

7.2 Medieval sources

Unfortunately, the history of Faroese through the middle ages is very poorly documented. In this respect the situation is very different from that of Icelandic with its rich literary heritage. Here we will list the most important medieval sources that are available to those who want to study the history of Faroese.

7.2.1 Runic inscriptions

Two runic stones from the Viking age have been found in the Faroes. One was found in Kirkjubøur in 1832 and is now believed to be from around the year 1000, although some scholars have considered it to be older than that (see e.g. Dahl 1980:13–14). The inscription is very difficult to read, but according to one of the latest attempts to decipher it (by Marie Ingerslev Simonsen in 1959), the last words can be read as shown in (1a). An earlier attempt (by Ludvig Wimmer 1887) is given in (1b) (the first line below the inscription is an attempt to transcribe it into standardized Old Norse orthography, cf. the section on phonological changes below):

- | | | | | | | | | |
|-------|----------------------------|------|-----|-----|--|----|--------------|------|
| (1)a. | uik | ufi | uni | rue | | b. | uftir | hrua |
| | Vígúlf | unni | ró | | | | eftir | Hróa |
| | 'granted peace to Vígúlfr' | | | | | | 'after Hrói' | |

The other stone was found in Sandavágur 1917. It is believed to be from around 1200. The inscription is longer and easier to read and has been deciphered (by Johannes Brøndum Nielsen) as shown in (2) (cf. Dahl 1980:15):

- | | | | | | |
|-----|---------|------------|-----------|-----------|-------|
| (2) | þorkæl | onondarsun | austmaþr | af | ruha |
| | Þorkell | Qnundarson | Austmaðr | af | Roga |
| | Þorkell | Qnundarson | Norwegian | from | Roga- |
| | lande | X byggþe: | þen | a s(t)ap: | fyst |
| | lande | byggðe | þenn | a stað | fyrst |
| | land | settled | this | place | first |

'Þorkell Qnundarson, a Norwegian from Rogaland, was the first settler in this place.'

Here *Austmaðr* (literally 'Easterner') means 'a Norwegian', a term commonly found in Old Icelandic literature (Norway is east of Iceland — and and of the Faroes), and *Rogaland* is an area in Norway.

A third runic stone was found in Fámjin on Suðuroy, but it is considered to be from a much later time (presumably the 16th century, cf. Dahl 1953) and is of no linguistic value since it only contains a few runic symbols. Two wooden pieces with runic carvings on them have also been found in Eiði on Eysturoy. One of them seems to contain a (part of) a runic alphabet, the other possibly a word or a part of a word.

The language on the old runic stones is, of course, not especially Faroese but rather the com-

mon Nordic language of the Viking age. Hence they do not tell us anything about the history of the Faroese language as such, although they are interesting in and of themselves.

7.2.2 Legal documents

The *Seyðabræv* 'Sheep Document' is generally considered the oldest and most important authentic Faroese document written in the Latin alphabet (see e.g. Jakobsen 1907). As the name indicates, it contains regulations about sheep farming in the islands. It is dated 1298 and usually referred to in Faroese as *Kongsbókin* (Sth. perg. 33, 4^o, now preserved in the National Archives in Tórshavn), basically written in Norwegian (or Old Norse). The writer, reverend Teitur, is otherwise unknown and it is not entirely clear whether he was Icelandic or Norwegian (see e.g. Hagland 1983, Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson 2000:94). The manuscript contains, however, a few words and expressions believed to be especially Faroese (cf. e.g. Matras 1960) and hence it has been suggested that the original draft was written in the Faroes (for discussion see Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson 2000:94 and references cited there). A transcription of *Seyðabrævið* from the early 14th century is preserved in the University Library in Lund (Perg. Hist. Lit. 12, fol.). This transcription has been "edited" (some sections moved) and it has been claimed that the transcriber must have been Faroese, since this version contains more specifically Faroese linguistic traits. This is apparently also true of other documents in this vellum book in the Lund University Library (cf. Jakobsen 1907:XXXI). These traits include word forms like *girða* 'make a fence' (where the original has the more "Norwegian"-looking *gærda*) and expressions like *hvarki ... nea* 'neither ... nor', instead of Old Norse *hvarki ... né* (cf. Jakobsen 1907:XXXIX-XL — see also Sørli 1965). A short passage from the *Seyðabræv* follows below (in italics), together with Jakobsen's translation (1907:9 — Jakobsen's orthography has been modified slightly here) and an English translation:

- | | | | | | | | |
|-----|-----------|---------------|------------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|-----------------------------|
| (3) | <i>Nu</i> | <i>liggia</i> | <i>haglendi</i> | <i>saman</i> | <i>utan</i> | <i>garðs</i> | |
| | Nú | liggja | hagalendi | saman | uttan | garðs | |
| | now | lie | pastures | together | outside | fence | |
| | <i>oc</i> | <i>æigv</i> | <i>.ij. menn</i> | <i>huarr</i> | <i>sinn</i> | <i>haga</i> | |
| | og | eiga | tveir | menn | hvør | sín | haga, |
| | and | own | two | men | each | his | pasture |
| | <i>oc</i> | <i>gengr</i> | <i>savdr</i> | <i>or</i> | <i>annars</i> | <i>haga</i> | <i>oc i hins ...</i> |
| | og | gongur | seyður | úr | annars | haga | í annars |
| | and | goes | sheep | from | one's | pasture | (and) in another's |
| | <i>þa</i> | <i>taci</i> | <i>sa</i> | <i>savð</i> | <i>sinn</i> | <i>allan</i> | <i>oc beri i sinn haga</i> |
| | tá | skal | hin | taka | seyð | sín | allan og flyta í sín haga |
| | then | shall | the other | take | sheep | his | all and move to his pasture |

No special Faroese traits can be seen in this excerpt from the *Seyðabræv* but the observant reader will note some inflectional differences between the Old Faroese (Old Norse) text and the Modern Faroese one. Here we have highlighted old past tense plural form *æigv* (or *eigu* in more common normalized orthography), which ends in *-u* as was typical of the present tense plural of

preterite-present verbs, but *eiga* now ends in *-a* in the pres.pl., as do many of the preterite-present verbs (cf. section 3.8.2.3). We have also highlighted the old subjunctive forms *taci* (or *taki*) and *beri* — note that here they call for a translation including the modal verb *skula* ‘shall’.

The *Hundabráv* ‘Dog Document’ is another old legal document preserved in the Stockholm parchment book and it contains regulations about dogs in individual villages (cf. Jón Helgason 1951).

A more important linguistic source is the series of letters called *Húsavíkarbrøvini* ‘The Letters about Húsavík’. The six letters exist in transcriptions from 1407 (preserved in the Arnarnagnæan Collection in Copenhagen as Perg. AM fasc. 100, 1a) and they are dated from 1403–1405. Another set of letters is also preserved (as AM fasc. 100, 2a) in a transcription from 1479 (the certified transcriptions concern letters from 1412 and 1443). A third somewhat younger but linguistically important source is a transcription of the *Seyðabráv* from 1600 (AM 316 fol.). These documents (the Húsavík letters and the transcription of the *Seyðabráv* from 1600) are generally considered to be written in Early Faroese (as opposed to Old Norse, Icelandic or Norwegian), which can then be dated as far back as to the beginning of the 15th century. Although the spelling is not drastically different from that of older documents (the spelling still has *þ* and *ð*, for instance), occasional “misspellings” indicate Faroese phonological changes. In one of the Húsavík letters we find the form *hrentadi* for older *rentaði* (cf. Jakobsen 1907:38; Matras 1960:82), which indicates that initial /h/ before a consonant (here /r/) had been lost so the scribes did not know where to write an *h* before a consonant and where not. Hence they would occasionally insert it where it did not belong, as in the form *hrentadi*. Another Húsavík letter (cf. Jakobsen 1907:37; Matras 1960:82) has the spelling *huast* for older *kvask* (or *kvazk* or *kvast*) ‘said self’. Here /kv/ would be etymologically correct but the spelling indicates the change from /hv-/ to /kv-/ in initial position, making it impossible for the writers to know when to write *hv-* and when *kv-*. We will return to developments of this sort in the section on phonological changes below. An illustrative sample from the Húsavík letters is given in (4) in the same format as the one from *Seyðabrávið* in (3) (cf. Jakobsen 1907:38–40):

(4)	<i>en</i>	<i>so</i>	<i>mykid</i>	<i>j</i>	<i>Hiatlande</i>	<i>ad</i>	<i>segs</i>	<i>skillingar</i>	<i>ok</i>	<i>xl</i>
	og	so	mikið	í	Hetlandi,	at	seks og fjøruti	skillingar		
	and	so	much	in	Shetland	that	six-and-forty	shillings		
	<i>hrentadi</i>	<i>leigan</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>huerium</i>	<i>tolf</i>	<i>manadum</i>	...			
		rentaði	leigan	á	hvørjum	tólf	mánaðum	...		
		gave-profit	the rent	for	each	twelve	months			
	<i>ok</i>	<i>þar</i>	<i>til</i>	<i>oll</i>	<i>ol gogn</i>	<i>sidan</i>	<i>fyrir vttan</i>	<i>kannur ok</i>	<i>diska</i>	
	og	hartil	síðan	øll	øllát		fyrir vttan	kannur og	diskar	
	and	there-to	also	all	ale-containers		in-addition-to	pitchers and	plates	
	<i>ok</i>	<i>potta</i>	<i>ok</i>	<i>onnur</i>	<i>elld</i>	<i>gogn</i>				
	og	pottar	og	onnur	kókingaramboð,					
	and	pots	and	other	cooking utensils					
	<i>er</i>	<i>hon</i>	<i>mintisk</i>	<i>ei</i>	<i>huorsu</i>	<i>morg</i>	<i>voru</i>			
	ið	hon	mintist	ikki	hvussu	mong	ið	vóru		
	that	she	remembered	not	how	many	that	were		

Here we see the “reverse” spelling *hrentadi* (for *rentaði*) explained above. Note also the “lack” of *u*-umlaut in *kannur* ‘pitchers’ (for Old Norse *kǫnnur*), typical for Faroese (as opposed to Icelandic — but similar forms are also common in older Norwegian). Finally, observe that Jakobsen inserts *ið* ‘that’ in the indirect question beginning with *hvussu mong* ‘how many’ but there is no such element in the corresponding Old Faroese sentence.

7.2.3 Other written sources

After the Reformation around 1540, most documents concerning Faroese matters were written in Danish, but some Faroese words, mostly names (personal names, place names), can be found there. The so-called *jarðabøkur* ‘cadastrés’ (the oldest from 1584) and *tingbøkur* ‘court records’ (going back to 1615) are the most important documents here. Although these books are mostly written by Danish officials, one can occasionally glean some information about Faroese pronunciation behind the danicized forms of Faroese words (see especially Hamre 1944). This is admittedly not easy, however, since most of the words are names of some sort and hence prone to various kinds of analogical and folk-etymological changes. Consider the examples in (5):

(5)		Danicized form:	Modern Faroese form:
	a. Place names:	Gjov	Gjógv
		Myggenes	Mykines
	b. Personal names:	Joen	Jógvan
		Peder	Pætur

The danicized form *Joen* may suggest a disyllabic form of the Faroese name at the time (as opposed to the monosyllabic Old Norse/Icelandic *Jón*, for instance), but one might have expected that the Verschärfung (*ó > ógv*) would have left some trace. The fact that it does not do so either in the place name *Gjov* (now *Gjógv*) might seem to indicate that it had not occurred at the time, at least not in the general form that it has today (see the discussion in section 7.4.2.3).¹ This suggestion receives some support from certain other forms in the cadastrés, such as *Roffue* for the place name (*á*) *Rógvu* (cf. Petersen 1993a:15; see also Hamre 1944). The form *Myggenes*, on the other hand, is probably to be interpreted as some sort of Danish folk etymology (*Myggenes* = ‘midge peninsula’) and the form *Peder* may not tell us anything about the pronunciation of *Pætur* since the name *Peder* exists in Danish. — But the *jarðabøkur* also contain other types of examples, such as interesting spelling forms like “gaarss ennde” for modern *garðs endi* (‘end of a fence’), suggesting that the /ð/ had been lost at the time (see also the discussion in section 7.4.2.1).

It should also be mentioned here that it is occasionally possible to find information about the Faroese language in a couple of travel reports from the Faroes in the 17th century, namely

¹ Note, however, that one could argue that a Danish tradition in the transcription or spelling of Faroese names of this sort might have been established earlier and the spelling would thus not tell us anything about the pronunciation of the names at the time of writing.

Thomas Tarnovius (edited 1908 and 1950, see the bibliography) and Lucas Jacobsøn Debes (see especially Jørgen Rischel's edition from 1963 — see also Dahl 1980:32ff.).

Finally, it should be mentioned that the ballads frequently preserve various older word forms, older types of case marking etc., but it is usually impossible to tell how old these forms may be.

7.3 Faroese orthography and Faroese as an official language

7.3.1 Examples of phonetically based orthography

The first person to do any extensive writing in post-reformation Faroese was Jens Christian Svabo (1746–1824). In the 1770s he began to write down Faroese ballads and also compiled the first Faroese dictionary (Faroese-Danish-Latin).

Svabo was forced to try to develop a systematic way of writing Faroese when recording the ballads and working on the manuscript of the dictionary. He based his orthography on his own dialect of Faroese, that of Vágur (his father was a Danish minister in Jansagerði in Miðvágur). As a result, his manuscripts give a quite clear indication of the pronunciation of (the Vágur dialect of) Faroese in the late 18th century. An example of Svabo's orthography is given in (6), both from his collection of ballads and from his dictionary (see also Hansen 1991, 2003a, Barnes and Weyhe 1994:197, Jóansson 1997:81ff., Poulsen 1997a, etc.):

- | | |
|---|------------------------------------|
| (6) Svabo's orthography: | Modern Faroese orthography: |
| a. Aarla vēar um Morgunin | Árla var um morgunin |
| Seulin rōar uj Fjœdl | sólin roðar í fjøll |
| Tajr seüü ajn so miklan Mann | teir sóu ein so miklan mann |
| rujã eäv Garsia Hœdl. | ríða av Garsia høll. |
| (Roughly: 'It was early in the morning, (when) the sun was coloring the mountains, (that) they saw a great man ride from Garsia's palace.') | |
| b. Fjadlsteavur s.m. en lang Stav, beslagen nedenom med Jern, baculus longior, annulo ferreo et cuspidē infra munitus ... | |
| ('long stave, iron-bound at the bottom with fitted spike') | |

As the reader can verify, Svabo's orthography shows evidence for various phonological developments in Faroese. Thus it indicates the development (diphthongization) of the old long vowels, e.g. when Old Norse /ó, í/ are spelled "eü" and "uj", respectively (cf. *uj, rujã* for *í, ríða*; *Seulin, seüü* for *sólin, sóu*). Observe that the spelling "eü" rather than, say, "ou" for old /ó/ presumably indicates a dialectal feature of Vágur (cf. the discussion in 6.2.3.3). Svabo's orthography also shows the diphthongization of long /a/ (spelled "eä") whereas the modern orthography does not. Similarly the spelling "aj" for the diphthong /ei/ is phonetically based. Note further that Svabo does not use "ð" in his phonetically based orthography, and he uses "dl" for old /ll/ where the phonological development calls for it (cf. *Fjœdl, Hœdl*) whereas the modern orthography does not. Finally, observe that unstressed /a/ is sometimes represented as "ã" (*roär, Garsia* — unstressed /i/ is also occasionally written "ĩ", e.g. *baajir* for *báðir* 'both').

Other aspects of Svabo's orthography worth mentioning here include the (fairly consistent) use of double vowel symbols (*ee, ii* ...) to represent long vowels (*eer* for *er* 'is', *tiil* for *til* 'to' ...), although this is not without exceptions (e.g. *betur* 'better'). Note, however, that "aa" is used to represent old /á/ regardless of quantity (thus *aarla* for *árla* 'early' (short vowel) and *Baatin* for *bátin* 'boat(Asg.)' (long vowel)). Consonant length between vowels is also indicated by doubly written consonants (*lœddu* 'loaded', *Monnun* for *monnum* 'men(Dpl.)'), and this also includes the (presumably preaspirated) "hard" stops /pp, tt, kk/ (e.g. *ettir* for *eftir* 'after', *ikkji* for *ikki* 'not'). Word-finally, on the other hand, consonant length is not always indicated (thus *Mann* 'man(Asg.)' but *han* for *hann* 'he' (but note that here (lack of) sentence stress may play a role). Svabo represents the "hard" stops /p,t,k/ as "p,t,k" between vowels (*Lejpi* for *leypi* 'wooden creel(Dsg.)', *Baatin* for *bátin* 'the boat(Asg.)', *tekur* 'takes'), suggesting that these stops had (some sort of) aspiration in his dialect in this position (see the discussion in 6.2.1.3 above). The palatalized /k,g/ are generally represented as "kj", "gj", also before front vowels (*gjevi* for *gevi* '(I) give', *Bainkjir* for *beinkir* 'banks'). The Verschärfung combinations now represented as -*ögv-* and -*ügv-* are typically represented as -*øgv-* and -*ygv-*, respectively (thus *Sjögvrur* for *sjógvrur* 'sea' and *Brygv* for *brúgv* 'bridge'), which is somewhat surprising as this does not correspond to any known dialect variant today (cf. 6.2.3.3). Otherwise the letter "y" is generally not used by Svabo (nor is "ý"). The dative ending is always written "-un" and not "-um" as in the modern orthography (e.g. *sjaalvun* for *sjálvum* 'self(D)'). Finally, the glides inserted by the glide insertion rule (see section 2.3.5) are sometimes but not always represented (thus both *naavun* and *naaun* for *náðum* 'peace(Dpl.)', *bognaĩ* and *bognajĩ* for *bognaði* 'bent').

All in all, however, Svabo's orthography is remarkably consistent and hence he managed to establish a kind of orthographic tradition, although there is some variation in the orthography used by those who followed in his footsteps. We will now look at some examples below for comparative purposes.

In 1817 the Danish minister and natural scientist Hans Christian Lyngbye visited the Faroes and learned about the Faroese ballads. Lyngbye himself recorded fragments of the so-called *Sjúrðarkvæði* ('Ballads about Sjúrður') and later contacted the minister in Suðuroy, Johan Hendrik Schrøter (1771–1851), and asked him to provide more complete transcriptions. Schrøter wrote down a number of ballads for Lyngbye and these formed the basis for the first book published in Faroese, *Færøiske Qvæder om Sigurd Fofnersbane og hans Æt 1822* ('Faroese Ballads about Sigurðr Fáfnisbani [i.e. Sigfried] and his kin', cf. Lyngbye 1822). An illustrative sample is given in (7) below:

- | | |
|---|---------------------------------|
| (7) Schrøter's orthography (in Lyngbye): | Modern orthography: |
| Brinild situr uj gjiltan Stouli, | Brynhild situr í gyltum stóli, |
| Teã hit veãna Vujv, | tað hitt væna vív, |
| Drevur hoon Sjúra eäv Nordlondun | dregur hon Sjúrða av Norðlondum |
| Uj Hildarhaj tiil sujn. | í Hildarheið til sín. |
| (Roughly: 'Brynhild sits on a golden chair, the beautiful lady, she attracts ('draws, pulls') Sjúrður from the North to herself on Hildarheiði.') | |