

The Far-Farers – A Journey from Viking Iceland to Crusader Jerusalem
by Victoria Clark. Macmillan 2003.

For anyone who likes travel writing this is the book for you; for anyone who likes history this is the book for you; for anyone fascinated by the events of the first two centuries of the second millennium, events that have done so much to shape our modern world, this is the book for you.

Victoria Clark, a former Balkan and Chechen war correspondent for the Observer, has in the Far Farers taken the story of a 10th century Viking called Thorvald who, having become a Christian, journeyed from his home to Jerusalem. It was a long and tortuous journey through lands riven by political and military upheaval, religious tension and conflict, and power struggles between faiths and states. Any similarities that can immediately be extrapolated from this and applied to our own times are wholly deliberate.

Where Clark scores so highly is that she gives the historic a contemporary feel so that one becomes engaged by the characters of whom she writes and does not feel distanced from them by the centuries that have elapsed since they lived. She also has a knack for encountering modern characters of such originality that they too jump from the page and embed themselves in one's mind.

Jewish readers will be particularly moved by her modern encounter with a survivor of the Nazi round-up of the Jews in Thessaloniki in 1942, now returned to her place of birth after a self-imposed exile in France and Israel.

Victoria Clark deserves many plaudits for this complete book, a tale on many levels, playing to the intellect and the emotions, and written with a sure but light touch. I warmly recommend it.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh