a very useful analysis of their reliability or otherwise. A brief afterword exhorts the reader to make good use of the available sources, both primary and secondary, and to take due note of the contributions of linguists, textualists, and palaeographers, whose work is essential in assisting the historian to work with the primary sources. An appendix presents the various known sources for a fourteenth-century incident in Connacht and a second appendix extracts a sixteenth-century record of a fourteenth-century contract in Donegal. These are good illustrations of what the book has discussed. A helpful short list of further
reading is followed by a classified index, which while very useful has the drawback that one must correctly identify the classification of a source in order to locate it. Although its focus is the later medieval period, this is a useful little book for the early medievalist. Well-conceived, well-written and well-presented, it should contain something useful to any scholar interested in early medieval Ireland, whether that is a contextual overview of later socio-historical developments, an introduction to the nature of Irish-language sources and their translations, or a pointer to some little gem of hitherto undiscovered material.

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Skórzewska, Joanna A., Constructing a Cult: The Life and Veneration of Guðmundr Arason (1161–1237) in the Icelandic Written Sources

This book constitutes an extremely thorough examination of written sources relating to the life of the twelfth- to thirteenth-century Icelandic bishop, Guðmundr Arason, regarded as a holy man and miracle-worker during his lifetime and after, but who was never officially canonized by the church. Skórzewska concentrates on the five extant prose narratives about Guðmundr, supplemented by historical documents such as annals, charters, and church records; the five skaldic poems about Guðmundr are treated briefly. The undertaking began life as Skórzewska’s PhD thesis, and it sometimes betrays these origins, particularly in the first chapter describing the source material, which is dense and dutifully detailed. This descriptive habit continues throughout the rest of the book, where lots of detail is collated from the narratives about Guðmundr’s activities during his lifetime, as well as posthumous miracles attributed to him. This is doubtless the most comprehensive account available, but at times threatens to overshadow the more probing analyses of the nature and context of the sources from which Skórzewska’s most far-reaching and interesting insights come. After Chapter 1 the book is organised roughly chronologically, covering different periods of Guðmundr’s life, with comparisons to the lives of other medieval Icelandic bishops and hagiographic writing in western Europe. Chapter 2 outlines his childhood and early education, and Chapter 3 continues with Guðmundr’s formative years of adolescence and his entry into a clerical career, beginning with his tonsure at the age of twelve. Skórzewska highlights that while the sources build a positive account of Guðmundr at this point in his life, they also portray “an average young Icelander” (67). Most of the sources describe Guðmundr’s “spiritual awakening” as