

# **Turið Sigurðardóttir and Brian Smith, eds. *Jakob Jakobsen in Shetland and the Faroes***

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This fine book is the result of a conference on the work of Jakob Jakobsen (1864–1918) held in May 2006 at the North Atlantic Fisheries College in Port Arthur, Scalloway. Organised by Fróðskaparsetur Føroya and the Shetland Amenity Trust, it was the first major event born out of the Faroe-Shetland cultural agreement, signed in Tórshavn in November 2003 that aims to re-establish the centuries-old cultural links between the two neighbours. The conference ran over two days and had more than seventy participants. Four years later, the papers have been rewritten, turned into articles and published in this impressive volume edited by Turið Sigurðardóttir (Fróðskaparsetur Føroya) and Brian Smith (Shetland Museum and Archives) that makes a welcome and attractive addition to scholarly works about the Faroe Islands and Shetland.

A brief preface by the two editors is followed by fifteen articles and a biblio-

graphy of Jakobsen's publications. About a third of the papers are by Faroese scholars, and the rest divided among scholars working in the UK, Ireland, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Iceland and the US. The authors range from young scholars who provide new contributions and fresh insights into accepted ideas to seasoned practitioners who are writing on areas where they have long been specialists. The approaches and methodologies of several disciplines are on display in this work, as dialectologists, language historians, place-name specialists, folklorists, ethnographers and social historians all ply their trade. The resulting articles are grouped thematically under 'Biography' (one article), 'Language' (five articles), 'Place names' (three articles), 'Folklore and ethnology' (five articles), and 'Society' (one article). In each section, the achievement of Jakobsen is assessed within these disciplines. Not wishing to

quibble, but as the papers are so wide-ranging and interdisciplinary in nature, reflecting the different aspects of Jakobsen's work, an editors' introduction that highlighted some of the common themes, drew parallels between the articles, or even set the work into a scholarly context, would have been most useful.

The first article, a biography of Jakobsen, is by the Faroese author Marianna Debes Dahl and presents her work on the private letters to the man, now housed at *Føroya Landsbókasavn* [the National Library of the Faroe Islands].<sup>1</sup> In all, there are some 53 correspondents from Shetland and elsewhere in Britain and from the Faroe Islands. Dahl's account of these letters is interwoven with details about Jakobsen's work and life (that has a particularly sad end) as well as with her own memories of first hearing about Jakobsen in 1960 from Prof. Christian Matras in Copenhagen. The article paints an interesting picture of the wide array of the contacts that Jakobsen had and of his philological studies and field-work. Dahl's attempt at comprehensiveness, however, means that the correspondence is described rather superficially – no doubt because of space limitations – and it would have been enjoyable to read some quotations from these letters or for fewer letters to have been presented but in greater detail.

A delightful aspect of the article is the very personal tone in which Jakobsen's life is described. We read about his successes and failures and the consequences for him

and his family. One rather extraordinary piece of information (unfortunately – like the rest of the article – without a reference) is that '[w]hen Jakobsen was a small boy, Shetland islanders, mostly fishermen, came into his father's book shop in Tórshavn. So similar were their two languages at that time that Jakobsen senior and the rest of the Faroese staff in the shop were able to communicate with the Shetlanders' (p. 7). It seems most unlikely – if I have understood the claim correctly and judging from the findings presented in the articles on language that follow – that the language of the Shetlanders and the Faroese were mutually intelligible in the second half of the nineteenth century. That they could communicate through some sort of pidgin (cf. the well-documented North Atlantic Basque-Icelandic pidgin),<sup>2</sup> or with plenty of sign-language and goodwill on both sides is surely more likely than the possibility of linguistic affinity. In spite of this, Dahl's introduction to Jakobsen's life and works makes for pleasant and informative reading.

Of the five articles in 'Language', the first two, by Doreen Waugh and Edit

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Marianna Debes Dahl. *Endurskin av Jákupi doktara: frá brøvum, hann skrivaði til síni 1875–1918* (Tórshavn: Fannir, 2002).

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Peter Bakker. 'A Basque Nautical Pidgin: A Missing Link in the History of *fu'*, in *Journal of Pidgin and Creole Languages* 2:1 (1987), 1–30; Nicolaas G. H. Deen. *Glossaria duo vasco-islandica* (Amsterdam: H. J. Paris, 1937); John A. Holm. *Pidgins and Creoles*, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), II Kap., pp. 628–630; José Ignacio Hualde. 'Icelandic Basque Pidgin', in *Journal of Basque Studies in America* 5 (1984), 41–59.

Bugge, both concern extant Norn words in the Shetland dialect of today. Waugh has written a description and critique of Jakobsen's dictionary of the Norn language.<sup>3</sup> Using four headwords ('dron', 'hjoelben', 'pobi' and 'skorek'), she illustrates what Jakobsen's dictionary can offer to the place-name scholar. While demonstrating and praising Jakobsen's monumental achievement – his dictionary contains 10,000 carefully defined words – Waugh also warns us of its shortcomings, including its antiquarian bias, artificial enhancement and the sometimes incomplete nature of the evidence from which he drew his conclusions. And, as Jakobsen himself noted: 'Of the words of Norn origin, more than ten thousand in number, that I succeeded in collecting in Shetland, not more than half can be said to be in general use at the present time' (p. 25). Furthermore, he used place-names as sources for many words, but as Waugh points out (p. 26), the meaning of many of these names would not actually have been known by their users. Finally, Waugh, using the word 'amos' demonstrates that some of Jakobsen's etymologies are possibly incorrect. The article takes a more personal turn towards the end, when she describes a number of words that she uses in her own dialect (Waugh is from Shetland).

The occurrence of Norn words in the speech and memory of Shetland Islanders

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<sup>3</sup> Jakob Jakobsen. *An Etymological Dictionary of the Norn Language in Shetland*, 2 vols (London/Copenhagen: David Nutt/Vilhelm Prior, 1928–32), reprinted Lerwick: The Shetland Folk Society, 1985.

today is the focus of Bugge's article, that uses sociolinguistic quantitative methods to support theories concerning the mechanisms behind why some Islanders know more words than others.<sup>4</sup> Her investigation has thrown up a number of interesting findings; for example, that words relating to the landscape are particularly less well known, while words that are also found in other British dialects appear to be doing well compared to those only found in Shetland. Her findings lend further support to Waugh's comment that 'dialect erosion has been less severe during the twentieth century than some doom-mongers would claim' (p. 26). It would seem that word-death is not as dramatic as feared.

Similarly the following two articles, by Hjalmar P. Petersen and Michael Schulte, also complement each other. They both discuss Jakobsen's suggestions for the orthographical reform of Faroese, but take very different views on the topic.<sup>5</sup> Petersen's starting point is that Faroese orthography, as designed by Venceslaus Ulricus Hammershaimb, is difficult and needs revising. Particular problems apparently centre on 'the ð/g spelling, the distinction

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<sup>4</sup> The article builds on her 2007 Master's thesis from the Department of Scandinavian Studies at the University of Bergen: 'Shetland wirts. En studie av kjennskap til og oppfatninger om det shetlandske dialektordforrådet' (available online at [https://bora.uib.no/bitstream/1956/3263/1/Masterthesis\\_Bugge.pdf](https://bora.uib.no/bitstream/1956/3263/1/Masterthesis_Bugge.pdf)).

<sup>5</sup> For a description of these proposals, see Kaj Larsen. 'Stavingaruppskot Jakobs Jakobsens', in *Varðin* 61 (1994), 7–41.

between *i/y*, *í/ý*, and the distinction between *-ir* and *-ur* in the second and third person singular indicative' (p. 47). Jakobsen made a number of suggestions in 1887 for amending Hammershaimb's etymological orthography,<sup>6</sup> and Petersen considers how these recommendations represent Faroese phonology in general, what problems they pose for the representation of dialects and what advantages they have for children learning to spell. As Petersen notes, Jakobsen strove to represent each sound (phoneme) with one letter (grapheme), and for there to be a plain and simple connection between the two. Petersen feels strongly that the desirability of an orthographical system can be measured in the degree to which it is 'phonetic'. Although a phonetic spelling of Faroese would lead to numerous homonyms (e.g. both *fer* 'goes' and *ferð* 'journey' → *fer*, and *sjeyti* '7th' and *skeyti* 'cloth' → *sjeyte*) as well as divergent forms for related words (e.g. *dagur*, *dag*, *dags*, *degi* 'day' → *dävrur*, *dä*, *dags*, *deje*), Petersen claims that 'Jakobsen is in agreement with modern linguistic thinking here, since it is obviously no problem for the mind to comprehend such alternations in the language' (p. 58; no reference). As there are no real statistics available, Petersen supports the claim that Jakobsen's orthography would even today improve the correctness of

children's spelling by presenting a graph based on intuitive(?) scores provided by Katrin Næs (a schoolteacher who is currently writing a PhD on spelling errors at Fróðskaparsetur Føroya). The article ends with a discussion of the arguments proposed by Jóannes Patursson against Jakobsen's proposed reforms. Clearly, Patursson's arguments verge on the eccentric – he wrote, for example, that 'ð should be reintroduced into the language as *d'*' (p. 64) – and such pronouncements represent some of the worst kind of romantic language engineering imaginable. But they are absolutely not the only arguments that can be made against Jakobsen's orthography as is shown in the following article by Schulte.

Schulte also makes the point that Jakobsen thought he 'would make writing and reading acquisition easier for young Faroese pupils' (p. 68), but takes him to task over the claim, for what is script basically designed for? Quoting the Norwegian linguist Gustav Indrebø, Schulte thinks that orthography should stress 'samanhengslovi, umsynet til tradisjonen, til fastleik i skriftmålet, til tydlegskap [*the law of transparency, the factor of tradition, and steadiness in the written language, as well as distinctiveness*]'. Regularity in spelling does not just have to be at the level of sound, but also at the level of meaning. If spelling is based on morphological and morphophonemic principles then word formation and inflection become more transparent and comprehensible which actually facilitates reading (especially when scanning longer sections of texts). So, for example, the forms *dagur*, *dag*, *dags* and *degi* 'day'

<sup>6</sup> Originally printed in *Dimmalætting*, nos 20–25, and reprinted as 'Nogle ord om færøsk samt et forslag til en ny færøsk retskrivning' in Jakob Jakobsen. *Greinir og ritgerðir*. Ed. by John Davidsen (Tórshavn: H. N. Jacobsens Bóka-handil, 1957), pp. 23–43.

are easier for a reader to interpret than **dä***vur*, **dä**, **dags**, **deje**, as is *sligin* and *slignir* 'slain' rather than **slijin** and **slidnir**. Homophone differentiation is also necessary and many homonyms in many languages are spelt differently to avoid confusion; cf. English *for* ~ *four* ~ *fore*, *no* ~ *know*, *hoarse* ~ *horse*; Italian *ho* 'I have' ~ *o* 'or', *hanno* 'they have' ~ *anno* 'year'; Polish *morze* 'sea' ~ *może* 'perhaps', *chodź* 'go' ~ *choć* 'although'. But, for example, Jakobsen would rather have us spell both *veður* and *vegur* as they are pronounced, i.e. **vevur**. The advantage of stable, traditional word images cannot be overestimated, although, of course, Faroese had no autochthonous writing tradition for either Hammershaimb or Jakobsen to build on. Ultimately, writing systems are attempts at representing different 'competing' aspects of language (phonetic, phonemic, lexical/morphological, morphophonemic) and this compromise will naturally lead to discrepancies and irregularities. But this is preferable to just concentrating on one of these aspects of language to achieve a 'regular' system. Indeed, as Schulte points out, Jakobsen himself seemed to understand this and subsequently made a series of adjustments from 1893 and 1895 in the direction of Hammershaimb's orthographic principles (p. 84). If Faroese pupils are having difficulty acquiring good skills in spelling, Schulte – and I must admit that his general line of reasoning about Faroese orthography is in agreement with this reviewer's – feels that the future for the language should be in didactics and pedagogy, not in linguistic attempts at reforming orthography; after all, English,

Israeli and Chinese pupils manage to master their non-phonemic scripts.

The final article in the section on language by Remco Knooihuizen concerns the language shift from Norn to Scots. Few scholars are better equipped to write on this subject,<sup>7</sup> and Knooihuizen provides a comprehensive, if necessarily brief, account of the death of Norn that lays to rest a number of myths about the survival of Norn in Shetland as well as highlighting areas still in need of research. After providing a brief history of Norn, he dates its last speakers to the generation born c. 1700. Subsequently, he discusses each of the reasons for the death of Norn that have been proposed by Michael P. Barnes (1984).<sup>8</sup> Of these, Knooihuizen takes particular issue with the claim that Scots was spread through formal education. The Scottish Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge established its first school in 1713, which is after the critical period for the language shift, and moreover SSPCK charity schools in Shetland were 'ambulatory' or 'itinerary' (p. 93). In other words, the amount of education received was rather limited, and it was simply too little and came too late to have played a

<sup>7</sup> Remco Knooihuizen. 'Minority Languages between Reformation and Revolution: Approaches to Historical Sociolinguistics on the Plurilingual Margins of Early Modern Europe'. Unpublished PhD thesis. University of Edinburgh, March 2009.

<sup>8</sup> Michael P. Barnes. 'Orkney and Shetland Norn', in Peter Trudgill, ed. *Language in the British Isles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 352–66, on p. 355.

major role in the demise of Norn. The most likely causes of language death, according to the author, are that Shetland's links with Scandinavia were severed at the same time as the influence of Scots was growing both through immigration and its use in high prestige domains (administration, law, and church). It became necessary to learn Scots just to get by. However, as Knooihuizen points out, this does not really explain why Shetlanders adopted Scots as their own language and for use in private conversation. There are many other bi- and multi-lingual communities where one language has not taken over. More research is needed on language shift and language death in general, but also on marriage patterns and social networks during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

In a final excursus, Knooihuizen compares the language situations of Norn (in the face of Scots) and Faroese (in the face of Danish). Although they share many similarities, there are two important differences. Firstly, the trade monopoly was centred on Tórshavn (not spread throughout the islands) and secondly Danes immigrated to the Faroes in very small numbers. Whereas Shetlanders saw the language situation around change dramatically, Faroese contact with Danish remained limited to visits by the vicar or merchants in the capital.

The third section – 'Place names' – comprises three articles that either describe the contributors' own work that builds on Jakobsen's legacy or that discuss his theories and methods. In her contribution, Eileen Brooke-Freeman describes how the Shetland Amenity Trust's 'Shetland Place

Names Project' builds on the work of Jakobsen in the 1890s and of John Stewart in the 1950s. The project aims to record all available information about Shetland's place names in a database that is linked to digital maps. The recording method, the database and the geographic information system are described thoroughly, as are the challenges faced by the project, *viz.* the sheer volume of material, the lack of names plotted on maps, and the rather urgent time span – key and potential informants are becoming incapacitated or dying before the project team can verify information. The project sounds most worthwhile indeed, and the database an invaluable tool for onomasticians, linguists and historians alike. But where can we find this database? On p. 109, Brooke-Freeman explains, 'Not only are we are [*sic*] charged with the important task of locating Shetland's place names, but the use of current technology dictates that our goal has to be to make the information available to all interested parties worldwide, be it the local resident, the school child, the local historian, the official who has to produce maps or road signs, the archaeologist or the linguist.' However, I have been unable to find the database online. There are a couple of illustrated examples from the database in the article, but no web address, and one is left wondering whether this wealth of information is (or will be) available open access and online, or as a free or purchasable CD-ROM.

In her contribution, Gillian Fellows-Jensen discusses the Norse word *gata* in its various forms in Shetland. She begins by describing the spread and distribution

of street names in *gata* during the Middle Ages before providing various meanings of the word; for example, Faroese *gøta* is explained as meaning ‘a trodden footpath between villages’ (p. 112). Attention is subsequently turned to place names in Shetland in which the element *gata* survives today, or is found in older Ordnance survey maps or in the written records of Jakobsen and Stewart. Some of the place names contain *gata* in a Norse form (e.g. Gott in Tingwall and Cunningsburgh, and Goat and Hestingott in Dunrossness), while others have an Anglicised or Scots form (e.g. Gates in Sandsting, Gett in Northmaven, and De Get-rigs in Huster). Fellows-Jensen provides etymologies for these place names and shows that *gata* had a variety of meanings (*viz.* ‘road’, ‘path’, and ‘strip of land’) in Shetland, but warns that many names in *-gate* are new Scots formations rather than Scotticised versions of Norn formations (p. 120). Thus, she concludes that many of these *gate* place-names may have been coined long after islanders stopped speaking or understanding Norn, an important caveat for analyzing the origins of settlers, their linguistic background and their settlement patterns.

Kristin Magnussen’s study of Jakobsen and his work on Faroese place names is both highly readable and well researched. After taking over from Hammershaimb’s work on recording place names, Jakobsen ‘managed to inspire youthful society in Velbastaður and Kirkjubøur, Sólarmagn, to start a new project to record place names in 1914, and Sólarmagn’s protocol records that Jakobsen gave a lecture to

the society’ (p. 122–23). Again the reader is struck by Jakobsen’s *áræði*, drive, charisma and industriousness. Magnussen describes the challenges faced by Jakobsen in his work, not least the inadequate records and registers. His three scholarly articles on place names ‘Strejflys over færøske stednavne’, ‘Keltisk indflydelse paa Færøerne’ and ‘Staðanøvn í Føroyum’ are mentioned (and discussed in part), as is his unfinished article ‘Gamle elvenavne og fiskepladsnavne på Shetland’ (p. 124). Magnussen’s contribution then proceeds to describe Jakobsen’s holdings at the archives of *Føroyamáldæildin* [the Faculty of Faroese] at Fróðskaparsetur Føroya that relate to onomastics. This is a fascinating insight into material that can be difficult to consult unless one is fortunate enough to be in Tórshavn. The author provides an extremely helpful categorisation and summary of each of Jakobsen’s areas of research (names of islands, names of villages, names bearing witness to heathen beliefs and so on), but also assesses his proposed etymologies, not all of which have withstood the test of time. For example, Jakobsen proposed that the island name Mykines derived from *mykr/mykja* ‘muck’ + *nes* ‘headland, cape’ relating to the huge amount of bird-droppings to be found there. More recent wisdom, however, has it that the name derives from Celtic *muc-innis* ‘pig island’.

This reviewer thoroughly enjoyed Magnussen’s article that tells us a great deal about Jakobsen’s own theories and methods as well as about the orthography he used in his notebooks which was generally phonetic and thus able to reflect

the northern and southern dialects he encountered on his travels. One is left with a profound feeling of indebtedness to and admiration of Jakobsen.

The fourth section of the book 'Folklore and ethnology' contains five articles. The first is by the reputed folklorist Bo Almqvist (not Almqvist as spelt in the volume). His contribution deals with Jakobsen as a folklore collector and like several other articles in this book, Almqvist expresses his indebtedness to Jakobsen giving the article a personal flavour. Jakobsen's work was first introduced to the author by Dag Strömbäck who recommended his students consult his dictionary of the Norn language for a survey of West-Nordic folk tales and legends, and specifically for an understanding of the word *ganfer* that appears in two entries in Jakobsen's dictionary and forms the basis of Almqvist's article here.

Almqvist delights in the continued existence in Shetland of one of the meanings of *ganfer* (1.2): 'a sudden loud cracking sound like a thunderclap'. As regards the other recorded meanings of *ganfer* (2) – viz. a. 'ghost (of a dead person)', or b. 'apparition of a living person' – Almqvist here too finds evidence for its use today with meaning 2b: In Orkney, a *ganfer* is considered an apparition of a living person and a portent of that person's death. The author also provides examples from folktales and stories from Orkney and Iceland that demonstrate that the *ganfer* has a foreboding of the way in which the viewer is to die. Differences between such *ganfers* in Orkney and elsewhere are also discussed, not least the gender of the viewer. That

such omens and forebodings formed part of the belief system of our forefathers is not surprising to Almqvist: 'Life was harsh and dangerous, and the thought of disaster and ultimate death was never far from people's minds' (p. 141). But as the author explains, there were ways to avoid, annul or even reinterpret such ill omens. This may explain one of Jakobsen's recorded meanings and descriptions of *ganfer* (2), when the time of seeing the apparition can actually invert the ill omen: 'the word is reported in sense of a person's double, seen before noon. If one's double is seen before noon, it is considered a sign of long life for the said person' (p. 134). However, there is great variation recorded in Shetland and Orkney concerning the relevance of timing when meeting one's *ganfer*. The great strength of Almqvist's article is the glimpse it provides of the vast folkloristic knowledge contained in Jakobsen's dictionary. And how, as several other articles have also noted, the sayings, beliefs and words recorded by Jakobsen can still be traced in living tradition today.

Jakobsen's *Færøske Folkesagn og Æventyr* (1898–1901) forms the basis of Eyðun Andreassen's article that deals with the problems of analyzing an oral story-telling culture once it has been committed to writing. Andreassen exemplifies this by using the story of Beinta and her three husbands (quoting a whole ten pages of John West's English translation),<sup>9</sup> and by discussing the aspects of authority, context and communication in the process of transformation from an orally rendered story to a written account. Andreassen shows how Jakobsen's compilation of independent

stories was rewritten as a coherent version that changes the very character of these tales. For example, Jakobsen furnished his text with an introduction in which Beinta is described as a witch: 'evil was incarnate within her' (p. 146). Thus, the reader is left with just one way in which to understand Beinta, an understanding that would not have been gained from the oral story-telling context and that is furthermore contradicted in historical sources. The different stories and tales about Beinta express different opinions, but these disappear in Jakobsen's rendition. As the written word carries more authority than orally transmitted tales, it is Jakobsen's version of events that has become the dominating source of knowledge about Beinta. Andreassen's article thus brings to the fore the inherent dangers in trying to analyze oral literature using written sources. While praising Jakobsen for his achievement in collecting these stories and skilfully and elegantly crafting them into a written style, Andreassen offers a useful model for the folklorist to tackle his folk-tale collection effectively.

Gunnel (not Gunnell as spelt in the volume) Melchers' article investigates Jakobsen's contribution and work as a dialectologist. She places him in the context of the Neogrammarian philological training he would have received at the University of Copenhagen, but underscores the fact that Jakobsen studied language 'in the field' and was very much in line with the

emergent discipline of dialectology. She subsequently compares Jakobsen's work on Norn with the *Survey of English Dialects (SED)*, begun in 1946, teasing out similarities and differences in approach, methodology and fieldwork practice. Unfortunately, we do not have an extant copy of a plan or list of questions (if such ever existed) used by Jakobsen in his fieldwork, but Melchers, more so than other scholars such as Michael P. Barnes, claims that his procedure was systematic and structured. However, she also notes that his list of 'emotive' words must have been caught in the course of conversation rather than in a structured interview. When compared with *SED*, this freer way of eliciting words from informants lends his work an advantage that enabled him to acquire vocabulary without preconceived ideas of correctness. Furthermore, Melchers views Jakobsen's rich documentation of household and textile items as evidence for his extensive use of female informants; few women were interviewed for *SED*. The author also views Jakobsen's phonological descriptions and phonetic transcriptions as more informative and useful than some other scholars have before her, and she deplores the general failure to make use of the phonological data collected by Jakobsen. Information on grammar is, according to Melchers also rich but not presented explicitly in the dictionary. The article makes a good case for the continued value of Jakobsen's work showing him to be 'far ahead of his time, especially in the way he conducted his fieldwork' (p. 182) and praising his dictionary as 'superior to most publications of its kind' (p. 182). It

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<sup>9</sup> This Beinta is, of course, the woman who forms the basis to Jørgen Frantz-Jacobsen's novel *Barbara* (1939).

also conjectures – for we have no hard evidence as such – about Jakobsen’s interview methods and his rapport with his informants.

Carol Christiansen’s article assesses Jakobsen as an ethnographer. Although he described himself as a philologist, Jakobsen’s definitions of words, according to Christiansen, read more like ethnographic field notes. Indeed, ‘his research methodology and fieldwork strategies are comparable to what would become standard practice for anthropologists and ethnographers in the first part of the 20th century’ (p. 184). Christiansen uses Jakobsen’s letters and records to show that he developed a complex web of local contacts and informants, and he re-visited individuals and places several times. This apparently demonstrates a recognition of how data collection functions and is akin to methods used by anthropologists today. Christiansen also draws parallels between Jakobsen’s fieldwork methods and Bronisław Malinowski’s ‘participant observation’ (pp. 185–86). The author adeptly shows how we can use Jakobsen’s dictionary entries both to gain information about his research methods and to learn about the quality of life in Shetland in the past (special days of the calendar, medical and veterinary cures, foodstuffs and so on). As Christiansen concludes, ‘[h]ere in Jakobsen’s Norn dictionary is what historical researchers dream of: information about the minutiae of life’ (p. 190). The article clearly demonstrates the importance of Jakobsen’s dictionary to ethnography, as he was able to include masses of ethnographical information into

his entries. The author concludes by suggesting that as time progresses and ever more knowledge is lost, researchers will become more dependent on Jakobsen’s dictionary not just for the linguistic forms contained therein but also for the cultural contexts he recorded. Christiansen’s well-written article concisely explains, exemplifies and argues for the continued and varied contribution of Jakobsen’s work to the field of ethnography.

Yelena Sesslja Helgadóttir’s article describes the Shetland rhymes recorded by Jakobsen and their connections with the Faroese tradition of *skjaldur* and the Icelandic post-medieval tradition of *pulur*. The Shetland material is divided into two groups: 1) rhymes which definitely have old roots, and 2) rhymes which are not proved to have had old roots. Yelena H. begins by considering a number of ‘cow-call verses’ recorded by Jakobsen and their kindred texts and parallel cow-names in other Scandinavian countries, and she shows how these rhymes all share the same principle of alliteration as a means of organising poetic sound. She traces these post-medieval cow-verses back to the Middle Ages and, while demonstrating that the content and concrete motifs are varied, makes the case for a continuous tradition of cow-name rhymes throughout the North Atlantic and Scandinavia. Yelena H. goes on to describe the *Grylla*-verse tradition in Shetland, Faroe and Iceland, as well as its related home-visiting customs. She agrees with Terry Gunnell that the Shetland *Grylla*-verse is ‘probably not only closely related to the Icelandic and Faroese verses, but is also rooted in

the wider *Grýla*-tradition' (p. 203). She turns to an Orcadian/Fair Isle verse, published in 1929, about the 'Great Muckle Grulyan' and shows it to be part of the *Grýla*-verse tradition sharing a number of motifs with Icelandic and Faroese rhymes. She concludes this section by suggesting that these rhymes originally came from mainland Scandinavia in the second half of the fifteenth century. Yelena H. subsequently proceeds to discuss the group of Shetland rhymes recorded by Jakobsen that are related to other Scandinavian rhymes but have not been shown to have old roots. By comparing the presence of each rhyme in Iceland, Faroe, Shetland and mainland Scandinavia, she suggests from where and when they might have reached Shetland.

The article offers evidence that the rhymes in Shetland Norn recorded by Jakobsen are firmly rooted in the post-medieval Scandinavian rhyme tradition. Interestingly, some of the rhymes, motifs and verses appear to have been taken to and from Shetland after the Reformation, at a time when Norn is usually understood to have ceased to be productive. This is a scholarly treatment of the material recorded by Jakobsen that shows the value of his records for our knowledge about the cultural contacts between mainland Scandinavia and the North Atlantic, particularly after the Middle Ages, but it tells us little about Jakobsen himself. At 39 pages (the average article length in the book is just 15), it does make a rather disproportionate contribution to the book, and for the purposes of this volume may have benefited from shortening.

The final section – 'Society' – contains just one article, the excellent contribution by Leyvoy Joensen on how Jakobsen used Norn as a creation myth for Faroese modernity. The article opens with a review of the comparative accounts of Shetland and Faroe by the Icelander Þorleifur Guðmundsson Rep (1849) and the Faroes' colonial governor Christian Pløyen (1839). Both comment on the economic development in Shetland with its flourishing fisheries and growing population and the backwardness in Faroe with its subsistence farming and fishing. Repp identifies the cause as Danish colonialism while Pløyen points to the stifling monopoly trade and calls for its abolition (which finally happened in 1856). Against this background, Joensen places Jakobsen who, rather than considering economic development, brought linguistic development to the fore: Faroese survives and retains the potential to become a modern print language, but unless action is taken it would go the same apocalyptic route as Norn – to its death at the hands of a colonial power.<sup>10</sup> The disappearance of Norn in Shetland thus became for the Faroese 'a striking political parable' (p. 233). Joensen then outlines the growth of national romanticism in Scandinavia (and in the emergent Faroese nation in particular) as well as the persona of the scholar hero, 'doktor Jakobsen', painting him as a 'martyr of modernization' (p. 237).

The article contains a wealth of insight and contextualising information, and

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<sup>10</sup> The demise of Norn had been documented in Jakobsen's doctoral thesis 'Det norrøne sprog på Shetland' (1897).

should be a must for anyone working on the rise of national romanticism and the language movement in Faroe. Joensen draws upon relevant aspects of social and economic history, and includes much source material ranging from poems about Jakobsen to his own notes and thoughts about the demise of Norn and the future of Faroese. She compares Jakobsen to other linguists and folklorists of the period such as Elias Lönnrot, Jón Árnason and Ivar Aasen, showing the similarities and differences between their various projects. Most importantly, she shows how Jakobsen's use of Norn as a horror scenario for Faroese does, in fact, not hold up to scrutiny. In short, she points to the Crofters Act of 1886 as the cause of liberation on Shetland (long after the decline of Norn), and argues most convincingly that, '[i]f liberation is the compared term, then 1856 [abolition of the monopoly trade in Faroe] equals 1886, and then Faroese is not parallel to Norn but to Shetland dialect' (p. 252). Jakobsen, it would seem, had been comparing apples with pears. She continues, '[o]utsiders who focus on the tragic demise of Norn when they assess the linguistic situation of Shetland miss the fact that the islands appear to be in the midst of a language revival similar to that experienced in Faroe; I take as an indication of this the conference on Shetland Dialect held in Scalloway in 2005 as well as the Jakobsen Conference itself' (p.253). Hear, hear!

The concluding bibliography by Kristin Magnussen and Turið Sigurðardóttir includes Jakobsen's books, articles, poems, translations and editions; other scholars' papers and articles on Jakobsen's life, work

and collections; reviews of Jakobsen's work, and obituaries and speeches about him. Finally, there is an edition of a number of poems about and to Jakobsen by Hans Andrias Djurjuus, J. H. O. Djurhuus, John Graham, Ida Handagard and Mikkjal Dánjalsson á Ryggi. The biography is well presented and will provide an excellent tool and resource for scholars working on Jakobsen.

Throughout the book, there are, unfortunately, mistakes and discrepancies in language and formatting for the reader to stumble over. Although they in no way detract from the important contribution the book makes, they should have been avoided. They include some awkward sentences in English; spelling errors (e.g. 'Hammarshaimb', p. 68; 'Newfoundland-and', p. 113); inconsistencies in referencing (e.g. 'pp.260-1'; but 'pp.320-321', both on p. 133 n. 5; note also 'pp.173' on p. 19 n. 15); alternation between Americanisms and Britishisms (e.g. 'mid-term talk' on p. 5, 'radio program' on p. 240, but 'A-levels' on p. 5); different phonetic transcriptions (e.g. Faroese <gj> is [ʃʒ] for Petersen and [j] for Schulte), and mistakes in the realisation of symbols (e.g. 'a Danish mile [7x532 km]' instead of '[7.532 km]', p. 113). In the Appendix to Doreen Waugh's article, we are informed that 'the words I have considered are in bold' (p. 31), yet none of the following text is printed in bold type. (There are similar formatting problems elsewhere, e.g. the dictionary article on p. 19). Finally, an index would have been very welcome.

But enough belly-aching! The contributors and editors of this volume are to be

congratulated on this splendid collection of articles that makes a huge contribution to our understanding of Jakobsen's life and works, and the important subjects of language, onomastics, ethnology, folklore and nation building. With many new insights into this great man's life and work

and plentiful evidence for his continued relevance, *Jakob Jakobsen in Shetland and the Faroes* is a must for anyone wishing to keep abreast of the latest research in the history of culture, language and society in the North Atlantic.