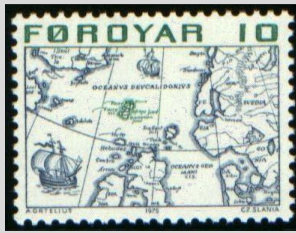


The Foroyar, the Faroer, Faeror or Faeroer. Also called the "Sheep Islands".



Afb. 1

10 ore: Map of Ortelius (1573) + 90 ore: Map of Lucas Jacobsen Debes (1672) Both stamps are issued on January 30, 1975 and are part of the first series of postage stamps of the Foroyar.

In the Atlantic, between Iceland and Scotland, lies a group of eighteen islands. These islands with around 50,000 inhabitants belong to the Danish kingdom. Of these eighteen islands, there are seventeen inhabited, Litla Dimun is the small uninhabited island where there are only sheep and birds. The capital Torshavn lies on the largest island, named Streymoy, and houses more than 19,000 people. It is believed that since times long before the Vikings the islands were inhabited by Irish monks. The most famous, and the probable discoverer of the Foroyar and Iceland in 500 AD, was St. Brendan. (484 to 577).



Afb. 2

The two Europa stamps (1994) in a sheetlet. Issued together with Ireland and Iceland to commemorate the travels of St. Brendan and the establishment of the Irish monks on the Foroyar and Iceland.

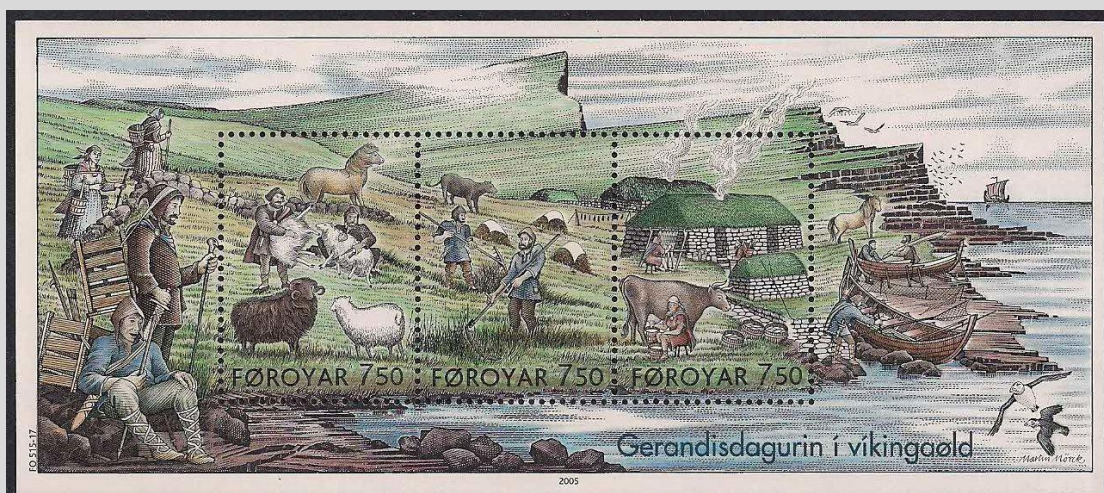
There has however never been found evidence that St. Brendan actually has been on this group of islands, let alone that he would have founded a monastery there. That monks lived there before the Vikings discovered the islands is indisputable. The monks were expelled by the Vikings in the 9th century, but around the year 1000 AD the "Christianization" of the islands was in full swing. The famous ruins of the Magnus Cathedral in Kirkjubour would stand on the remains of St. Brendan's Church.



Afb. 3

The famous ruins of the Magnus Cathedral in Kirkjubour.

This archipelago was an ideal stepstone or staging point for tours of the Vikings in westerly direction. They settled there soon, as said by the end of the 9th century. Metal and wooden objects and tools were to be introduced, but the islands offered an abundance of fish and brought sheep could graze extensively on the existing grassy slopes. The Vikings were hardened people, used to living outdoors, and could survive well here.



Afb. 4

Scene from the daily life of the Viking inhabitants of the islands.

The settlers were mostly residents of many Norwegian communities around the Irish Sea and the northern and western islands of Scotland, including the Shetland and Orkney Islands. Also displaced people and /or outlaws settled in this new area. In the early 11th century the Foroyar Islands, a free area until that moment, were taken in possession by Sigmundur Brestirson for the Norwegian king Olaf Tryggvason and from that moment the Norwegian laws were enforced. The Faroese language, spoken by the islanders, stems therefore from the North Germanic group of languages and is in its current form, together with the Icelandic, one of the smallest but also one of the oldest forms of language that the language of the "rulers" (Danish) has managed to resist.

When Norway in 1397 AD together with Denmark and Sweden formed the Kalmar Union the Danish control and interference increased. Under this Kalmar Union were all areas that were considered by these three countries as being their property. These areas were: Greenland, The Foroyar, Iceland, the aforementioned Shetland and Orkney islands, Schleswig and Holstein plus the part of Finland that was occupied by Sweden.

The Danish Queen Margareta the First had a lot of influence and got her cousin Eric von Pomerania on the Norwegian throne. This made the Danish influence even greater and therefore the Danish language became increasingly important on the Foroyar and eventually dominated the old mother tongue.



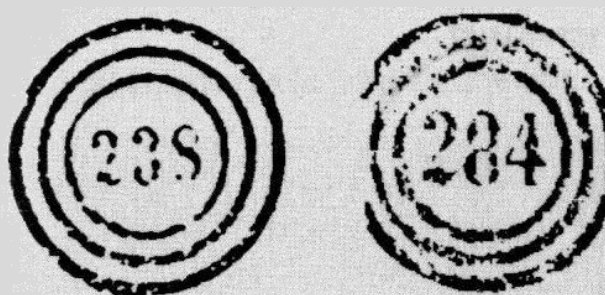
Afb. 5

Two stamps issued on the occasion of the Kalmar Union.

The Kalmar Union fell apart in 1523, but the Danish-Norwegian union continued. When in 1536 the weakened Norway could offer no more resistance against the Danish rule, Norway became a Danish province. This was the end of the last remnants of the Kalmar Union. But the Norwegian influence was still evident on the Faroyar. This Norwegian control lasted until 1814, when the union between Denmark and Norway was abolished.

Norway formed a personal union with Sweden but now also lost on paper her outside areas and Denmark continued alone with all outdoor areas Iceland and Greenland including the Faroyar. The latter as a result of the Napoleonic Wars.

The Faroyar as the locals call it in their own language received in 1854 a simple form of self-government. This did not mean that the predominantly poor fishermen and sheepowners instantly got a more prosperous existence. Far from it. Their land was in that early period looked upon by the Danes as a colony. These owned virtually all trade (fish and sheepwool) and largely determined what was or was not allowed. In this way they not only fixed the private but also the total civilian structure of the country. The postal affairs were also arranged by the Danish motherland. The first post office was opened in 1870 in Thorshavn. Then followed Trangisvaag (in 1877) and Klaksvig (in 1888). In this period the typical Danish numeral postmarks (238 and 284) were in use.



Afb. 6

Both the numbered postmarks.

From 1888 there were postmarks in use stating the city name in grotesque writing and the date with or without mentioning the year. From 1903 several small branches were opened on the therefore eligible islands. These branches were given a two-ring postmark with the town and in the middle segment a star. From 1929 the star had to be removed. These postmarks were called star - or star-cut postmarks.



Afb. 7

Two letter pieces, one with the star postmark KOLLEFJORD, the other with carved star postmark FUGLEFJORD.

Of course, all the places were stated in Danish. Seen in the light of the social and cultural development of the average resident that was not so surprising. The top layer of society consisted almost exclusively of Danes. Those who could read and write were so on the Danish way of life directed that one could actually speak of a dichotomy in the population. Poor and often illiterate, so the lower classes, or mediated to rich and literate (in Danish and often in other in commerce used languages). After World War II, in which the Foroyar from April 12th, 1940 till May 16th, 1945 were occupied by the British, some things changed



Afb. 8

British "occupation forces" exercising somewhere on the islands and playing with children in a street.

During the war there were no connections between the mainland and the islands. A Danish government was not there and therefore no Danish interference. So the islanders had many things to improvise. This worked really well and it tasted slightly of independence. The fleet of fishing vessels began to implement their own, until then forbidden flag and with English help their own banknotes were printed. The first airport was built on the island of Vagar.

The stamps were Danish and these stayed valid for franking throughout the war. Also in this period, Danish stamps were overprinted to meet certain common rates. These rates also followed the Danish rates in this period. One had seen how Iceland had declared its independence in 1944 and many wanted to bring the idea of independence and autonomy, which is one of the motives of the Vikings, to new life. One should not forget that many residents feel(ed) more connected with the Icelanders or Norwegians than with the Danes.

After that in 1946 another independence movement of the population had tried in vain to move to secede, finally the islands got, in 1948, a form of internal self-government. Their language, the Faeroes (which is more related to the old Icelandic and Norwegian than Danish) was recognized and they got their own flag.



Afb. 9
The flag of the Foroyar.

However, many administrative matters remained the same. In 1955 it was again attempted to achieve greater independence, but also this time one did not succeed. In 1962, the Danish postmarks were replaced by postmarks in which the place names were spelled in the Faeroes. So Straender changed in Strendur and Kvalbo became Hvalba.



Afb. 10
From the Danish language (EJDE) to the own language (EIDI).

The Danish language is officially still one of the two languages, spoken on the islands but plays almost no role anymore in ordinary life. In 1976 finally it was decided under pressure from the public and from the Danish politicians to give the Foroyar a form of greater autonomy and identity. This was expressed amongst others in allowing its own postal administration.

Were there in the period before 30-01-1975 Danish stamps in use on the islands and were the normal Danish rates valid, after this date there was a drastic change. The first own stamps were issued on 30 January 1975. However, control over issuance policy and tariffs was still one hundred percent with the Danes. Only from April 1st, 1976 the Foroyar were granted their own postal administration and they could set their own rates. From that date, the postal administration is completely into their own hands and stamps are issued that mostly relate to events that take place on the islands themselves.



Afb. 11

Stamps issued to commemorate 100 years of adult education on the Foroyar.

Also the flora and fauna of the islands as well as art, history and cultural expressions, legends and folklore can be found on the stamps and the postmarks. These beautiful stamps are alone already a reason to start collecting this young stamp-country. However, for the collector who wants to delve more into the postal history there is plenty to enjoy.



Afb. 12

An airmail letter from Toftir 24-03-1995 to Belgium. The stamp that is used has as motif the *AMacrosteles alpinus* a common grasshopper-like on the islands.

To name a few: More than eighty years of Danish stamps with postmarks, first laid down in the Danish and later in their own language, the Faeroes. The wide variety of postmarks with or without star. The emergency overprints which just after the First World War and early in the Second World War had to overcome the resulting scarcity. Because of the secluded position all post was sent and received by ship. This provides many nice pieces of ship post.



Afb. 13

Local letter within (Thors) havn stamped with a poststamp of 5 and the 2 ore emergency overprint poststamp, total 7 ore. This overprint was used in the period from 13 to 24 January 1919.

And then of course we have not talked about the various postal rates that can be collected.

Did you know that during the Second World War on the by British troops occupied islands stamps were used, which were printed and issued in the German-occupied Danish motherland? These stamps were sent to the islands with German approval by the UPU in Berne.



Afb. 14

Letter Piece with the 20 ore poststamp type Karveel, issued on 25-10-1940 in Denmark under the German occupation and used on the Foroyar under British occupation on 20-01-1943.

On the 1st of April 2001, a sheetlet was issued to celebrate the fact that the Post issues their own stamps for 25 years.



Afb. 15

Souvenir sheetlet with the rowboat Skopun with which the mail was transported from island to island in the 19th century, the post office of Thorshavn opened in 1906 and Simun Pauli Poulsen a striking country postman.

Nowadays, the Faroyar are a fairly prosperous group of islands with an autonomous status within the Danish kingdom. However, the economy is still attached to the Danish. A real independence is therefore for the time being not expected. Although there is lately again serious talk about a possible impending separation I think the financial dependence will again prove to be a stumbling block to big to overcome.

Although the Faroyar belong to Denmark they are not members of the European Union. And most of the residents actually think that is okay.

Some interesting links related to the Faroyar:

- <http://www.faroeislandssc.org/> - The website of the Faroe Islands Study Circle in England.
- www.stamps.fo/ - The website of POSTA STAMPS, the Faroyar post
- <http://www.framtak.com/> - Where you may come across much to know about this group of islands.
- <http://www.faroeislands.com/> - Also many things worthy to know.
- <http://www.noer.com/faroe/> - Geoffrey Noer's homepage, a collector of Faroyar postal history.
- <http://www.prostamps.de/> - An overview of the postmarks used in the Danish period.
- http://redhost.it/Filatelìa/Faroe_Home/Home.html - The homepage of an Italian Faroyar collector.

And of course there is a lot to be found on Wikipedia about this archipelago.

Literature:

- Stamps and story of the FAROE ISLANDS, by D. Brandt. ISBN 9979-9194-4-2.
- Faeroernes interimitiske frigorelsesmidler 1919, by K. Hopballe en S. Riis. ISBN 87-981294-5-7.
- Faeroernes postale forhold under anden verdenskrig, by K. Hopballe. ISBN 87-981294-6-5.
- Faeroske Frimaerker, by K. Hopballe & K.D. Nielsen. ISBN87-981294-3-0.
- Postal Rates (1870-1976), by B. Flack. And the various additions.
- Danske Forsendelser 1875 - 2003, by NH Bundgaard. ISBN 87-7012-370-5.
- An introduction to the Postal History of Denmark 1624-1950, by D. Cornelius. ISBN 0-9545207-0-X.
- The Faeroe Islands Topographic Atlas, by R. Guttesen. ISBN 87-7421-951-0.
- Furthermore, the various catalogs of Scandinavia, AFA, DAKA and FACIT.

Please also consider "de sage van Akraberg" from "De Friesche Sagen" of Theun de Vries.

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