The Faroe Islands visited by the French expedition “La Recherche” in 1839. A presentation and discussion of the Faroese chapter of Xavier Marmier’s official account.

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Franska rannsóknarferðin La Recherche á vitjan í Føroyum í 1839. Ein lýsing og viðgerð av partinum um Føroyar í almennu frágreiðingini hjá Xavier Marmier.

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Úrtak

Franska rannsóknarferðin *La Recherche* var millum fyrstu stóru rannsóknarferðirnar í Norðuratlantshavi í fyrru helvt av 19.øld. Við nøkrum undantøkum í Norðurlondum hevur ferðin ikki vakt so stóran ans millum granskarar, sum hon átti, kanska tí tað mesta av tilfarinum frá ferðini ikki er til á enskum. Greinin er ein viðgerð av kapitlinum um Føroyar í frásøgnini hjá Xavier Marmier (1809-1892), sum var almennur skrivari á ferðini. Kapittulin er prentaður fyri fyrstu ferð í enskari týðing í hesum Fróðskaparriti. Náttúruvísindamaðurin Paul Gaimard (1793-1858) stóð fyri ferðini, og umframt Xavier vóru vísindafólk og tveir listamálarar við. Árini eftir komu fleiri útgávur við frásagnum og úrslitum frá luttakarunum á ferðini. Kapittulin um Føroyar er úr almennu frágreiðingini *Voyages de la commission scientifique du Nord, en Scandinavie, en Laponie, au Spitzberg et aux Feröe, pendant les années 1838, 1839 et 1840, sur la corvette La Recherche* [1842]. Í greinini verður víst á, at hóast steðgurin hjá Xavier í Føroyum var stuttur, ger hann rættiliga nógv burtur úr at lýsa oyggjarnar, týðiliga ávirkaður av romantiskum rákum, serliga hugmyndum um tað kalda, næstan manntóma norð og hugsanini um tað sublima, sum eyðkendi bæði skaldskap og ferðafrásagnir í fyrru helvt av 19. øld. Endamálið við ferðini var kortini ikki einans at lýsa upplivingar, men at skriva eina almenna frágreiðing við nýtiligum upplýsingum um t.d. landafrøði, búskap, handil og siðir. Sum flestu ferðafrásagnarhøvundar í síni samtíð tekur Marmier í hesum samanhangi á seg leiklutin sum tann, ið leggur til merkis ein tørv á broytingum og menning, t.e. umboðar framburð, hevur størri útsýni og kennir heimin betur

enn fólkini í landinum, hann vitjar, meðan hann um somu tíð eisini veit meir enn lesarin og ikki gloymir, at endamálið við ferðini er at savna inn upplýsingar um ein ókendan part av heiminum.

Abstract

The French expedition La Recherche conducted by naval surgeon and naturalist Paul Gaimard (1793-1858) was one of the first major international and interdisciplinary scientific endeavours to explore the European North in the first half of the nineteenth century. Inaccessibility in English may be one of the principal reasons why La Recherche is far from receiving the critical attention it deserves. Xavier Marmier (1808-1892) was the expedition's official historian and chronicler. The Faroese chapter from his official account in Voyages de la commission scientifique du Nord, en Scandinavie, en Laponie, au Spitzberg et aux Feröe, pendant les années 1838, 1839 et 1840, sur la corvette La Recherche [1842] is printed for the first time in English translation in this issue of Fróðskaparrit. Considering Marmier's short stay, he writes quite extensively about the Faroes. His descriptions are marked by the Romantic longing for the sublime as well as images of the North as a cold and sparsely populated place. Marmier's purpose however, did not consist solely of sharing his impressions, but to provide an official account of the voyage including the principal points of interest observed, concerning e.g. geography, economy, trade and popular culture. Marmier is in this context the typical travel writer at the time, representing modernity and progress, noticing lack of developments, suggesting improvements, having better insight and knowing the world better than the people he is visiting, while at the same time not forgetting the actual purpose of his travel, which is to gather information and introduce the reader to an unknown far away region in the world.

Keywords: Travel writing, Faroe Islands, the Arctic, Xavier Marmier, La Recherche, explorations to the North, the sublime, Romanticism

The French expedition *La Recherche* conducted by naval surgeon and naturalist Paul Gaimard (1793-1858) to Greenland and Iceland (1835 & 1836), Lapland and Spitzbergen (1838 & 1839-40), as well as the Faroe Islands (1839), was one of the first major international and interdisciplinary scientific endeavours to explore the European North in the first half of the nineteenth century. The expedition led to dozens of scholarly publications and at least two popular travelogues written by Xavier Marmier (1808-1892), the expedition's official historian and chronicler : *Lettres sur l'Islande* (1837) and *Lettres sur le Nord : Danemark, Suède, Norvège, Laponie et Spitzberg*, 2 vols. (1840). Though Marmier was a well-known writer in France during his day, as his biographer Wendy S. Mercer has notably pointed out,[1] he no longer receives much critical

[1] See the jacket of her biography *The Life and Travels of Xavier Marmier (1808-1892). Bringing World Literature to France*. Oxford: Oxford University Press (published for the British Academy), 2007.

attention, let alone the expedition, at the exception of Fenno-Scandia and Iceland.[2] In a Faroese context, the expedition is mentioned in the history about Tórshavn, *Havnar Søga,* vol. 3 (Jespersen & Nolsøe 2009: 15-18), together with a short excerpt from Marmier's account in Faroese translation, and Kim Simonsen mentions the expedition in his dissertation on travel writings and the formation of a national self-image in the Faroes (Simonsen 2012: 150-52). A comprehensive summary of a Faroese translation by Suni Lamhauge of Xavier's official account was printed in the popular Faroese magazine *Myndablaðið NÚ* in 1985 (Nú 1985: 1&2). No English translation of Marmier's accounts has been published to date and even if some pages from the first volume of the *Histoire du voyage* (Gaimard 1838) appeared in translation in Scotland in 1838 (Marmier 1838), inaccessibility in English may be one of the principal reasons why *La Recherche* is far from being the household name it deserves to be.

The original mission of the corvette "La Recherche" (hence the expedition's name) sent out to the West Nordic Isles in 1835, 1836 and 1839, consisted in searching for the vessel "La Lilloise" conducted by Lieutenant Jules de Blosseville (born 1802, presumably died 1833) which had disappeared during a voyage to

[2] The most prominent titles are two albums published in Norway and Finland, respectively: Nils M. Knutsen and Per Posti, *La Recherche: En Ekspedisjon Mot Nord/Une Expédition Vers Le Nord*. Tromsø: Angelica Forlag AS, 2002; Tuula Kousa (ed.), *Ranskan viimeisen kuninkaan retkikunta: La Recherche Lapissa* ("The Expedition of the Last King of France: La Recherche in Lapland"). Helsinki: John Nurminen Säätiö, 2014. Jan Borm has contributed a chapter to the latter, published in English under the title "Lapland Under French Eyes: the second La Recherche expedition (1838-1839) narrated by Xavier Marmier", in *Arctic & Antarctic International Journal for Circumpolar Socio-Cultural Issues*, vol. 14, 2020, 47-77. Open access:
https://iacsi.hi.is/issues/2020_volume_14/3_article_vol_14.pdf.
An excellent overview of the expedition's voyages in the years 1838-40 has been provided by Einar-Arne Drivenes in French: "Voyages de la Commission scientifique du Nord, en Scandinavie, en Laponie, au Spitsberg et aux Feroë, pendant les années 1838, 1839 and 1840", article first published in *Inter-Nord*, no. 20, 2002, available at http://transpolair.free.fr/routes_polaires/recherche/htm (last accessed 18.08.2021).
Concerning Iceland, Árni Snævarr has published a study focused on Gaimard entitled *Maðurinn sem Ísland elskaði. Paul Gaimard og Íslandsferðir hans 1835–1836* ("The man that Iceland loved. Paul Gaimard and his trips to Iceland 1835–1836"). Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 2019. Gisèle Jónsson is the author of a book on nineteenth-century French voyages to Iceland in two volumes. S.l.: s.n., 2012. The first volume is dedicated to the *La Recherche* expedition to Iceland: *L'Expédition Gaimard. Les rélations Franco-Islandaises au dix-neuvième siècle, tome 1.* A copy is available at the Bibliothèque nordique in Paris. See also Roland Le Huenen's article "Les deux voyages de la corvette « La Recherche » en Islande et au Groenland de 1835 et 1836", in *Viaggiatori. Circolazioni scambi ed esilio*, Anno 3, Numero 1, settembre 2019, 69-86, and Jan Borm's article "'This island so sad and beautiful' – Iceland seen by the French expedition *La Recherche* in the 1830s – from scientific observation to cultural representation" in J. Borm, J. Kodzik and A. Walter (eds.), *Repreentations of the West Nordic Isles: Greenland – Iceland – Faroe Islands*. Kiel: Wachholtz Verlag, 2022 (forthcoming).

the coast of Eastern Greenland in 1833. Paul Gaimard and naturalist Eugène Robert (1806-1882) explored Iceland during this first voyage. They had been successful in collecting objects and natural specimen, up to the point of convincing the French Minister of the Navy, Admiral Victor Guy Duperré (1775-1846), to equip a second expedition to Iceland in 1836, to be led by Gaimard, accompanied by Robert and several other men including Xavier Marmier and the artist Auguste Mayer (1805-1890). Mayer's illustrations of Icelandic life published in the *Atlas historique* of the expedition were to become famous in Iceland and elsewhere (Mayer 1842). Gaimard and Robert kept diaries during the two voyages, but it was the latter who was asked to write up his journal into a full-length account which was only published in 1850[3], while Marmier's narrative had first appeared in serial form in the prestigious review *La Revue des Deux Mondes* in 1836-7 (Mercer 2007: 62n23), republished in book form as *Lettres sur l'Islande* in 1837 (Marmier 1837).[4] Marmier had been chosen as the expedition's official historian during the second voyage because of his linguistic skills and scholarly expertise, having a command of English, German and Dutch while starting to learn Danish in 1836. He had already made a name for himself with his work on German literature and articles published in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* (Mercer 2007: 57-8). He was to keep his role of historian on the following two voyages to Lapland and Spitzbergen in 1838 and 1839-40.

It was during the 1839 voyage that *La Recherche* also sailed to the Faroe Islands. The aim was to fill in a gap in the expedition's exploration of the West Nordic Isles, as Marmier explains at the beginning of his Faroese chapter:

> "In the year 1839, we were called by the Ministry of the Navy to go on another expedition to the Northern parts. This time, we were to visit the archipelago of the Faroes, which we still had not seen, and to try to approach the ice of the pole as far as possible" (Marmier s.d.: 293)[5]

Gaimard's team included "Mess. Durocher, mining engineer; Delaroche, hydrographer; Ch. Martins, naturalist; Raoul Anglès, in charge of meteorological observations like on the previous voyages; Lauvergne and Giraud, painters" (Martins 1866: 68), and Xavier Marmier who adds: "We were to join M. Biard and M. Bravais in Hammerfest." (Marmier s.d.: 294). First on the list is Joseph Marie Élisabeth Durocher (1817-1860), graduate of the prestigious École

[3] See n. ii. Gaimard's journal has remained unpublished. Excerpts in Icelandic translation have been published by Árni Snævarr in his book (Snævar 2019).

[4] Marmier also contributed the volumes *Histoire de l'Islande*, Paris: Arthus Bertrand, 1840, and *Littérature islandaise*. Paris: Arthus Bertrand, 1843, to the series of publications presenting the expedition's results.

[5] Quoting from Jan Borm's translation of the official account. Marmier had already published an earlier version of this chapter in his account *Lettres sur le Nord. Tome second. Danemark, Suède, Norvège, Laponie et Spitzberg*. Paris: H.-L. Delloye, 1840, 193-248.

polytechnique and École des mines in Paris. On return, in 1841, he defended his doctoral thesis in physics on rocks and minerals in the Faroes.[6] He also contributed to the publications of the expedition. Next on the list is Ferdinand Antoine Jules de la Roche Poncié (1810-1882), a hydrographer and former student of the École Polytechnique also; followed by Charles Frédéric Martins (1806-1889), a Protestant of German origin, physician and botanist.[7] Raoul Emilien Anglès (1813-1876) had already been in charge of meteorological observations during previous voyages. As to the two artists mentioned, only Barthélemy Lauvergne (1805-1871), a naval painter, is credited as the author of the drawings representing the Faroes in the atlas (Mayer, Lauvergne, Girard s.d.).

Marmier was familiar with the world of the sagas and Icelandic history by the time he arrived in Tórshavn. He also documented himself on Faroese history and culture as his reading notes on works by Lucas Jacobsøn Debes (1623-1675), Jørgen Landt (c. 1751–1804) and Carl Julian von Graba (1799-1874) in a journal kept at the Bibliothèque nordique in Paris show. It also contains "Faroese runes" on two pages, "communicated by Mr Schröter, Thorshavn, 1839", as Marmier indicates.[8]

Unlike his account of Iceland where he admittedly spent much more time, Marmier's Faroese chapter is only focused on Tórshavn and its surroundings. Although Marmier refers to settlements around the islands the point furthest away from the capital the expedition seems to have reached was Kirkjubøur, a

[6] See : http://www.annales.org/archives/x/durocher.html (last accessed 05/09/2021).

[7] Martins later published his souvenirs as a naturalist entitled *Du Spitzberg au Sahara: Étapes d'un naturaliste au Spitzberg, en Laponie, en Écosse, en Suisse, en France, en Italie, en Orient, en Égypte et en Algérie.* Paris: J.-B. Baillière et Fils, 1866. His experience in the Faroes is only briefly mentioned, in the context of his studies on the "colonization" of plants in the Shetland and Faroe Islands as well as Iceland: "I had visited the Faroes in 1839; the vegetation on this archipelago had struck me. Although it is lost in the middle of the North Sea, its flora consisted of very common plants that stem from the plains of central Europe, others from the Swiss Alps, some from Scotland and Greenland. By extending my research to the Shetland Isles and Iceland, I also noted that these islands do not have their own vegetation, but that all their plants originally stem from the continent. This is the conclusion that Watson also reached in his studies of the British flora." (*op. cit*., 206-7; tr. J. Borm).

[8] Manuscipt no. 3901, Bibliothèque Saint-Geneviève, Bibliothèque nordique, Paris: Lucas Jacobsøn Debes' book *Færoæ & Færoa reserata: Det er Færøernis oc færøeske Indbyggeris beskrifvelse, udi hvilcken føris til liuset adskillige naturens hemeligheder, oc nogle antiqviteter, som her til dags udi mørcket hafve været indelugt, oc nu her opladis / alle curieuse til velbehagelighed, sammenskrefven oc forklaret aff Lucas Jacobsøn* (Copenhagen, 1673); the English translation of Jørgen Landt's narrative, entitled *A description of the Faroe Islands, containing an account of their situation, climate, and productions; together with the manners, and customs, of the inhabitants, their trade, etc.* London: Printed for Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme 1810; and Carl Julian von Graba's travel diary, *Tagebuch, geführt auf einer Reise nach Färö im Jahre 1828.* Perthes & Besser, Hamburg 1830.

place they visibly enjoyed visiting ("The most beautiful set of dwellings we have seen is Kirkeboe"). Having arrived in the capital on June 28, 1839[9], the expedition was to reach Hammerfest on July 12, having stayed in the Faroes barely for two weeks. The headings at the beginning of the chapter give an idea of the contents. Marmier's first impressions are clearly marked by Romantic longing for the sublime as something both beautiful and frightening:

> "we saw a great mass of square rocks rising out from the middle of the ocean like a fortress: it was one of the isles of the Faroese archipelago […] The grey mist which was dropping down along these mountains like a veil of mourning, the long stripes of stream surrounding their summit and the stormy waves breaking at their foot lent them the darkest and strangest aspect."

Readers familiar with French Romantic travel literature will recognize this trope as one of the key characteristics of *boreal poetics* to borrow a term introduced by Sylvain Briens. According to the latter, Marmier's discourse about the North is driven by a nostalgia for Antiquity and mythical peoples like the Hyperborean, adding; "This discourse expresses and echoes the fascination with exoticism characteristic of French poets like Gérard de Nerval or Baudelaire and especially orientalist motifs stemming from this fascination." (Briens 2020: 24). Marmier uses compelling characteristic imagery, e.g. "like a fortress" and "like a veil of mourning". It may of course not seem obvious that Marmier might be considered to be "orientalising" the Faroes. Even though he compares the love and importance of sheep in the Faroes with the inhabitants of Guiana and the coconut, it is the notion of the North as a region with special qualities that permeates his descriptions. In this sense the idea of *othering* the archipelago by rendering it in terms partly inspired by the *exoticism* characteristic of French Romanticism appears methodologically productive, at least as far as Romantic imagination is concerned, specifically an idea of regions in the North as desolate and mystical places. Throughout the account, Marmier uses the term "the North" as if it was a certain entity, and he compares the Faroe Islands to other regions in the North, e.g. Finland, in order to point out characteristic features of nature, living conditions and culture in the region. Contemplating the view from the hills around town, Marmier turns philosophical:

> "There is a beguilement in those hours of solitude spent on the seaside amidst the uniform and plaintive murmering of the tide, in this vast space across which one's thoughts fly as the eyes jump from wave to wave, which no idiom can convey, nor song express. One emerges from there feeling

[9] Martin indicates June 25 as the date of arrival.

> relieved and stronger. It seems as though the breeze blowing over the waters enlivens the soul while the sight of space enlarges the mind."

Marmier is evidently enjoying these moments though his impression of absolute solitude is of course only relative. The passage exemplifies the Kantian notion of the sublime previously mentioned. Marmier experiences something beautiful and at the same time unlimited and vast. It is a special kind of tranquillity, almost spiritual, leaving him relieved and lifted. He does not refer to the beautiful in a traditional or ordinary classical sense, but explicitly mentions the "vast spaces" that "no idiom can convey". It is as if he tries to comprehend reasonably, what he sees (balancing the disturbing and the beautiful), but he fails to do so and instead lets the "sight of space enlarge the mind" (Ginsborg 2019). The projection of the idea of vast "emptiness" onto Northern and Arctic space is a persistent trope in travel writing up until the present day (Borm 2016).[10]

Time and again, visitors from outside the Arctic and northern destinations are looking for solitude and emptiness, longing for avatars of the sublime. Local observers tend to perceive their own space in significantly different terms. Suffice it to mention mythology and the sagas here, as well as lived space and personal accounts thereof. The former seem to have inspired a reviewer to praise Marmier's endeavour in the Faroes in the following terms:

> "It appears that there are popular songs in the Faroe Islands that have largely kept the naïve spirit of the first centuries. To hear these songs repeated on the beach, in the mountains, or by the children of the very people who had brought them with them or composed them may not be reason enough to leave one's hearth to the selfish or indifferent, but one would concede at least that they may serve as a generous pretext for the call that is so irresistible to travellers. This is why Monsieur Marmier is going to the Faroe Islands. Should he leave others to explore the last of these far-away lands that have made his name famous in return for his having popularized them amongst us?" (Latour 1839: 260-61)[11]

Several, more or less received ideas are striking in this appraisal. The Faroe Islands are presented here as a kind of ultimate faraway place still to be explored, perhaps not *Ultima Thule* since the author does not employ this well-known trope, but a very distant and thus presumably radically different place. A somewhat heroic gesture is lent to Marmier as the voyage to the Faroe Islands is

[10] Cf. Jan Borm's article "Greenland as seen by two contemporary British travellers: Joanna Kavenna and Gavin Francis", *Studies in Travel Writing*, vol. 20, 2016, issue 3: "New Narratives of the Arctic", pp. 262-271.
DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/13645145.2016.1220660.

[11] Antoine de Latour (1808-1881), review of Marmier's *Histoire de la littérature en Danemark et en Suède*, in *La Revue de Paris*, vol. 7, 1839, 260-270 ; here 260-261 (tr. J. Borm).

clearly announced as an adventure "into distant space" while also offering discoveries worthy of those venerable antiquarian minds who were fond of dreaming about ancient songs and manuscripts to be retrieved. Latour's prose seems to be echoing enthusiasm about Ossian's poems supposedly to have been found again and "translated" by James Macpherson (1736-1796) in the 1760s or at least the Antiquarian spirit still very much *en vogue* at the time of the expedition.[12] It also parallels the concrete endeavors and the interest among scholars to visit the islands or/and receive records of oral traditions, songs and ballads to use in research and scholarly work. A few years prior to Marmier's visit, in 1832, the Danish scholar C.C. Rafn published the ancient *Faroese Saga*, compiled from different Icelandic manuscripts and with a Faroese translation by the same Schröter, who communicated the runes to Marmier. Schröter also assisted the Danish scholar H. C. Lyngbye in publishing a volume of Faroese ballads in 1822. In 1845, Marmier himself published a book, *Chants populaires du Nord,* with translations of five Faroese short ballads (Skårup 1997).

Marmier's purpose did not consist solely of sharing his impressions, though, but to provide an official account of the voyage including the principal points of interest observed. Thus, the capital is described at some length even though Marmier seems to have quickly reached the end of his first round of remarks:

> "The name of Thorshavn could already be found in chronicles of the country eight centuries ago and it still indicates its heathen origin. This is where the inhabitants of the Faroes used to meet formerly every year to hold court over their quarrels and to deliberate about their interest. This is where the population embraced Christianity in AD 998 and converted to Protestantism in the late 16th century. Well, what could I add? There are some ten office holders and 650 inhabitants. The town's position is peculiar and very picturesque."

There is more to come in the ensuing pages, Marmier noting, for instance, the library and the hospital where the travellers meet a French patient, as well as Tórshavn as a war place, relating the fate of Magnus Heinason (1545-1589). Marmier considers Faroese history to be similar to that of Iceland. More general comments about life on the Faroe Islands include descriptions of the economy, sheep-herding of course ("The Faroese' real treasure are their sheep"), fishing, but also hunting, especially "dolphin" hunting, Marmier clearly referring to pilot-whale hunts, which in all travel writings about the Faroes, especially since the Romantic period, have been highlighted as a distinctive feature of Faroese culture and included as an almost required part of every travelogue from the islands. According to the records, the only whale hunt in Tórshavn in 1839 took place in August (Nolsøe & Jespersen 2009: 193). Marmier's quite detailed

[12] On the widespread reception of Ossian see Howard Gaskill (ed.), *The Reception of Ossian in Europe*. London: Thoemmes Continuum, 2004.

description of the hunt and killing of whales therefore relies on other sources, presumably the books he read before leaving France. The fact that crimes barely exist in the Faroes is duly admired by the author who is admiring the Faroese for their "amiable, earnest and hospitable" character, because of their isolation and the monotony of their work, as he puts it. No doubt inspired by the theory of the climate commonly applied at the time, Marmier describes the population as phlegmatic, taciturn and melancholic, deducing these character traits from what he calls the "dark surroundings". Still, the population appears to be generally speaking in good health according to Marmier, a point that seems to have been confirmed during his interviews with the island's chief medical officer. Marmier also describes dress, customs and manners, providing some stories of the water spirits to illustrate the fact that old memories are kept.

Apart from Marmier's solitary musings on top of a hill, the two most vehemently striking passages of his chapter are probably the description of visiting a modest lady and her children in their home, as well as his discussion of the trade monopoly. The passages reveal Marmier's understandings of society and political development in areas far from the European centers. Concerning the former, Marmier's account, which appears as a story within a story and with its own distinctive moral, voices his at least emotionally participative stance. His concluding remarks read both as a homage and a coming-to-terms with the humble circumstances he had witnessed:

> "Her words were accompanied by such a joyful look, and the children seemed to confirm her hope by the sheer expression of their physiognomy. Listening to her speaking in such a quietly resigned way, I was rejecting all those elegies written about pretended sadness; and I admire the wisdom of Providence for spreading the fertile germs of hope below the thatch, placing in the hearts of the poor an infinite source of sweet satisfaction."

The reference to Providence may appear somewhat conventional, but Marmier clearly had been moved by the lady keeping her cheerful spirits in the face of adversity. The hardships endured by the population are largely explained by the impact of the trade monopoly. According to Marmier, "this hideous law of monopoly impedes work and paralyses all industry." In his journal kept at the Bibliothèque nordique, one can find a few remarks in relation to an article entitled "Den Feröiske Handel" from February 1838.[13] Marmier admits an advantage, as he perceives it, of the monopoly in that it purveys "the certitude for the inhabitants of the Faroes that they are always provided with what they need." Having observed this, he adds: "but at what price?" – observing in the end:

[13] Probably Bjarni Þorsteinsson's article "Om den færøeske Handels Tilstand i ældre og nyere Tider : samt om denne Handels Frigivelse" in *For Historie og Statistik, især Fædrelandets, vol.1* (1822) published by J. Collin in Copenhagen.

"the evil is in the monopoly."[14] In the official account he elaborates on the theme, making a suggestion for improvement: "People are told that the regulations concerning the monopoly, guarantee to the Faroese a provision of annual goods at a fixed price; but would they not obtain these goods more easily and at a better price if they could benefit from competition?" In his concluding remarks, Marmier takes on the role of mouthpiece to launch an appeal to the King:

> "Talking about their sufferings, these poor people often told me that the King knew nothing about this, that he was just, good and compassionate; that if only he were aware of how deep their distress is at times, he would come to their aid. But those who know and remain silent about the situation take a sad responsibility upon themselves."

Open criticism of the monarch's action is avoided. Instead, an admonition is voiced to those who oppose themselves to social reform. Marmier is in this context the typical visitor and travel writer noticing injustices and lack of developments, suggesting improvements, knowing what is best and having better insight than the people he is visiting while at the same time introducing the reader to an unknown far away region in the world. The Faroese resource persons that he meets, e.g. Schröter mentioned in his notes, are experts in traditions and the past, not authorities on contemporary challenges and possible future developments. In Iceland, the members of the expedition had met several of the principal actors of national revival. Marmier had notably translated two poems by Bjarni Thorarensen (1786-1841), deputy governor of northern and eastern Iceland and one of the first Romantic poets of Iceland whom Gaimard and Robert had met during their own exploration of the island. It is possible that Marmier would have met with similar views about reform in Copenhagen and in the Faroes though there is no evidence to be found in his own writing. Research in the files of the Danish governor on the islands in this period reveal complaints about the Monopoly as well as examples of public demands for better and freer trade (Isholm 2020: 304), but progress was very slow, and Marmier maybe didn't stay long enough to experience this dissatisfaction expressed coherently, although he mentions the suffering due to the Monopoly. In 1840 the governor himself, Chr. Pløyen, published a book written as a travelogue from The Shetland Islands and Scotland, critical of the influences the Monopoly had on the Faroese population (Pløyen 1840). Whatever the case may be, a committee of ten Icelandic officials had been created by royal decree in 1838 (Karlsson 2020: 36). It was going to take more than a decade before the Løgting was re-established in the Faroes and several more years before the Danish royal trade monopoly was abolished in 1856.

[14] Manuscipt no. 3901, Bibliothèque Saint-Geneviève, Bibliothèque nordique, Paris: "Avantages du monopole…. qu'il y a certitude pour les h. des F. d'être toujours pourvu de ce dont ils ont besoin, mais à quel prix ?"; "le mal est dans le monopole" (tr. J. Borm).

As to the atlas, it contains nine illustrations provided by Lauvergne. His imagination seems to have been captured mostly by the Faroese landscape, depicted as picturesque and even grandiose, judging by the reduced size of human figures, as well as a view of Tórshavn covered in snow, the caption in the table of contents specifying that the picture had been drawn on June 30, 1839, just after some snowfall, enhancing French ideas of the North. Occasional snow showers may have occurred in June 1839, but it is highly unlikely that the snow covered hills and streets in Tórshavn. His rendering of the ruin in "Kirkeböe" bears witness to romantic fascination with ruins, the author of the captions – presumably Gaimard - adding the following comment: "This church, which the Reformation stopped from being completed, had been founded by Bishop Hilary who was intending to turn it into the cathedral of the Faroes."[15] There is no evidence of the Reformation being the reason for the uncompleted cathedral, and one might be tempted to read this as the lament of a Roman Catholic for medieval times, quite unlike Marmier's representations of Protestantism and Protestants being able to read and write anywhere he went in Scandinavia and the West Nordic Isles, no matter how modest their situation may have been. Be that as it may, Lauvergne's illustrations are a striking image of the fascination that the Faroe Islands have held among travellers from different European nations. The islands served as a welcomed place for imaginations of the North and the past, a good opportunity – however in this case only partly – to reproduce tropes from Romantic art and literature. Marmier's account may be more socially engaged, but it is apparent that both the artist and the writer had been moved by what they saw. Besides the expedition's scientific programme, *La Recherche* also participated in the effort of echoing, if not expressing reformist views. Marmier's conclusion, in any case, is unmistakably lending voice to such pressing concerns.

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Chapter IX

New departure up North. – The Faroes. – Thorshavn. – Administration and resources of the country. – The flocks of sheep. – Hunting. – Dolphin hunting. – Character of the Faroese. – Folk tales. – Ancient habits. – Traditional dance and songs. – The monopoly.

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In the year 1839, we were called by the Ministry of the Navy to go on another expedition to the Northern parts. This time, we were to visit the archipelago of the Faroes, which we still had not seen, and to try to approach the ice of the pole as far as possible.

When this decision was made, I held the chair in Foreign Literature created by Mr de Salvandy at the Faculty of Literature in Rennes. I regretted leaving a noble city which I had learned to like in no time. Colleagues had welcomed me there with indulgent goodness and the audience, thanks to its benevolence which I keep fond memories of, had supported and encouraged my efforts. Showing the order of the Ministry of the Navy, which had accepted to have me join the work of the Northern Commission for the third time, I was hoping to be in a position to expect to be given leave by the university for several months, and to return to my duties which had become dear to me thanks to the kindness that I had been treated with in carrying them out. Mr Villemain refused to grant me leave, but the demon of voyages had the better over any considerations of material advantages. I quit the honourable position that Mr de Salvandy had appointed me to for the sheer pleasure of launching myself again into distant space.

La Recherche, under the command of M. Fabvre, like the year before, was fitted out in the port of Le Havre at noon on June 14. The other officers of the vessel were Mess. de Langle, Genet, Chastelier, Saint-Vulfram, sublieutenants;

Normand and Feray, lieutenants. The members of the Commission, presided over since 1836 with tireless zeal and cordial devotion by Mr Paul Gaimard, were Mess. Durocher, mining engineer; Delaroche, hydrographer; Ch. Martins, naturalist; Raoul Anglès, in charge of meteorological observations like on the previous voyages; Lauvergne and Giraud, painters. We were to join M. Biard and M. Bravais in Hammerfest.

The breeze turned against us at some distance from Le Havre and we had to beat laboriously to leave the Channel. After five days, we still had not rounded the English coast; we were beneath Dover Castle.

The contrary winds were followed by calm wind and rain, the two most tedious atmospheric accidents during a sea voyage. When the sails are deprived of wind, collapse and drop heavily against the masts, when the horizon is covered in mist and constant rainfall wears down the patience of even the most intrepid walker on deck, a ship is a rather singular picture to behold. While the sailors cover their heads with the hood of their pea coat like monks, squatting silently at the bottom of the rails or leaning against the ship's boats, the passengers move about looking for distraction. One listens to accounts of nomad life and tales of shipwreck; another tries to do a sketch which a sudden rolling causes an indelible mark to be printed on; yet another tries to cover the sight of clouds by covering himself in a haze of smoke. There are some who devote themselves brazenly to their studies; but they also soon become impatient, boredom leaving its imprint on their face; they close their book to go and see where the cape lies, to ask at how many knots the ship is moving and to enquire after the helmsman's experience concerning the state of the atmosphere and the likelihood of a change in weather.

On the 25th, the wind finally turned to the south; and on the 28th, at night, we saw a great mass of square rocks rising out from the middle of the ocean like a fortress: it was one of the isles of the Faroese archipelago. To the North, one could perceive several consecutive lines of rocks and mountains, some of them indented and undulated, others sharp-edged, soaring out from the waves in one piece, pointing their snow-covered top high up in the air. Examining their surface, one could see that there were neither trees nor vegetation: they were bare rocks like those in Iceland, sundered here and there by deep bays or separated from each another by the tide. The grey mist which was dropping down along these mountains like a veil of mourning, the long stripes of steam surrounding their summit and the stormy waves breaking at their foot lent them the darkest and strangest aspect. All around, we were trying to make out a church spire or dwellings, but saw none, as there are only poor huts, located far from one another at the bottom of the rocks. They are so narrow and low that one can only notice them once one reaches the place which they have been built on. Early in the morning, we fired a cannon shot to call the pilot; but all that we managed to stir was a colony of sea gulls and some skuas who flew away with a hoarse and plaintive scream. Over on the mountain side, there was not a single movement;

one would have thought a desert land shrouded in mortal silence. An hour later, we repeated our sign and ended up perceiving a small boat in the distance heading towards us with a red handkerchief tied to a pole: it was the pilot's boat. He came on board our vessel, and, to appear more confident, put half a leaf of tobacco in his mouth. As we were going about to avoid the reefs and to enter the strait of Thorshavn, the Faroese man examined all the rigging and gear of *La Recherche* as curious as a child. He said that he had never seen such a beautiful ship. His eyes were fascinated by the copper binnacle and the capstan was a wondrous thing to him. Apart from that, the man had a good and honest face which seemed to bode the honesty of the islanders we were going to see while his dress announced their misery. His Wadmal jacket and trousers had been patched so many times that one could hardly see the original cloth on which a hand that was patient rather than dexterous had made a kind of mosaic with countless pieces of all colours and shapes. His cap was nothing but a rag of Wadmal pleated on the top, his shoe a square of sheepskin folded over the foot and tied with a strap.

Having tacked for several hours, the pilot made us anchor in a rather large bay which was not very safe, facing Thorshavn which is the biggest town of the country, or, rather, the only town, seat of the governor, judge and centre of commerce; in brief, the place fishermen tell their children wonders about, like good-humoured people from the provinces do about Paris. The name of Thorshavn could already be found in chronicles of the country eight centuries ago and it still indicates its heathen origin. This is where the inhabitants of the Faroes used to meet formerly every year to hold court over their quarrels and to deliberate about their interest. This is where the population embraced Christianity in AD 998 and converted to Protestantism in the late 16th century. Well, what could I add? There are some ten office holders and 650 inhabitants. The town's position is peculiar and very picturesque. One has to imagine a semi-circle of craggy, savage mountains at the far end of the bay. This is where a spit of land, or, rather, a promontory of rocks rises out of the water in a straight line, in the centre of the circle, like an arrow in the middle of a bow. Most of the houses have been built on this promontory, in two symmetrical rows, the houses squeezed closely to each other like the stands in the square of Leipzig on major fair days. The lanes that cross this triple mass of dwellings are so narrow that two horses could not walk abreast, so rocky and craggy that in order to get through them safely in some places one has to cling to the rocks with one's hands and feet. In winter, on a day of black ice, descending the rocks can be considered to be quite a hazardous balancing act. Besides, the houses are in a similar state to the lanes. Apart from those belonging to the government which the office holders live in, almost all of the others are but poor huts built in the same way, unlike the ones in Iceland built from lava rock, nor those in Norway with big round logs, simply with some dozes of boards nailed together: it is a kind of dwelling which represents the transition from a nomad tent to a cemented

edifice. They are so frail that one has to tie them to the ground with cables to prevent the wind from blowing them away. The houses only have a ground floor and are invariably divided into two parts by a partition. One first enters into the kitchen which has no floorboards nor windows; daylight can only penetrate by the door or the chimney. All there is in the way of furniture are some earthenware pots, some wooden utensils, a seat made from whalebone and other bones serving as a broom or poker. The second room is lit by two or three windows. This is the common living room of the family. This is where the women comb wool and weave Wadmal. This is where the father, mother and children sleep packed together on some boards covered by bits of straw. This narrow space devoid of air and filled with the smoke of the turf fire exhales a sickening smell that strangers can hardly get used to. But what a pleasant surprise it is to see some physiognomies emerge from this heavy atmosphere whose misery could not change their happy faces. The women are remarkable for the harmony of their traits, the freshness of their complexion and the children of charming grace! All these people of the Faroes are very handsome. During our time here in Thorshavn and on the other coasts we did not meet with a single deformed or crippled being; and we often stopped during our deambulations in town, surprised by the manly and strong stature of a fisherman or the endearing look and smiling face of a young girl.

One evening, I entered into one of the darkest huts we had seen so far. The mother moved towards us, thanking us in a plain and affecting way for having wanted to visit her home. She was a young woman whose gaze and looks had faded due to material concerns, work and perhaps her poor state, though her smile was still so soft that someone passing through would not have guessed about the suffering it was hiding on seeing her. She was carrying a child on her arms whose lips were touching her curly hair from time to time. A little girl who had taken to flight on seeing some strangers come in, was hiding next to her, holding onto a patch of her dress, rolling her big blue eyes in astonishment at us; three other children were standing in front of the window, in the background of the scene. The poor mother told us all about her life, the long hours of waiting in winter, her work in the fields or close to her house. Having thus depicted her hard-working existence in simple and non-emphatic terms instead of complaining and murmering, she praised Providence for having taken care of her and her family. “We are poor people,” she said; “but thanks to the Lord everything is alright in our modest home. When my father died, he left a boat to me as my heritage. My husband is a good fisherman; as to myself, I work for rich people in winter, and I look after a small field in summer for which we have to pay little rent only. Thus, the days go by and at the end of the year it so happens that we still have enough to buy some barley to eat and enough wool to clothe us. The hardest times were those when my children were so young that I had to stop my daily work to take care of them; but now they are growing and soon they can help me.”

Her words were accompanied by such a joyful look, and the children seemed to confirm her hope by the sheer expression of their physiognomy. Listening to her speaking in such a quietly resigned way, I was rejecting all those elegies written about pretended sadness; and I admire the wisdom of Providence for spreading the fertile germs of hope below the thatch, placing in the hearts of the poor an infinite source of sweet satisfaction.

Yet, Thorshavn which consists of several hundred huts is also a war town. At the entry to the port, one can see a fortress built by the ancient hero of the Faroes, Magnus Heinesen [16], to protect his place of origin against the invasions of pirates. People here say that it used to be quite a sizeable bastion defended by several pieces of artillery; but during the war, Fort Thorshavn had its moments of mourning and disaster. The passive resignation with which it submitted to fate did not prevent it from ruin. In 1803, the fishermen of Nordö reported a frigate flying the French flag.[17] Soon after, the frigate appeared in the Bay of Thorshavn to anchor proudly at the bottom of the fortress. The vessel adorned by our flag revealed itself to be an English frigate and it was easy to foretell its purpose since Denmark, allied to France, was not well-considered at all by England at the time. The Governor could hardly hope to defend himself without compromising the whole town: he sent a delegation of twelve parliamentarians aboard the frigate which was retained by the English. He sent twelve more who were also retained. The inhabitants of Thorshavn who were indignant about such perfidious acts wanted to take possession of the canons to engage in combat; but the English would not leave them enough time. They landed in large numbers, took possession of the fortress, nailed down the canons, demolished the bastion in part and returned to their frigate. History has not recorded the names of these men who entered these quiet waters with such daring, disguised by a foreign flag whose glory consisted in making twelve fishermen their prisoners, to invade a

[16] Marmier's note: He was the son of a Norwegian who had settled in the Faroes, and who became a reverend after the Reformation. Magnus dedicated his life to the sea and distinguished himself early thanks to his boldness and courage. He went off intrepidly with an ill-equipped vessel and only a few men to fight the English and German freebooters infesting the coasts of Iceland and the Faroes. Frederic II put him in command of a Danish corvette for services rendered by way of recompense. This was the corvette with which he took hold of an English vessel that had loaded Faroese wares. The English protested, pretending that their goods came from the Shetlands. The sworn enemy of pirates was himself accused of pirating and had to pay with his head for an alleged crime. Magnus was executed in 1589. Soon after his innocence was acknowledged and the judge who had been most zealous in having the sentence proclaimed was condemned to pay a considerable fine. There are several traditional songs in the Faroes about this hero of the people.

[17] Translator's note: Marmier is likely referring to the British naval brig, *Clio*, which under the command of Thomas Folliott Baugh sailed around the islands with a French flag and attacked the fortress of Tórshavn (Skansin) on May 16th 1808, not 1803.

defenceless place in plain daylight and to devastate an abandoned bastion. It appears that the English maritime annals contain more information in this respect than the Faroese do. The heroes of this glorious campaign must be inscribed right next to those who went off one morning during an armistice and without any declaration of war to set fire to the fleet of Copenhagen. Now the fortress of Thorshavn is nothing but an earthen bastion armed by a few canons and defended by a troop of twenty-four chasseurs who are jointly soldiers and sailors. They are in charge of the Governor's or *landfogde's* boat which takes him to the various isles.

Thorshavn's best defence is not this mock fortress but the state of its streets and surroundings. How could human greed be tempted by or an idea of revenge resist in view of these uncultivated hills, these dwellings void of any luxury goods, inhabited by sick families resigned to their fate? There is no tree nor harvest about Thorshavn; only a meagre enclosure of verdure and some barley fields here and there from which the labourers often only harvest stalks of unripe straw and grainless ears. The inhabitants of this town are to be pitied even more than those in the country as the ground on which they live does not allow them to raise cattle; all they have in the way of resources is supplied by their fishing or industry. The women knit a certain number of stockings which they are unfortunately obliged to sell for very little. Thus, while other small towns in the north such as Reykyavik, Tromsö or Hammerfest grow year by year and embellish themselves, Thorshavn remains at complete standstill. Nobody manages to get rich here, no fisherman can build a house to replace his frail hut. The troubled life these poor people have to lead hampers their intellectual development. Almost all of them can read, many can write, but unlike the Norwegian peasants of the Guldbrandsdal, they do not unite their efforts to procure books and journals, and one cannot not find any printed or manuscript sagas in their homes like one does among the Icelandic peasants. There is now a school on each of the Faroese islands, either permanent or ambulant; but anyone hoping to become a churchman or to obtain civil employment has to study in Denmark. Thanks to the zeal of some intelligent men, however, a library was founded in Thorshavn. The government provided the sum of 1.500 francs. Diverse donors have sent books. The churchmen, office holders and the principal inhabitants of the Faroes pay a small contribution every year to increase its holdings. With such feeble means near 5000 volumes were assembled including quite a large number of choice titles.

It is also in this town that the only medical officer in the Faroes is to be found. He receives a regular salary and has to treat all the poor people of the country for free. But it is impossible for a single man to help all of the families spread across so many different shores. The sea is often too heavy and the wind too stormy to go from one island to another; and while the preacher or doctor are waiting for the waters to calm to provide some ultimate help or consolation, the humble child of the Faroes dies as it had lived, in pain and with resignation. To

end, there is also a hospital to be found in Thorshavn: it is only a modest wooden house built by the sea, but it is open both to strangers and people from here. Those who go there are treated with moving pity and never-failing concern. When we arrived in town, there was a sailor from Boulogne there. One night, during a violent storm, he had been caught by a wave on deck, thrown against the big mast and had broken his leg. The captain tried to straighten it with the help of some small boards and a ball of wool. He then took him to Thorshavn and returned to France. The unfortunate man had been there for two months, alone among a foreign people whose language he did not understand, uncapable of rising from bed and only seeing the mist and the tides. The doctor paid him a visit every day and to distract him from his solitude he taught him how to read. His biggest moment of joy since he had been here was to apprehend our arrival. He forced himself to sit upright in his bed to see the top of the masts of our vessel and when we entered his room, he saluted the captain and told us in his plain and artless language about his rough crossing to Iceland and his arrival in the Faroes. The shine in his eyes betrayed the joy of seeing some compatriots again and to speak his language; and when we asked him if he needed some money, he replied: "No, I need nothing; but if there are some sailors from Boulogne on board as I believe there are, I would be grateful if they were given permission to come and see me."

Our first impression on penetrating into the rocky strait of Thorshavn was rather painful. Yet, having spent just a few days in this town we already started regretting to have to leave it soon. Be it in the home of an official or a fisherman, everywhere we had been welcomed with eager cordiality. Wherever we were walking in the streets we saw good and earnest faces, women bowing gracefully as we were approaching, the men always keen to serve as a guide and to take us somewhere by boat. And then, even if the town itself offers only sad views, the mountains bordering the bay and these blueish isles one perceives in the distance are magnificent to behold. I liked walking up the hill that rises above the fortress in the evening, to look at this humble city of the North beneath me with its turf roofs and panelling, these huts looking like boats blown ashore by a gale and the sea divided by a large black rock or mountain here or there in the distance. We already began to experience those beautiful dusky nights of the Northern regions again. The sun would only drop from them horizon very late and once one could not see it anymore, the whole sky was still suffused with soft light. Yet, it was more silent than during the day and all one could hear was the melancholic sound of the waves rolling in on the shore, and then withdrawing again, leaving behind a fringe of foam and a garland of seaweed. There is a beguilement in those hours of solitude spent on the seaside amidst the uniform and plaintive murmering of the tide, in this vast space across which one's thoughts fly as the eyes jump from wave to wave, which no idiom can convey, nor song express. One emerges from there feeling relieved and stronger. It seems

as though the breeze blowing over the waters enlivens the soul while the sight of space enlarges the mind.

But I would merely provide a partial view of the Faroes if I insisted on talking only about Thorshavn and its hills. The archipelago offers the most romantic sites and the most picturesque viewpoints to the astonished eyes of the artist. It consists of twenty-five islands, seventeen of which are inhabited[18]. Moving from one of these isles to another, one may pass beneath a mass of pierced stone like a triumphal arch or by the foot of a rock imposing like a pyramid, sharpened like an arrow. On this side you can see a big dark cavern disclosing itself at the bottom of a mountain which the fisherman enters boldly with his boat in pursuit of seal seeking refuge there; over there a palisade whose slippery walls have never been touched by human feet; still further away, a rock worn down at the bottom by the waves beating against it ceaselessly, protruding its bare and blackened, weather-beaten front out into the sea.

The history of these isles resembles Iceland's. Like Iceland, they were discovered on a stormy day. In the days of Harald Fairhair, a colony of Norwegians settled here. At first, they were subject to a sort of oligarchic government. They then had to submit to Norway, forced into union like the latter, Iceland and Greenland by Denmark in the late 14th century. They are now administrated by a Danish official who holds the title of Governor and divided into six districts or *syssel*. There are 39 churches looked after by seven ministers. It is a harsh task for the ministers to visit these parishes strewn across the ocean at some moments in the year: thus, they cannot preach everywhere on a regular basis. They are often prevented from doing so by hurricanes and may have to stay far away from their home for weeks on end[19]. Often, they can only accomplish their evangelical mission at the risk of their own lives; but the saddest aspect of their office in these isles is not the rough and dangerous journeys they have to go on but their loneliness. They live on some silent shore amongst two or three huts, carrying their memories of other parts and another life with them since they are all Danish men who graduated from the university of Copenhagen.

The archipelago of the Faroes stretches from 61°15' latitude north to 62°21' longitude (*sic).* Its total population does not exceed 7000. The interior of the isles is uninhabited. The peasants build their dwellings exclusively in the woods and on the coast; this is where they have enclosed patches of verdure and sometime

[18] Translator's note: the number of inhabited islands being correct at the time of Marmier's visit, he is obviously including some of the islets in the total number

[19] Marmier's note: In the old days, there used to be various points in the Faroes, Holy water springs, where parents could baptize their children when bad weather stopped them from taking them to the minister. This custom no longer exists. Parents bring their newborn child to the minister, often jeopardizing its life due to the exertions and danger of the journey.

a field to grow barley or potatoes. According to Mr de Born's[20] calculation who has taken measures of this country in all sorts of direction, only one sixtieth of the ground is cultivated. The rest is nothing but a stony crust covered by a thin layer of earth without consistency.

The Faroese' real treasure are their sheep[21]. The sheep are almost to them what the reindeer are to the Laplanders and the seal to the Greenlanders or the coconut tree to the inhabitants of Guiana. They provide them with all they need: food, wool, tallow; and whatever is left after they have woven their clothes, they sell to procure the various things they cannot find in their country. Several Faroese own flocks of five to six hundred sheep, some even more; but what is strange to see is them treating this animal negligently although it is a precious resource. No farmer has thought of building stables for his sheep, or at least a shed to find shelter during the bad season. The miserable animals wander about the mountains in any kind of weather. In winter, they are obliged to seek food beneath the snow like reindeer. If the snow is hard due to the cold they starve to death. Sometimes they are buried under an avalanche; on the coldest days they seek refuge in the caverns. Their entries are often blocked by snow whirlwinds and the sheep have to remain inside for whole weeks without food or drink. Some have been seen gnawing their own wool during a famine. In June, the peasant will look for his flock together with men used to chase with dogs trained to track down stubborn sheep in ravines and caves. Each peasant recognises his own sheep by a particular sign and catches them one by one to shear them, an operation which he executes in barbarous manner. The Faroese do not cut off the wool from the sheep but tear it away by hand, sometimes so violently that the sheep are bleeding; after which they are released back into wild nature. Horses are also left on their own in winter and during summer in the fields. One goes looking for them twice a year: first, to transport manure to the meadows and secondly to bring back turf to the farms. Only the cows have the privilege of feeding at the hayracks and to sleep in a stable thanks to the product of their mammals.

Hunting is still quite an important resource for these islanders. There are no bears here, it is true, nor wolves or fox; but few countries contain such a large quantity of birds. One can find them by the hundreds everywhere on the coast and in the mountains. The Faroese chase them with rare intrepidity; they do not limit themselves to kill those wandering about on the shore or flying above a hill; they climb up the roughest trails to take them from their nest. If the rock on which the bird is breeding appears too high and its surface too polished for the

[20] Translator's note: Christian Ludvig Ulrich von Born (1744-1805), officer in the Danish army and commander of the Tórshavn garrison 1782-1796.

[21] Marmier's note: The name of the island probably stems from this term (*Faraö*, sheep islands), but the origin is not quite clear. Since we are discussing etymology, may I observe in passing that to speak of the Faroe *islands* is a pleonasm since the word *ö* at the end of the name signifies *islands* already.

Faroese to cling to, he will go up to the top via a detour to tie himself to a rope held by two or three of his companions to let himself down to where he had seen the bird settle. Once he has caught hold of his prey, he pulls on a string fastened to the arm of one his companions who then pull him up to the top of the mountain. But sometimes it so happens that the rope gets caught in the fissures of the rock and the imprudent hunter will remain suspended between heaven and earth, neither able to descend nor to move back up. Some years ago, a peasant from Nordö thus spent a whole day and night in the midst of the rocks without any food, half-naked, exposed to the cold and tortured by the rope chafing his side. He was about to bite through the rope with his teeth out of despair and at the risk of killing himself by falling into the abyss when some other peasants arrived to rescue him. They managed to save him from this dreadful situation; and setting foot on soil, he fainted.

Fishing was once the most important and fruitful occupation in these isles. For several years now, it has been far less abundant either because the shoals of fish have changed place, or they have really been shrinking; but there is still dolphin hunting[22] and this could make the Faroese forget all fishing. No sooner has a fisherman seen a pod of dolphins, than he alerts the inhabitants on the coast by raising a particular flag. The latter climb up on the hills and light a fire from grass and soon this telegraphic signal announces the happy news to all of the isles. Whirls of smoke float in the air, fires are lit on one summit after another, their number and position indicating to the inhabitants of the distant coasts where the dolphins are to be found; parents and neighbours are in a hurry to join him; the women prepare food and they launch themselves cheerfully into the tide. It is hard to imagine the busying about in Thorshavn on such a day: the women and children rush around town shouting: *Gryndabud, gryndabud!* (dolphins, dolphins![23]). All doors open in response to the blessing thus voiced, all families are up and about: who will be quickest to reach his boat, who will be first to break the waves with his oar or hiss the sail. The governor and bailiff are also in a hurry to conduct the convoy with their longboat and ten chasseurs in uniform hissing the Danish flag to the top of the mast. When all the fishermen have assembled in the designated spot, they line up for the fight, advancing according to the way the place is located in a tight column or in a large semi-circle. This is the way they surprise the dolphins by pushing them behind the barrier, chasing and hunting them until they drive them to the far end of a bay. This is where the circle tightens around them, the dolphins being caught in between the land and the boats, blocked on one side by the shore on which any

[22] Translator's note: Xavier Marmier speaks of "dolphin fishing" ("la pêche du dauphin"). We do not know which exact species he is referring to though one would assume that he is talking about pilot whales. Long-finned pilot whales were first classified in the early 19th century as "Delphinus melas". The term "pilot whale" can be found in English sources from the mid-19th century.

[23] Translator's note: see previous note for the term "dauphin".

imprudent move will make them strand and on the other by the men armed with stakes. At this particular moment only, a strange superstition takes hold of the fishermen: they do not want to see any women nor preachers on the coast since they believe that women and preachers will make the dolphins flee. Once this obstacle has vanished, a terrible bloodshed is committed. The fishermen hit, cut open and massacre the whales, blood spilling out so that the whole sea is red and those who might still try to escape lose their agile instinct in the bloody waves, falling prey to the sharp iron, like the others do. The victims are often counted by the hundreds. When the slaying is over, the dolphins are pulled out onto the beach. The *sysselmand* will estimate the value of each animal, putting a sign on its back. The governor then distributes shares. To begin with, a part is given as tithes to the king, the church and the preachers, another to the office holders, a third to the poor and a fourth to those who have participated in the hunt, so and so much per boat and per man. The man who has discovered the pod is entitled to choose the largest whale. Those who have been injured or suffered some damage during the expedition receive an extra share; finally, another part goes to those on whose grounds the hunt took place, that means invariably to the king who is the biggest landowner in the country. When the sharing has ended, the animals are skinned and cut up; the skin is used to make straps, the meat and blubber are one of the choicest foods of the Faroese family. Oil is made from the blubber and kept in dried bladders. The entrails have to be taken back out to the open sea by each boat in order not to infect the shores. A ton of oil can be usually obtained from an average-sized dolphin to be sold in Thorshavn for 30 to 40 francs. The meat and the blubber are worth more or less the same. The fisherman carefully gathers all the remains of his catch and returns triumphantly back home with them.

The houses to be found on the coasts are usually larger and more comfortable than those in Thorshavn. Like everywhere in the North, they consist of several small buildings, each one for a particular use. One can see the main building first, next to the enclosure, built half from stone and half from wood. There is a large kitchen, a room in which the women meet to weave Wadmal and another which serves as the larder. The shed is next door and a little further a barn with an earthen oven in which barley is ripened for twenty-four hours at burning temperature, like in northern Finland; as well as two or three huts made from loose boards. In November, the farmer hangs up whole sheep in here just after their throats have been cut. The air enters the hut from all sides, drying the bodies little by little. By May or June, the dry meat is thus hard, compact and juicy. It is eaten without salt and uncooked; at the risk of shocking the palate of gourmets, I have to confess that I have eaten thereof with relish several times. Besides, it is very handy for a fisherman. Whenever he intends to set out on excursion, he goes to the *kiadl* to cut himself a quarter of a sheep and leaves without having to think about the fire in the kitchen or spices. The most beautiful set of dwellings we have seen is Kirkeboe. It is situated between the sea and the

mountains, next to a small isle inhabited by eider-ducks. There used to be a monastery here of which only the remains are to be seen; it was the seat of Catholic bishops. Close to the farmer's house, you can still see the walls of a Gothic church which Bishop Hilary wanted to transform into the Faroese cathedral. But during the Reformation, the work came to a halt and the unfinished church stands there like a monument to the rapid fall of Catholicism in these distant isles.

The Faroese' character is amiable, earnest and hospitable. The isolation in which they live, and the monotony of their work renders them habitually phlegmatic up to the point of being almost indolent. Their dark surroundings make them taciturn and melancholic; but the rough outings they have to go on and the obsession of material care do not extinguish their feelings of pity for others. In the midst of their sufferings, they will remember those of others: a stranger will never knock on their door in vain, nor do poor people implore their commiseration to no avail. Whenever there is a very young and poor orphan in the district, one can be sure that a peasant will be keen to take care of him and to offer him a home.

Murder is unheard of here; disputes are rare and not very dangerous. The annals of the judiciary from the different isles have nothing to record but petty theft. Their customs are unspoilt. Hardly more than one or two natural children are born in the whole country every year. Formerly, whenever a young girl became pregnant, she had to pay a fine; if she then got married, rather than putting a garland of flowers on her head, she had to wear a red cap. Even today, she is not entitled to the two groomsmen who accompany the young immaculate girl to church; she has to go there on her own with the one who has chosen her to be his wife.

Their dress is both simple and graceful. The men wear round jackets in blue or green like those of the Tyrolians, a cardigan with shiny buttons, trousers and flat shoes made from sheepskin. Some have long hair which they tie into a plait falling on their shoulders like young girls do in Bern. The women wear short-sleeved, knitted mantelets which firmly tighten their waists and reach up to the neck, big floating skirts and charming small silk hats flattened at the top which leave the forehead uncovered. In former times, they would wear silver and golden costumes on big occasions, especially on engagement days, like the Icelandic women. Mr Giraud who accompanies us during this voyage has drawn a young girl in this old, solemn costume; to see her silent and motionless on her chair, with her hair tied up and powdered, wearing a damask dress and lace cuffs, one would have thought of a portrait from the times of Louis XV. But all this borrowed luxury pleasing the imagination of simple minds is slowly disappearing and nowadays a young girl believes she cannot look better on a wedding-day than dressed like a lady from Copenhagen who is trying her best to copy the ladies in Paris.

The old customs and manners thus also become obsolete here and there. Nonetheless, on the northern isles, one still finds some old women who pretend that they can retrieve stolen items and heal the sick thanks to some particular spell; and some peasants who are telling the tales of bygone days in perfect earnest by the fireside in the evening. They will talk about the *Huldefolk*, mysterious spirits who lead the same life as human beings do by the side of the mountains and who own great flocks which invisibly pass through the pastures. "I knew a young girl," a peasant from Thorshavn told me, "who was always chased by the Huldefolk. She went to see the minister for some advice, but he could not help her. In the end she married and from this moment on, the Huldefolk stopped chasing her. I also knew a fisherman who had met those inhabitants of the mountains several times. Me, I believe him," he added naively, "even though I have not seen them." There is another sort of spirits called *Vattarre*. They are cute little dwarfs, even smaller than the German ones. They live beneath stones close to the houses and are so sweet and timorous that they cannot stand any murmur. A quarrel will scare them, and blasphemy makes them run away. As long as they live in harmony with the inhabitants of the house close to which they sought refuge, they bring luck to them, guiding them without being seen in their action, helping them with their work; but if the peasant whom they decided to help offends them, they will become his implacable enemy. Some people believe in *Mara*, a hideous monster that sometimes surprises people in their sleep, curling up and crouching on its belly oppressing them. One can only get rid of them by making the sign of the cross, pronouncing the Lord's name. People also say in these isles like anywhere in the North that the dead can come back to earth, either to take their revenge for some offense, or to pay back a debt that torments them in their tomb, or to give those they once loved some token of their affection. Whenever they return to the place where they once lived, they can fulfil the wishes of those they meet. One has to wait for them on Christmas eve on a path of the stations of the cross and to refrain from pronouncing any word or making a gesture on perceiving them: because the dead will disappear and then nothing else is to be expected of them.

In former times, people also held sorcerers in great awe. When a cow gave birth to her fist calf, one used to tear out some hairs between its horns in order to protect it from any spell. Whenever one started to milk her, one would first take some spoons of her milk to be offered as a libation to the spirits of the home.

To end, there is a wealth of stories about the *Nikar* or water spirits, about ocean monsters and people of the sea who attract young girls on shore to carry them away in the waters. Whales have been spotted here that would have made Jonas' whale look small. On one of the northern isles, four peasants went out by boat one day to go fishing. In the evening, they did not return. On the following day and the day after, people went looking for them but could not find them. A month later, a whale was stranded on the coast. It was killed and cut open. The first thing to be seen in its bowels were the four fishermen sitting in their boat

bent over their oars. At Quanesund, peasants who were going fishing heard strange screams every day but could not see anyone. One day they finally perceived a man of the sea whom they got hold of and took back to their home. The day after, they took him with them to go fishing again. When they had passed over a shoal of fish he started laughing. They rowed backwards and made an excellent catch. Every morning they thus set out with their mysterious guide whose laughing and silence they learned to interpret. In the evening they would bring him back to Quanesund, giving him some raw fish to eat, locking him up in the shed and painting a cross on the door. One day, when they had forgotten to paint the cross, the man of the sea escaped never to be seen again. On the shores of Stromö, there is a family which pretends to stem from a seal. Theirs does seem to be a strange genealogy, I admit; but it was explained to me in the most positive fashion by a member of the family, so that I had to take it seriously. One needs to know first of all that there are female seal who throw their skin on the shore to immediately turn into the graceful form of a woman. One day, a fisherman saw such a beautiful one that he immediately fell in love with her. He took her home, carefully locked the seal skin in a chest and married the woman who bore him several children. But one day, when he went out fishing, he forgot the key of the chest. The woman noticed it, took back the seal skin, ran across the shore and dived into the waters.

Memories of the former times and the Faroese national character have also been preserved in the celebration of several feasts, for instance Christmas and wedding ceremonies. Like in the old days, one can see young men choose an orator to stir the heart of the one they want to marry. This would be a fisherman famous for his wit, or a peasant gifted in composing verse. Once the date of the wedding has been determined, invitations are sent out to the whole district. When parents, friends, men, women and children have arrived on foot or horseback, they are crammed into the bridegroom's home in a jumble. Whole sheep and calves are roasted. Spirits flow out of big jars and beer is boiling in the brew kettle. The tables are laid all day and the guests help themselves without further ado since they are expected, like in Finland, to put some *species* on a tray held out to them before they leave. The wedding feast lasts for three days. The most beautiful and ceremonious day is when they receive their nuptial blessing. In the evening, everybody starts to dance. This Faroese dance is a very curious thing to see. The dancers join hands to form a large chain with no distinctions according to rank, age or sex. There are no musical instruments to beat the rhythm, but they know the traditional songs and ancient tunes with which they had been lulled to sleep. One of them will start singing a stanza while the others wait for the chorus which they all sing together. The tune which consists of only a few modulations is low-pitched, melancholic and impressive. Amidst the strongly resonant male voices one can hear the shrill voice of a young girl from time to time; but generally-speaking the rustic accentuation of these singers is well-pitched and on the beat. When the singing starts, the chain is moving,

turning and swinging around slowly at first and with a sort of nonchalant grace like the simple round dances in Brittany whenever the bignou[24] plays a popular tune: *An ini gos*[25]; it then picks up momentum and the movements become livelier and more rapid. The songs chosen for these solemn moments are almost all of them fragments or imitations of Danish *Kämpeviser*, stories about warriors, tales of combat and love like the stanzas of *Jerusalem* sung by the gondoliers in Venice. Step by step the dance resembles a scene on stage. The guests are taken in by the singer's tale and moved by the incidents of the play, shaken up, fascinated, waving their arms, tapping their feet, their gestures expressing in a way all that the poet had intended to convey in his verse and the musician with his tunes; except for the women who remain perfectly impassive in the midst of all this excitement as though they were not allowed to show any emotion. They do not move but let themselves be carried away. Watching them sometimes in the evening with their immobile face and pale figure, following happily yet with a sort of melancholy all the brisk undulations of the chain uncoiling like a snake and rushing forward in a whirl, one has the impression of young girls being drawn in by an irresistible force into the dancing of spirits.

In the midst of this theatrical ball, a man knocks on a beam to tell the bride that it is time to withdraw to her room; but she has to pretend not to hear and continues to dance. Soon another knock can be heard which she does not care about either. Finally, on hearing the third knock, she will leave, and it is proper for her, the good people say, to cry a little before she goes to bed. The husband will soon follow her and when both of them are in their room, the guests say a prayer out loud and sing a psalm.

Once these days of celebration are over, the Faroese peasant returns to his life of toil and deprivation. Either he has to till the ungrateful soil or he has to go fishing on cold winter mornings. All year long he drinks nothing but water and eats but rye bread. He was born in poverty and has to bear its burden all the time. The sea and the land only provide him with a precarious livelihood and his feeble income is still further reduced by the trade monopoly he is subjected to like a law of serfdom. The Faroese trade was free in former times. The inhabitants sailed to Bergen themselves to trade the goods of their country for those they needed. Later, they gave up on these voyages, but the merchants of the Hanseatic towns came each summer to engage in negotiations about the exchange of commodities. One day, Frederick II took command of this trade as though it were his personal belonging, leasing it out to a company from Lubeck and Hamburg. The trade monopoly dates from this period and has been enforced more or less rigorously though it has never ceased. In 1607, the King granted this privilege to merchants from Bergen; Frederick III generously granted it to a man whose services he

[24] Translator's note: a bagpipe.

[25] Translator's note: an hini gozh. – the old woman. See : https://tob.kan.bzh/chant-00847.html (last accessed 26 May 2021).

wanted to reward and whose son then inherited it as though it were a fief. The harshness with which the owners of this monopoly treated the unfortunate isles provoked such piercing and reiterated complaint, that the government came to their aid in the end by recovering the privilege granted to unjust hands, albeit to explore the right itself, not leaving them off any better. In 1790, the King, who was besieged by new requests, promised to liberate commerce as soon as a good occasion would arise, and, strangely enough, such an occasion has not arisen so far. We would certainly consider ourselves blameworthy if we dared to plead, without having thought about it, in favour of emancipation which may certainly have its disadvantages. But we have observed closely the fatal effects of the monopoly on the Faroese population, listening to the complaints of fishermen and peasants; and all that we have seen and heard has stirred feelings of profound pity in our heart. No law of monopoly has ever been dictated anywhere with such a lack of consideration (we believe to be in a position to affirm this without the risk of being contradicted) and enforced with such rigour. As recently as three years ago there was only one store in Thorshavn for the whole of the Faroe Islands. The peasants from the north and the south had to rent a boat and pay the oarsmen to go on a tiresome voyage that was often dangerous to be paid for their poor goods in Thorshavn according to the rate. One day, a boat with twelve men perished during one of those voyages. This accident left a strong imprint and the government decided at last to set up warehouses at different points. There has been one in Transgisrangfiord since 1836, and another in Bordö. A third one is established right now in Vestamanna[26]. But this means only little alleviation of a distressing state of things; the root of evil is still there entirely. According to old regulations, the price of Faroese goods and Danish goods destined to be exchanged had to be determined by the average selling price of each over the past five years. Up until then, there was at least some sort of resemblance to justice in what the law stipulated even if the maximum thus imposed on the peasants, was a harsh necessity; but in 1821, a new regulation introduced an excess charge of 33% to the average price of Danish goods and, in 1834, another lowered the price of Faroese goods by 50% which meant a clear deficit of 83% to those unfortunate men obliged to engage in such transactions. And one should not imagine that it is easy for the Faroese to get out of such cruel trading: they are only allowed to negotiate with government representatives. If they try to sell goods to anyone else, they will be tried in court like criminals. Some years ago, a young woman gave some woollen tissue to a fisherman from Dunkirk in exchange for earrings; she was accused, tried and condemned to pay a fine of sixty francs. A peasant had to pay the same fine for having exchanged fish for a few bottles of spirits with English sailors. This law prohibiting trade with foreigners is so strict that the Faroese are not even allowed to have any relations with the islands closest to them. The Danish vessels only arrive in

[26] Translator's note: Marmier's spelling of place names retained.

Thorshavn in May and go on their last voyage in September. For the rest of the year, the inhabitants of the Faroes are cut off from the whole world and do not receive any news. In winter, they could receive letters and newspapers via the Shetland Isles. They have been asking for permission to do so for several years, but so far to no avail. In truth, on seeing such misery, one is tempted to remark, as an English traveller did who had also visited the Faroes and who had observed, like us, the sad consequences of the monopoly: "It seems to be the policy of the Danish government, to keep the natives of their distant possessions in a state of poverty and perpetual dependence[27]."

This hideous law of monopoly impedes work and paralyses all industry. A large pair of knitted wool stockings is sold for two francs in Thorshavn. How can women enjoy working when the materials they use, and the fruit of their labour have to be ceded for such a price? People are told that the regulations concerning the monopoly, guarantee to the Faroese a provision of annual goods at a fixed price; but would they not obtain these goods more easily and at a better price if they could benefit from competition? People are also told that the taxes were very low in this country and that the monopoly therefore had to be considered as a necessary supplementary charge. If this is so, however, one should raise taxes while allowing not foreigners but Danish merchants to freely enter the various ports of the Faroes as they now may in Iceland. I am certain that the inhabitants will bless the day on which the government will take such a measure.

Talking about their sufferings, these poor people often told me that the King knew nothing about this, that he was just, good and compassionate; that if only he were aware of how deep their distress is at times, he would come to their aid. But those who know and remain silent about the situation take a sad responsibility upon themselves.

[27] Translator's note: George Steuart Mackenzie, *A Short Account of the Faroe Isles. Drawn up for The Edinburgh Encyclopaedia*. Edinburgh: Printed by A. Balfour, 1815, p. 9. N.B.: Marmier's French translation replaces "the natives of their distant possessions" by "les habitants des Féröe" ("the inhabitants of the Faroes").