

REVIEWS:

G.V.C. Young: *From the Vikings to the Reformation: A chronicle of the Faroe Islands up to 1538*. Shearwater Press, 1979, 184 pp.

This book is literally a chronicle i.e. a continuous register of events in order of time. There are 17 chapters, arranged chronologically, with an average length of 5 pages of text plus one page of footnotes. The main text is followed by 12 Appendices and 12 Documents that take another 50 pages.

The first half of the main text is essentially a summary of the *Faroese Saga* while the second half deals with religion, law and culture. The Appendices contain lists of Scandinavian kings and of the popes before the Reformation, as well as translations of the *Sheep letter* and various legal documents.

The book, then, is a series of chronological notes on the Faroes and is basically a reference book rather than a narrative history. The author is a lawyer and his book reads like a brief – a set of well-tested instances that could be employed to contest a point of law.

Unfortunately the book is not well served by the frontispiece map (drawn by Miss Clewer) where one fifth of the villages given are misplaced, some misspelled, and the whole outline badly drawn.

The second chapter does not begin convincingly when it states (p.5):

“The majority of Faroese settlers came from the area around Bergen in Western Norway, which is apparent from the surnames (*sic*) ..” –

These ‘surnames’, which follow that statement are the names of the prevailing winds: SE, SW, NW & NE. These winds are given in Faroese, two of which are misspelled! This is strange evidence indeed!

In chapter 9 on religion we learn (p. 41):

“The old gods are still memorized (*sic*) in the Faroes. On Suderoy, Wednesday is called “*ónsdagur*” after Odin. Words which begin “*hós*” or “*tórs*” are connected with Thor. Here again a day of the week, Thursday is called “*hósdagur*” in most of the islands and “*torsdagur*” on Suderoy.”

This seems a curious statement for it means that we English must also be memorizing the old gods! For comparison, the days of the week in Faroese are actually: Sunday – *sunnudagur*, Monday – *mánadagur*, Tuesday – *týsdagur*, Wednesday – *mikudagur* (N.B.), Thursday – *hósdagur*, Friday – *fríggjudagur*, Saturday – *leygardagur*. So apart from Saturday there is little to choose between us!

Apart from some blemishes like this, readers may find the book a convenient source of well-known facts (mostly in Danish) that are assembled together in English, for the first time. Each short chapter is fully referenced.

Having gone to all this trouble of giving references and indexing people and places it is a pity that no full bibliography is given. The abbreviations to the reference sources, or logograms, given at the beginning of the book are of little help to readers who might wish to consult the sources themselves. Any new edition should contain a fully referenced bibliography.

Anthony Jackson

G.V.C. Young: *The history of the Isle of Man under the Norse or Now through a glass darkly*. Manx-Svenska Publishing Co., 1981, 259 pp.

This history covers the period 800–1266 and is arranged chronologically in ten chapters together with 21 Appendices that mainly comprise genealogical tables.

The author is a lawyer and also happens to be the publisher of this work. Until recently, Mr Young was the Lego-Chronologer for the Manx Government and so is in a privileged position to assess the records of Man. However, the subtitle reflects the fact that we can only catch glimpses of the effect of Norse rule since not all is clear and the records are patchy, to say the least.

Young confesses to having adopted a legal approach to the evidence that mainly consists of annals and sagas. Given his profession there is nothing surprising in his stance, neither is there anything wrong in so doing. Indeed it is commendable to base one's theories on documentary sources.

Young's main thesis is that the term “*Sudreyer*” or “*Sudreys*” (in English) means “the Hebrides *and the Isle of Man*”. This hypothesis is quite well sustained and gives us an extended vision of these Norse provinces.

The ten chapters comprise 180 headed paragraphs in as many pages and it would not be too unkind to say that they correspond to 180 index cards! This suspicion is heightened by the frequent use of “To revert to ...” something previously mentioned – in an attempt to link up the cards. In other words, this account of the history of Man consists of discrete packets of information arranged, more or less chronologically, afterwards. This criticism draws attention to the fact that the book is not welded into a whole but simply consists of a series of separate points only loosely linked together.

It is vitally important with such an exposition that the dates are *absolutely* CORRECT. Thus misprints such as the death of Earl Thorfinn which is given as happening in 1045 (p.51) goes ill with the statement *on the same page* that Thorfinn went to Norway in 1050! More careful proof-reading is necessary.