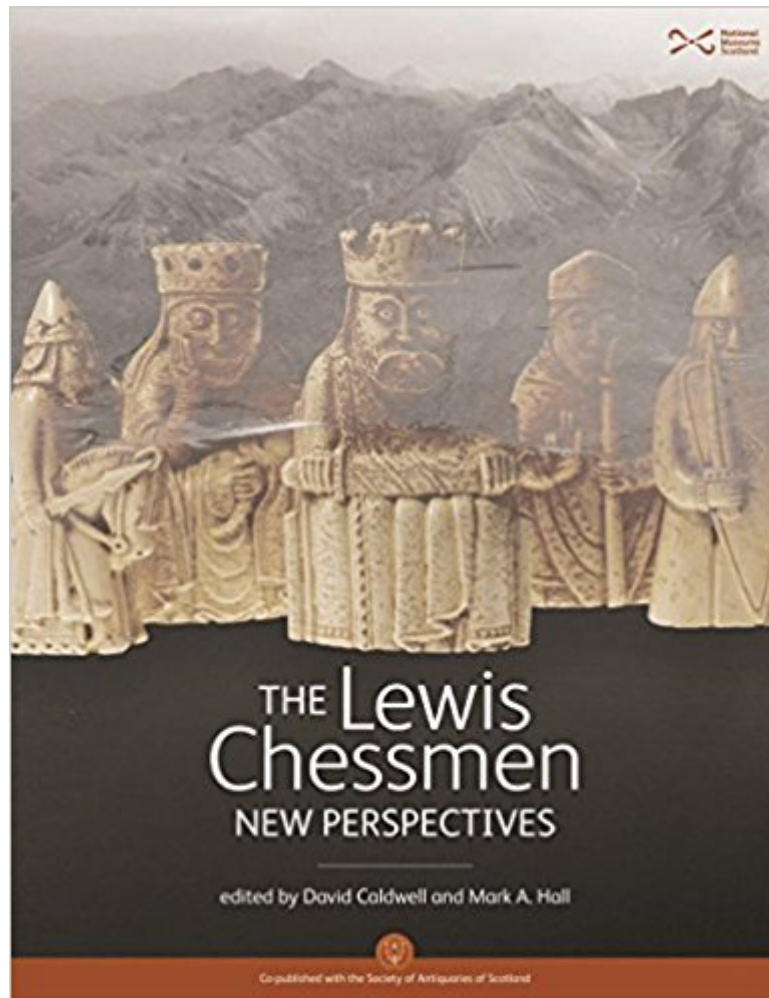




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The Lewis Chessmen: New Perspectives



Synopsis

The 93 Lewis chessmen, bought by the British Museum and by what is now the National Museum of Scotland in the mid nineteenth century, were made in twelfth-century Scandinavia, from ivory and whales' teeth. They continue to fascinate academics from various disciplines. In 2014 six of the British Museum's collection will be moved and displayed in a purpose-built museum in Stornoway, Isle of Lewis, Scotland, near where they were discovered almost two hundred years ago. As David Caldwell says: 'The beauty of the Lewis chessmen and their significance in the development of the game of chess are factors which have overshadowed other matters relating to their origin and provenance.' So the chapters in this scholarly book look, for example, at the landscape of Scotland's western seaboard, at medieval politics and kingship and at the ivory trade in the north Atlantic as the time the chessmen were made.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

'... overall a valuable contribution to the study of this extraordinary hoard of medieval gaming pieces and demonstrates how wide-ranging the questions are that such a find raises and how varied the methodologies must be in order to tackle these.' *The Society for Medieval Archaeology*; '... a very well-edited presentation of the Chessmen and their material, artistic and historical context.' *Medieval Histories*; 'This is an impressively comprehensive and often surprising insight into the significance of these iconic artefacts.' *Current Archaeology*

David Caldwell was formerly keeper of Scotland in Europe for National Museums Scotland. He was

the lead author in NMS Enterprises The Lewis Chessmen: Unmasked, published in 2010 and reprinted five times.

This is a fascinating look at the context of the Lewis Chessmen. A previous reviewer noted that it is academically inclined, which I would agree. I learned a great deal about the history of the Hebrides, including the fact that there was a Kingdom of the Isles for a couple of centuries. For those who are so inclined this is a seven course meal.

Scholarly treatise but a very good book.

To me, this hardcover book is an academic treatise not designed for the general public. It really is a collection of analytical pieces written by scholars, many of whom come from Scandinavia, Iceland, Great Britain, and other northern climes. The style of writing is rather difficult to deal with, to say the least. Some passages must have a "fog index" of 100, or more. Add to that the unending scholarly footnotes and other references and the whole thing is nearly unreadable. Yes, the section on Iceland as being a likely origin of the Lewis Chessmen is intriguing and there are some good illustrations, maps, and photos in the 326 pages. But the narratives should have been edited into more readable form. My advice to those generally interested in the Lewis Chessmen would be to buy the small monographs that are available on the subject. These have been put out by the National Museum of Scotland and by the British Museum Press and range in length from 64-80 pages.

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