Much has been written about Viking voyages, raids, exploration and settlement in the North Atlantic, the Baltic and the lands of northern and western Europe during the Viking Age. The same applies to the activities of Scandinavian Vikings – the so-called Varangians (mostly Swedish) – in Russia, on the Russian rivers, in the Black Sea and the lands of the Byzantine empire. Students of Viking history have long been familiar with the most important facts of this history although ”new” knowledge is still being brought to light, offering new perspectives and interpretations. This is not least due to recent archaeological research in the area.

Voyages to the south – the Iberian peninsula and the Mediterranean – have on the other hand remained something of a sideline in Viking Age studies. We can only claim to know the very broad outlines and our limited knowledge is often based on narratives of North-European writers, some in Latin, others in the vernaculars. These writings are, however, often unreliable, based on secondary sources and stories that have passed from one generation to another and sometimes written centuries after the events took place.

Ann Christys’ new book, *Vikings in the South*, is a valuable contribution to the history of Viking voyages to Iberia and the Mediterranean. It enhances our knowledge and is likely to arouse new interest in the subject. Christys has studied Latin and Arabic historiography of medieval Iberia and is consequently familiar with the primary sources giving evidence of Viking voyages, raids and other activities in the peninsula.

Apparently Viking voyages to the lands south of the Bay of Biscay began in earnest during the 840s and lasted for the next two centuries. Vikings raided in Galicia and al-Andalus as well as Garonne and Toulouse in the year 844 and in 859-861 a Viking expedition to Iberia and into the Mediterranean took place. Then the northerners seem to have reached the west coast of Italy and some sources, not all of them very reliable, indicate that they even sailed on to Constantinople. During the latter half of the ninth century Vikings were frequently seen off the coasts of the Iberian peninsula. By then their raids were, however, on a smaller scale and less fierce than during the 840s and we can indeed not be sure that they were all made by Scandinavian Vikings. Many narratives, Latin as well as Arabic ones, are inaccurate and late, the evidence is often tenuous and some writers seem prone to apply the word ”Viking” to marauders who had nothing to do with Scandinavia, Saracens, Muslim

pirates, etc.

During the tenth century the Viking voyages to the south became few and far between and during the eleventh century they all but stopped although some later episodes are recorded.

There can be no doubt that many places on the Iberian peninsula and in the Maghreb were harassed by the Viking scourge by the mid-ninth century. The Vikings inspired fear and in many places defensive measures were taken. As Christys states these areas were however only slightly brushed compared with elsewhere in western Europe.

Ann Christys' book on the Viking voyages to Iberia and the Mediterranean is a most important to research of Viking history. Its most important contribution is in my opinion the author´s discussion of the historiography. Christys has a profound knowledge of both Arabic and Latin sources on the Viking voyages to the south and has studied these in the original language. She discusses every work of any importance, evaluates them critically and shows that only few are indeed reliable; many are pure myths or dramatized stories written long after the events took place and can hardly be considered serious, let alone reliable, historical sources. To some extent she also makes use of medieval Icelandic and other nordic sources but only in English translation.

Besides written medieval sources Christys has studied the relevant place names and toponomy and makes good use of this. She is also familiar with archaeological research and discusses some buildings and other constructions from the period and their importance for the history of the Viking voyages to Iberia and the Mediterranean.

The conclusion is that this book is invaluable for every student and researcher of Viking Age history. It brings the field of study on a new footing and into a new light.