Ohthere’s Voyages

A late 9th-century account of voyages along the coasts of Norway and Denmark and its cultural context

Edited by Janet Bately & Anton Englert


At some time in the late 9th century, a Norwegian seafarer by the name of Ohthere [Oht-her-e] told the West Saxon king Alfred of his voyages along the coasts of Norway and Denmark. Ohthere’s report made such an impression at the court of King Alfred that it was recorded and subsequently inserted into the Old English version of the late Roman world history by Orosius, accompanied by Wulfstan’s account of a voyage across the Baltic Sea.

Ohthere’s account is the earliest known description of the North by a Scandinavian and gives a fascinating and highly trustworthy glimpse of the early Viking Age. Since the 16th century, Ohthere’s voyages have been debated by an ever growing number of scholars, such as linguists, historians and archaeologists. In this book, a panel of experts presents the original source in its geographical, cultural, nautical and economic context:

THE SOURCE
Ohthere and Wulfstan in the Old English
Orosius by Janet Bately, with a note by E.G. Stanley
Text and translation edited by Janet Bately
Translation notes by Janet Bately, with two notes by E.G. Stanley

GEOGRAPHY
Early medieval accounts of the North before the Old English Orosius by Ian Wood
Geography, toponymy and political organisation in early Scandinavia by Stefan Brink

AT HOME
Ohthere and his world – a contemporary perspective by Inger Storli, with a note by Else Roesdahl
Borg in Lofoten. A chieftain’s farm in north Norway by Gerard Stams Munch
Who were the Finnas? by Irmeli Valtonen
Who were the Cwenas? by Irmeli Valtonen

AT SEA
Ohthere’s vessel by Arne Emil Christensen
Ohthere’s voyages seen from a nautical angle by Anton Englert
The fifth day. Ohthere’s route through the Schlei fjord by Andres Siegfried Dobat

DESTINATIONS
Ohthere’s destinations: Norway, Denmark and England by Peter Sawyer
The land of the Beormas by Nikolaj A. Makarov
The Sciringes health of Ohthere’s time by Dagfinn Skre
Hedeby in Ohthere’s time by Michael Müller-Wille, with a note by Sven Kalmring

TRADE AND EXCHANGE
Communication and exchange in North-West Europe by Stéphane Lebecq
Economic policy, prosperity and professional traders by Carsten Müller-Boysen

From the Foreword:
“The new series may include topics as varied as analyses of coastal sites from the Mesolithic period, fisheries from the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, and the development of ports and harbours in pre-modern times, as well as historical accounts of individual voyages.”
Jan Bill & Tina Damgård-Sørensen
The Viking Ship Museum