

Vicki Hild

Henry Sinclair Casebook

Kirkwall: Orkney Heritage Society, 2019.

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VICKI HILD'S *Henry Sinclair Casebook* was published posthumously in 2019 by her husband, Carl Hild, following her death in July 2017. The work takes an unusual approach, forming case studies to assess the validity of 'facts' regarding Henry Sinclair, earl of Orkney. These case studies are divided into fourteen short chapters, which engage with both primary and secondary source materials relating to the question posed. There are some issues that arise in the text, such as the mistranslation of the earl's seal legend as 'Henry Sinclair Committed Works,' which reads, in Latin, 'Henrici de sancto claro comitis orkadie' the correct translation of which is '[The seal] of Henry Sinclair, earl of Orkney'(page 101). It is the opinion of this reviewer that, as a whole, the work is complemented greatly by both the Foreword by Dr Barbara E Crawford (5-6) and the Preface by Dr Ian Peter Grohse (7-9).

The question arises: is this work a significant contribution to scholarly knowledge? The answer: perhaps not. Hild indicates as much, stating in the introduction, 'At the end of my research investigation, I found that my conclusion regarding Earl Henry was a reiteration of Dr Barbara Crawford's 1983 statement that, Earl Henry certainly appears to have been a remarkable man.'" (11) A statement such as this raises an issue for this reviewer, as a professional historian, when considering the aims of scholarly research and historical publication.

However, the work does raise questions that are significant to the discipline in terms of thinking about how we, as historians, interact with, and inform, public knowledge. We might consider the fact that Hild identifies 'gaps' in scholarly consensus between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as a larger problem for Scottish history. Some of these gaps arise from the gulf between eighteenth- and nineteenth-century historical practice and postmodern research methods, which are obvious to those trained in the discipline, but perhaps less obvious to interested members of the general

public. And this is, perhaps, Hild's contribution with this posthumously, self-published work. She raises an issue of the accessibility of academic historical writing beyond the 'ivory tower' and the aspects of the historical discipline that would benefit from more demystification when it comes to knowledge exchange. Indeed, Hild strives to debunk several problematic myths regarding Earl Henry, including his 'discovery' of North America, which was claimed in the 1980s due to a misreading of source material. Problematic myths and mis-readings of medieval sources continue to be contested presently, particularly in the field of crusade history. Hild's work suggests there is a place for amateur historians to contribute to the process of challenging problematic and potentially racist appropriations of the past, which reach beyond the university lecture hall. For this reviewer, the opinions of Grohse (8) are key to reading Hild's work. While this casebook is not sufficient in isolation, it may prove useful to future generations of historians, when read in conjunction with and in supplement to other, current historiography.

*Dr Rachel Meredith Davis
University of the Highlands and Islands*