

Lange, Michael A. 2007. *The Norwegian Scots: An Anthropological Interpretation of Viking-Scottish Identity in the Orkney Islands*. Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellon Press. 311 pages. ISBN: 978-0773453623.

This engaging and informative book seems to have begun life as a PhD dissertation entitled *The Discursive Construction and Negotiation of Cultural Identity in the Orkney Islands* (University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2006). Combining ethnography and folkloristics, it analyzes the complexities of Orcadian identity as presented more or less narratively to the author by an unknown number of locals interviewed in situ in 2003-04—the dissertation title, in other words, was a more accurate, if less marketable, designation. Given the speed with which the dissertation became a book, one has to assume that the text received minimal revision after it was defended. Nevertheless, *The Norwegian Scots* reads more like a book than a dissertation, and can be recommended not only to specialists but to anyone interested in questions of *cultural* identity as they are seen from the viewpoint of those engaged in fashioning and living them. Although the author is alert to contemporary academic debates, his presentation of his interpretative work offers more to those wanting to see how Orcadians think about themselves than it does to scholars trying to assess the value of current anthropological theory and practices. Indeed, its central weakness is that it is not at all informative about the processes by which its “data” were gathered and analyzed: it is unclear, for example, how many residents of the Orkneys took part, how they were selected, and whether the interviews followed a standard pattern (they seem to have taken place in the interviewees’ homes, being recorded “for about an hour, sometimes less, often more,” because “an hour *seems* to be a *useful* amount of interview time” [25]; emphasis added). While it is clear that the interviewees included a broad social range—Orcadians and “incomers” (exchange students amongst them), the young and the old, the male and the female, the schooled and the unschooled, the well-travelled and the never-travelled, and so on—the reader is left with no sense of how the study’s sampling as such was actually done. One learns only that those interviewed “are used as representatives of the culture as a whole” (10), and that the interviewer has interpreted their remarks “within a knowing context informed by [his] participant observation” (10). Similarly, while the study does briefly justify the choice of Orkney (“its strong sense of separate identity, its location on the geographic edge of Europe, its role in the center of Northern European history, and the fact that it draws identity from two 500-year periods as a part of two different worlds, Norway and Scotland,” [9]), it does not offer any

University of Victoria

focused reflection on Orkney's possibly distinctive nature as a setting for ethnography by virtue of its being an archipelago: is there, for instance, any anthropological dimension to what scientists call island biogeography? Are the Orkneys potentially a kind of Galapagos for ethnographers?

The results of this undefined sampling of local understandings of Orcadian identity are presented in four chapters that follow a brief introduction to the study and a brisk overview of Orcadian history that takes into account recent historiographical debate. In order, the interpretative chapters take up social norms ("Being Important, Being 'Biggy'"), sociolinguistics ("Orcadian Accent and Dialect"), history, inheritance, and tourism ("Heritage"), and local self-reflexive identity formation ("Belonging: Orkney Identity, Orkney Voices"). Each chapter efficiently contextualizes itself both in relation to Orkney and to current ethnographic theory and practice before moving on to a discussion of interviews that have a bearing on its subject; the interviews selected for discussion typically show contrasting views or at least a spectrum of difference, and the ethnographic interpretations they receive are thoughtful, respectful, and rarely surprising: that many Orcadians acknowledge the difficulty of seeing themselves as descendants of the Vikings, for example, even while making a personal and communal investment in just such an identity. Once again, the main limitation here is the study's self-presentation: there is no proper discussion of the reasons why certain categories of analysis were chosen and not others. Certainly, the categories used are defensible, but one can think of others, including that of "insularity." It is possible that the author's professed desire of writing a book that his interviewees would themselves want to read influenced its selection and presentation of the material, but this is at best an inference made possible by some scattered authorial comments. For an academic audience the value and utility of *The Norwegian Scots* would have been enhanced by more attention to its own identity formation.

Physically, this is not an especially attractive book, but it seems generally to have been carefully produced. Two sources cited in the text were missing from the bibliography, but the work's chief flaw, at least in the review copy, lies in the incomplete and mangled index (presumably the publisher's doing?): it consists of pages 309, 311, and 311, and the two pages numbered 311 differ from each other in the pages assigned to each indexed term (accurate in one case, however).

Iain Mcleod Higgins
University of Victoria