

THE ORKNEYINGA SAGA AND ITS REFERENCES TO LUNDY: A REVIEW NOTE

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The Nordic Orkneyinga Saga, relating to events in the 12th century, contains several references to Lundy. In the current popular edition (Pálsson and Edwards 1981) there appears to be an error in translation obliquely relating to the island, which this note is intended to correct.

INTRODUCTION

Written around AD 1200 by an unnamed Icelandic author, the Orkneyinga Saga is a major source for studies of the history of the Northern Isles, the Hebrides and Man. In addition to these island conquests, the Viking expansion of the 9th century saw the foundation of such trading settlements as Dublin, and wrested half of mainland Britain from the Saxon Kingdoms. The Saga goes on to narrate the history of the Jarls of Orkney until the 12th century, through times when Norman England was only tentatively settling Wales, let alone conquering Ireland. The Bristol Channel and the Irish Sea were still wide open to latter-day Vikings who found haven in the islands, many of which still bear Nordic names.

LUNDY AND THE SAGA

Lundy enters the Saga with the story of Svein Asleifsson, which dates to the 1140s, possibly as late as AD 1148. Basically Svein is appealed to for help by his friend Holdbodi of the Hebrides as the latter had been raided by a certain chieftain of Wales. When Svein and Holdbodi's longships approached the Bristol Channel the Welshman retreated to Lundy where he had a stronghold which they were unable to overcome.¹

A problem has recently arisen over the identity of this Lundy occupant as the most popular current translation of the Saga (Pálsson and Edwards 1981) refers to the *raider* as, "a chieftain of Wales, a man called Robert of English descent, who had arrived in the islands." This, were it the case, might have linked the foray to either the Newmarch or the Marisco families whose involvement with the island started about the middle of the 12th century. E. St. John Brooks (1931) speculates that the Marisco's holding of the island by AD 1166, was as a fifth part of a Knight's fee from the Newmarch family, with whose Welsh holdings the Mariscos were otherwise associated. Langham (1994, 11) makes an unsourced reference to the Marisco's connection with the island in AD 1154 and the Newmarch involvement from the late 11th century.

However the earlier translations (Anderson 1873, Dasent 1894, Taylor 1938) name 'Robert of English descent' as the messenger who came to Svein, and name the actual raider as 'Höld from Bretland'.

I am indebted to Professor Herman Pálsson (pers comm) for his confirmation that the translation should read:

"Then Svein had a message from Holdbodi of the Hebrides asking for his help against a certain chieftain who had arrived in the islands from Wales, driven Holdbodi off his estate and stolen a great deal of money. The messenger was called Robert of English descent."

It is easy to see how the transposition of the marauder's and the messenger's arrival in

¹ The primary phase pre-dating the massive stone structure in Bull's Paradise site III appeared to be contemporary with events in the mid 12th century.

the islands has caused this confusion and we are again indebted to Professor Pálsson for confirming the correct translation

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