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Jennings, Andrew; Kruse, Arne

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One coast - three peoples: names and ethnicity in the Scottish west during the early Viking period

by Andrew Jennings and Arne Kruse

Introduction

Among the many questions and mysteries in the place-name record of the Hebrides and the West Coast of Scotland, two have struck us as particularly interesting: firstly, why do there not appear to be any surviving pre-Norse names in the Outer Hebrides and perhaps in most of the Inner Hebrides; secondly, why are Norse settlement names based on topographical appellatives, such as names in *vík*, *fjall* and *dalr*, far more widespread than names of settlements composed of Norse habitative elements like *bólstaðr* and *staðir*? By examining these two questions, it will become apparent that they are linked and that they are related to the nature of Norse settlement, which shows considerable variation depending on whether it was in the Isles or on the Mainland.

In our discussion, we will suggest that the link between these two questions and the explanation for the place-name pattern is that in the Outer Hebrides and north of Ardnamurchan the Norse probably met Picts, who disappeared as a culture and as a people, while south of Ardnamurchan and along much of the western littoral, they met Gaels, who did not. Following this initial Norse settlement, there was a subsequent linguistic shift when Gaelic, having survived the onslaught, began to replace the Norse language, a process which began along the western littoral and later spread to the Isles.

1. Background: Archaeological, Historical and Linguistic

For a number of years the argument has been advanced that, according to the archaeological record during the pre-Viking period, the western insular area of Scotland

was divided into two cultural zones. The material culture of the Inner Hebrides and the mainland littoral (at least south of Ardnamurchan, corresponding to the historic kingdom of Dál Riata) forms one zone, with links south to Ireland and beyond, the area north of Ardnamurchan, including the Outer Hebrides with Skye, forms another, with close links to the Northern Isles, and east to Pictland.

Three decades ago, Leslie Alcock (1971) coined the term ‘Peripheral Picts’ to describe the pre-Norse inhabitants of the Outer Hebrides, to indicate both their distinctiveness in the use of pottery and lack of imported wares as well as their links with the Pictish Mainland. The distribution of pottery production is particularly instructive. The Outer Hebrides and Skye were long-standing producers of pottery, in sharp contrast to the area further south (Lane 1983).

Links with the Pictish mainland are indicated by three Pictish Class I symbol-stones from Skye and one from Raasay, and in the Outer Hebrides by an example from Benbecula and another from Pabbay, Barra. (See further discussion in Fisher 2001:11-12.) In addition, a knife inscribed with a potential Pictish ogham was discovered on Vallay, North Uist (<http://nms.scran.ac.uk/database>). No symbol stones or Pictish oghams have been discovered so far in the Dalriadic area.

The distribution pattern of the brochs is similar to that of the Pictish stones. Their distribution is clearly concentrated in the Outer Hebrides and north of Ardnamurchan, suggesting a cultural divide long prior to the appearance of the historical Picts. A number of broch sites were inhabited through the Pictish period up to c.800 AD – at the time of the arrival of the Vikings – when they appear to have been abandoned (see Armit 1996: 202; Sharples and Parker Pearson 1999: 48; Gilmour and Harding 2000)

The ‘Pictishness’ of the area north and west of Ardnamurchan has become increasingly apparent with new discoveries from South Uist, Barra and Eigg. On South Uist, we have the quaintly named ‘Cille Pheadair Kate’, who was inhumed c.700AD under a type of square cairn which is not only Pictish, of a sort generally found across eastern Scotland

and the Northern Isles, but which is most closely matched by two burials at Sandwick in Unst, Shetland, suggesting she, or her people, may have come from the north or have had close cultural links with the Northern Isles. (See Parker Pearson 2004:118). A couple of typical Pictish burial cairns may have been identified on Sandray, Barra (Branigan & Forster 2002:103) and a series of 15 square cairns, the largest Pictish cemetery yet found in the west, has also been identified just above the beach at Laig Bay on Eigg (<http://www.rcahms.gov.uk/highlighteigg.html>).

The precise linguistic situation along the western seaboard on the eve of the Viking raids is hard to ascertain but, as archaeology strongly points to a Pictish-linked material culture north and west of Ardnamurchan, it is likely that the Pictish dialect of P-Celtic was still spoken in this area, while Gaelic Q-Celtic was the norm to the south. A small corpus of place-names indicates the presence of P-Celtic speakers. Watson (1926:407) recorded 4 *pit-* ‘estate, land-holding’ names in the west: *Pitmaglassy* in Lochaber, *Pitalmit* and *Pitchalman* in Glenelg and *Pitnean* in Lochcarron. There are also two pre-Norse names in **abor* ‘confluence, river-mouth’, one of which is the famous monastery of *Applecross*, whose old name is preserved only in an English form (the modern Gaelic name *being a’ Chomraich*) and the other *Òb Apoldoire*, a bay at Strollamus, in southern Skye.

A story in Adamnan’s *Life of Columba* (Book I, chapter 33) certainly suggests that in the 6th century, Skye was not Gaelic speaking. According to the text, Columba baptized a good pagan called Artbranan, the *primarius Geonae cohortis* ‘leader of the Geona band’, after having instructed him in the word of God through an interpreter: *Qui statim, verbo Dei a Sancto per interpretem recepto, credens*, [Who immediately... believing, the word of God having been received from the Saint through an interpreter/intermediary/translator]. Although the interpreter might have been putting Columba’s religious jargon into a form understood by Artbranan, the fact that Columba himself was the religious expert suggests that the interpreter was translating Columba’s speech into another language, namely Pictish.

Continuing into the 7th century, a series of entries in the Annals of Ulster supports the

impression that Skye was still Pictish, and presumably P-Celtic speaking:

AU668 nauigatio filiorum Gartnaidh ad Hiberniam cum plebe Sceth

[Voyage of the sons of Gartnait to Ireland with the people of Skye]

AU670 Uenit genus Gartnaith de Hibeernia

[The sept of Gartnait came back from Ireland]

AU688 Occisio Canonn filii Gartnaidh

[The slaying of Cano son of Gartnait]

Garnait is a name with definite Pictish associations (Binchy 1963: xviii), and it occurs several times in the 'Pictish King Lists'. Indeed, this Garnait may have been a king of the Picts. The Pictish king Bruide son of Maelchon, who died in 586, was succeeded by Gartnait son of Domelach who Bannerman (1974: 92-94) suggested was the son of Aedán mac Gabráin, king of Dál Ríata, Domelach being his Pictish mother. However, there are chronological difficulties. The historical content of these annals is obscure. Were the sons of Garnait driven from Skye, and if so, by whom? Why did they return? Who slew Cano, the eponymous hero of the 9th century Irish tale *Scéla Cano Meic Gartnáin* (Binchy 1963)? This saga describes conflict between Aedán mac Gabráin and Cano, which, although chronologically impossible, might reflect conflict between Dál Ríata and Skye in the second half of the 7th century. The alternative interpretation that the *genus Gartnaith* was a Gaelic kindred the *cenél Gartnait*, through descent from Aedán, who had settled in Skye, can best be refuted by their non-appearance in the *Senchus fer nAlban*, which according to Anderson (1973:160) was probably drawn up in the years around 700AD.

An obscure entry in AU672, *Deleti sunt Ibdig*. [The Ibdai were destroyed] probably refers to the Outer Hebrides and may provide a political link between these islands and the Pictish kingdom. *Ibdai* is the Old Irish form of *Hebudes* and probably refers to the Outer Hebrides, islands outside of Dál Ríata, because the name does not occur in the *Senchus fer nAlban*. It bears an obvious resemblance to the AU entry of 682 *Orcades delete sunt la Bruide* [Orkney destroyed by Bruide], which refers to the Pictish king

enforcing his authority in the archipelago. It is possible that the 672 entry is a reference to an attack on the Outer Hebrides from the Pictish mainland, either enforcing submission or absorbing them into the Pictish Kingdom.

The Gaelic language was centred on the kingdom of Dál Riata, which according to the *Senchus fer nAlban*, by c. 700AD stretched from the Mull of Kintyre to Ardnamurchan. It would also have been spoken in monastic settlements further north, such as in the hermitage on Rum where, perhaps, Beccán mac Luigdech, who died in 677, composed poetry in praise of Saint Columba (Clancy & Márkus 1995). However, other than as a religious language, if Gaelic had not succeeded in spreading furth of Dál Riata in the 7th century, it is unlikely that it would have made much headway in the Outer Hebrides and Skye during the 8th. This was not a period conducive to the spread of the language. According to Woolf (in Lynch 2001:604) the ‘smiting of Dál Riata’ by Ungus mac Uurguist in AU741 probably destroyed the independence of the kingdom, effectively making it a Pictish satellite. However, on the other hand, the name Argyll, ‘coastline of the Gael’ which is likely to be a 9th century term, may indicate that Gaelic had begun to spread north of Ardnamurchan along the littoral during the 8th.

Although the Gaelic language was perhaps starting to make an appearance in the Outer Hebrides along with missionary and merchant advances from Dál Riata, there is no reason to believe that Gaelic was making substantial inroads into Skye or the Outer Hebrides during the course of the 8th century. It is a reasonable suggestion that c.700AD ‘Cille Pheadair Kate’ was speaking P-Celtic, as presumably were those interred in an identical way on Unst, hundreds of miles to the north.

2. Pre-Norse place-names

We can be reasonably confident that there were two languages still being spoken at the end of the 8th century when the Norse arrived in the Hebrides bringing a third, P-Celtic in Skye and the Outer Hebrides and Gaelic in Dál Riata and in monasteries to the north. The respective speakers of the two Celtic languages must have had a complete onomasticon for their territories. Unfortunately, most of these names were never recorded and have

now disappeared without a trace.

However, a small number of pre-Norse names do survive, and these are shown on the distribution map (*Figure*). The black names are from early Irish written sources, both in Latin and in Old Irish - their modern forms are not included on the map in order not to make it appear too crowded - for example *Ailech* where Brendan of Clonfert founded a monastery in the 6th century off the south-east coast of Mull (in modern Gaelic *Na h-Eileacha Naomha*, English the Garvellachs), and *Lismoir* where the death of abbot Echuid is recorded in AU635. The blue names do not appear in early sources but on the basis of etymology can be taken as pre-Norse, for example Morvern, (*Mor-Bhearn 'Sea gap'), which Watson (1926), the main authority for these names, suggested was the pre-Norse name for Loch Sunart. The two rivers called Sheil, would be other examples. These could be pre-Celtic names from the Indo-European root *sal 'stream, flowing river' (Nicolaisen 1976: 189) The place-name Glen Elg might be corroborating evidence for the spread of some Gaelic speakers north of Ardnamurchan in the pre-Norse period. It comes from *Eilg* 'Ireland', an early Gaelic colonial name. Gaelic colonial names certainly existed in the 8th century: we have the example of *Atholl* (AU739 'Talorgan son of Drostan king of Atholl was drowned'). In contrast, the red names are names from early written sources that have not survived.

With the clear proviso that our sample may be seriously flawed because the early sources are so focused on Dál Riata, we can draw a number of tentative conclusions from the distribution of names:

most of the surviving names are on the mainland and the names of islands themselves

most of the pre-Norse names in the islands appear to have been lost, including those recorded in the Inner Hebrides

the survival of the names of some of the tribal territories and some of the important tribal centres in Dál Riata suggest the survival of a polity in some form

The green names on the map are from Norse sources. Although there are no recorded pre-Norse names for the largest islands in the Outer Hebrides, Lewis and Uist, their Old Norse forms *Ljóðhús* and *Ívist* are likely to have been transformed into Norse from a pre-Norse language. Lewis may have been something like *Leoghus*, a form which occurs in the 10th century Irish saga *Caithreim Cellachain Chaisil* (Binchy 1963) while *Ívist* may be a resemanticised form of the ancient name for the archipelago itself (*Ibdaig* in Old Irish and *Hebudes* in Pliny NH IV, 103).

Ljóðhús and *Ívist* and a couple of other Hebridean island-names occur in the 11th century poem ‘[Magnúsdrápa](#)’ by Björn kreppendi about King Magnus Bareleg’s expedition (after Finnur Jónsson 1912, B vol. I.:404-6)¹:

Lék of Ljóðhús fíkjum
limsorg nár himni,
vitt vas ferð á flótta
fús; gaus eldr ór húsum;
Qrr skjöldungr fór eldi
Ívist (búendr mistu)
róggeisla vann ræsir
rauðan (lífs ok auðar).

[Over Lewis the fire played violently against the sky; all over people desired to flee; fire rose from the houses; the warlike king wasted North Uist with fire; farmers lost lives and wealth; the ruler reddened the war flash (sword).]

Hungrþverrir lét herjat
hríðar gagls á Skíði
TQnn rauð Tyrvist innan

¹ The translation is based on Finnur Jónsson’s translation into Danish and on the translation of the *Morkinskinna* stanzas in Anderson and Gade: 2000:298-9.

teitr vargr í ben margri;
grætti Grenlands dróttinn,
gekk hátt Skota stökkvir
(þjóð rann mýlsk til mœði)
meyjar suðr í eyjar.

[The hunger-diminisher of the goose of battle (bird of pray, warrior) harried in Skye; in Tiree the happy wolf coloured his tooth red in many a wound; the ruler over Grenland grieved young women in the south of the isles; the banisher of the Scots was lucky; the men of Mull fled until they were exhausted.]

Vítt bar snarr á slétta
Sandey konungr randir;
rauk of Íl, þárs jóku
allvalds menn á brennur:
Santíri laut sunnar
segga kind und eggjar;
siggæðir réð síðan
snjallr Manverja falli.

[Far and wide the keen king carries the shields on level Sanda; smoke drifted over Islay where the lord's men fueled the fires; south of Kintyre people sunk under the the sword edges; the fierce victory-increaser (warrior) later caused the fall of Manxmen.]

Ljóðhús and *Ívist* are very odd island names, meaning respectively 'house of people' and 'in-dwelling' in Old Norse. The names are unusual because they do not contain the normal Norse generic *-ey*, 'island' and are doubly atypical because they do not contain any semantic content which could relate the island to its location or its shape or to ownership in the form of a personal name. They clearly look like native originals which have been given Norse phonology and 'meanings' that may be easy to memorise, but do not refer to anything characteristic about the islands. The names are the likely products of

an interaction of peoples, probably coined during the initial contact phase between natives and explorers, or early raiders from the north (Kruse 2005). It is important to note that the modern Gaelic form of the name *Leodhus* appears to come from Norse, while *Uibhist* certainly does, and not directly from earlier pre-Norse tradition.

As with the Outer Hebrides and the Northern Isles, many of the island names in the Inner Hebrides, such as *Jura*, *Gigha*, *Colonsay*, and *Staffa*, were coined by the Norse. However, there are also island names of pre-Norse origin, such as *Islay*, *Tiree*, *Coll*, *Mull*, *Arran* and *Skye*. For example, *Mull* is recorded as *Malea insula* in Adamnan (Watson 1926:38). The Norse forms of the Inner Hebridean islands have not survived. For example, *Mýl* and *Eyin Helga*, are parallel Norse forms of the Gaelic *Muile* and *Eilean I*. However, in contrast to *Lewis* and *Uist* the modern Gaelic forms of these island names appear to have developed directly from pre-Norse tradition and not via Norse. Watson (1926:38, 503) pointed out the strange situation in Tiree where the modern Gaelic form *Tiridh* comes from the pre-Norse form, but the Gaelic for a person from Tiree, *tiristeach*, comes from the Norse form *Tyrvist*. The Norse form could have associated the Gaelic *tir* 'land' with the Norse god *Týr*, in spite of the obvious difficulty with the nominative case ending *-r*. If the modern Gaelic form of the island had come via Norse it would have been **Tirbhist*. It is important to emphasize the contrast between the Outer Hebrides where the pre-Norse forms of *Lewis* and *Uist* do not reassert themselves, and the Inner Hebrides where the modern Gaelic forms of *Islay*, *Tiree* etc appear to come directly from the pre-Norse forms.

The red names on the map show the extent to which names were lost in Dál Riata. The discontinuity is concentrated in the islands and suggests that the Norse impact on the Inner Hebrides must have been very disruptive. Johnston (1995) could not find any evidence for the survival of pre-Norse names on Coll and Tiree, while MacNiven's recent investigation of Islay (2006) suggests that the Norse disruption of the previous nomenclature was near total. He is very doubtful that any names from the *Senchus* have survived, except perhaps for *Freag*, which had twice as many *tech* 'houses' as the next biggest district and could be regarded as the 'metropolis' of early medieval Islay. There

are a series of 16th, 17th and early 18th century references to a farm-district known as **Ochdamh na Freighe*, which is no longer extant.

It is possible that traces of *Odeich*, *Cladrois*, *Ardhes*, *Loch Rois* and *Ros Deorand* may have survived through adaptation into Old Norse, as suggested by Thomas (1881) and Lamont (1958; 1966). For example, early Gaelic *Odeich*, may be reflected in Norse *Texa*. It is just possible that the second syllable of *Odeich* has been adapted to an Old Norse word related to modern Norwegian *tikse* 'a female sheep' However, Gammeltoft sees it as 'one of the clearest examples of an outright pre-Norse to Old Norse name-change' (2006:61). Similarly, *Ros Deorand* may just conceivably lie behind the Norse *Djurey* 'Jura'.

The example of Islay raises the possibility that a stratum of pre-Norse names may lie unidentified in the Norse onomasticon. It is just possible that the Norse heard and adapted a number of names in the Hebrides. However, if they did, the names must have been given 'meaningful' semantic content, because there is no layer of peculiar names like *Ljóðhús*, nor names whose semantic content is obviously at odds with their siting or environment.

On balance, it is unlikely that much Norse adaptation of pre-Norse names took place. However, if some names do exist outside of the island names, they would still highlight a linguistic break with the past because the pre-Norse forms have not reasserted themselves.

In contrast to the red names in the insular, western portion of Dál Riata, the eastern, mainland portion shows a degree of clear continuity. The tribal names, *Cenél Loairn* and *Cenél Comgall* survived the Norse impact in present day *Lorne* and *Cowall*, while *Kinelvadon*, which was recorded in the 12th century, preserved the obscure *Cenel Baedain*, as did the tribal centres *Dunaverty*, *Dunollie* and *Dunadd*. Excavation at Dunadd has hinted that the hillfort continued in use till the 10th or later centuries (Lane & Campbell 2000:262). However, the major name *Cenél nGabrain* and *Dál Riata* itself did

not survive. The sea-loch and district names north of Ardnamurchan may also owe their survival to a Dalriadan milieu, the sailors, traders and monks heading north to Applecross and beyond.

In the Outer Hebrides the Norse linguistic broom was particularly effective. The prevailing view amongst scholars since George Henderson (1910:185) is that the Norse names form the oldest stratum, there being no earlier names, indicating there was total discontinuity between the pre-Norse and the Norse periods. (See A. MacBain (1922:70), W.J. Watson (1926:38-9), I. Fraser (1974:18-19; 1984:40) and A.-B. Stahl (1999:365). In contrast, G. Fellows-Jensen (1984:151) seems to have been in two minds although she admits none of the Gaelic place-names in the Isles can be proved to be of pre-Viking date.

In his outstanding addition to the corpus of onomastic research in the Hebrides, Cox (2002) has, in the *Place-names of Carloway* retracted his earlier advocacy for the existence of surviving pre-Norse names (Cox 1991) and now suggests that many of the Gaelic place-names are 'old', created during the Norse period, rather than before it. We have suggested elsewhere (Jennings & Kruse 2005:259-60), that these were created by Gaelic speaking slaves imported by the Norse to the Hebrides in a similar way as to the Faroe Islands.

An interesting archaeological parallel between the Outer Hebrides and the Faroe Islands is observed by Lane (1983, 1990) and discussed further in Jennings & Kruse (2005). The 'new potters' who appear in the Outer Hebrides and Skye after c. AD 800 produce pottery with a completely new style and technique: 'I can see no evidence to derive the Viking-age style from the Dark-age style. The difference in form and construction methods seems overwhelming' (Lane 1983:379). The closest connections in time and style to this new Hebridean pottery are the northern Irish Souterrain Ware assemblages in Co. Antrim, and Lane suggests that the Norse themselves may have learned to make pottery in Ireland before settling in the Hebrides, or alternatively, they may have imported Irish slaves to make pots for them. He further makes the observation that

pottery of a very similar type is also found in the Faroe Islands, the only other Scandinavian settlement area in the West Atlantic region with a pottery tradition (Lane 1983:348). There are Gaelic loan-words in the Faroese language and Gaelic even appears in Faroese place-names (Jakobsen 1902 and 1915). The linguistic traces of Gaelic in Faroese as well as the Irish style pottery both in the Faroe Islands and the Hebrides are most likely to be indicative of Gaelic-speaking slaves.

Cox previously (1991) seemed to assume that the pre-Norse language spoken in Lewis was Gaelic, but has lately (Cox 2007), in a response to the discussion of his findings, allowed for the possibility ‘that Gaelic may have been spoken there prior to Norse settlement, but so may have Pictish’. He stresses ‘that the Norse-Gaelic contact took place over several hundred years, perhaps from the earliest period of Norse settlement’, and we find no problem with such a statement, as long as he now seems to accept the ‘general agreement that no Gaelic names can be shown to be pre-Norse creations’ (Cox 2007:142-3).

Along with the island names we have discussed previously there might be a small number of names (*pace* Henderson) that were borrowed by the Norse, because they do not readily invite Gaelic or Norse etymologies. A couple of examples are given by Oftedal (1980:188): [mu:nag] and [mũ:haf], both mountains. The examples are somewhat dubious as Oftedal also gives the case [gLũmaǵ], a bay beside Stornoway, which is a Gaelic word for a ‘deep pool’ *glũmag* (MacLennan 1979:185). If we were to accept the mountain names as genuinely pre-Norse, the similarity in their first syllable might suggest the Norse heard a form of *monid* (OW and OI ‘hill’). If these names are pre-Norse and not just names for which we cannot as yet supply a valid Norse or Gaelic etymology, then they probably indicate early contact with the natives. They are large, natural features crucial for navigational purposes, like the islands themselves, and might have been borrowed in the exploratory phase as land-marks.

Other than the possible but dubious exception of these exploratory names, we see complete discontinuity in the onomastic record, which is highly significant, as it links the

nomenclature of the Outer Hebrides with that of the Northern Isles. In both places we know there were settlements when the Norse arrived but there is no evidence from the onomasticon that the inhabitants of these settlements ever existed. The Norse do not appear to have borrowed unmodified names, they are unlikely to have adapted names, apart from the strangely resemanticised island names, and, perhaps most striking, they did not even incorporate *ex-nomine* units into their own creations. The absence of names like **Abervatn* (*ex-nomine* Pictish (*Aber*) + Norse *vatn*) or **Dunmórborg* (*ex-nomine* Pictish (*Dunmór*) + Norse *borg*) is in complete contrast to the survival and Gaelicisation of Norse names when Gaelic took over as the language of the people. There are any number of examples, but *Loch Langabhat* (Gaelic *Loch* + *ex-nomine* Norse (*langavatn*)) will suffice. Oftedal (1980:188) offers five Norse names which may have Gaelic components. They are said, a bit vaguely, to be ‘from the “strong” Gaelic areas, especially the Outer Hebrides’ (*ibid.*:169). However, Oftedal admits that ‘[t]he Gaelic-sounding components may, of course, be Gaelic popular etymologies of similar-sounding Norse components’. Cox (2007:142) provides two examples of Gaelic place-names that are used in Norse-originated names: *Camas Thairbearnais* (G *tairbeart* + ON *nes*) in Canna, and *Clach Eilistean* (G *ail* + ON *stein*, both meaning ‘stone’) in Lewis. The example from Canna looks like what it is meant to illustrate, and, as the name is not from the Outer Isles, it is not a total surprise. However, Cox’s example from Lewis can be disputed. The first element of this name of a large stone on the shore is more likely to be Old Norse *heill*, ‘luck, good omen’, as in several hill-names along the coast of Norway. Alternatively, it may be the adjective *heilagr*, ‘holy (also in a pagan sense)’, found in many Norwegian place-names. Both elements would relate the object to belief around fishing or sea-faring. In any case, these examples – and even if there exist a handful more – illustrate how *little* influence Gaelic had on the Norse-speaking population over hundreds of years when the two languages co-existed in the Hebrides.

The lack of *ex-nomine* units in the Norse naming suggests two things: firstly, that a new population established itself in the islands, a population which had insignificant interaction with the previous inhabitants, either because they had fled, were killed or had been taken into slavery abroad (Jennings & Kruse 2005:259-60), and, secondly, when

Gaelic was established alongside Norse, it must have had a very low status, probably the status characteristic of an enslaved part of the population.

To sum up, the native forms of a number of early names continue along the littoral, with one or two possible outliers in Mull and Skye, but the early names in the Outer Hebrides and most of the Inner Hebrides have been replaced. The only clearly identifiable native names which were borrowed by the Norse are the names of the islands themselves, such as *Ljóðhús* and *Ívist*, *Mýl* and *Ile*, which are likely to have been borrowed in an early Norse exploration phase. Within the islands themselves, there is no clear evidence of linguistic contact. If one accepts the earlier thesis that there was a linguistic division in pre-Viking western Scotland, it is clear that both the Gaelic-speaking and Pictish-speaking insular areas suffered nearly complete place-name replacement. However, within the formerly Gaelic-speaking area some of the important names on the mainland were retained and, unlike with *Ljóðhús* and *Ívist*, native forms of some of the Inner Hebrides reasserted themselves. This can be explained by, on the one hand, the survival of a Gaelic-speaking user-group of native names, perhaps in the Inner Hebrides but more certainly on the Scottish Mainland, and, on the other, the disappearance of a Pictish-speaking user-group of native names in the Outer Hebrides.

3. Norse names

The division of the western seaboard into a zone where pre-Norse names survive in a Gaelic context and a zone where they do not is mirrored by the distribution of Norse place-names, which can also be divided roughly into two zones (*Figure*). The outer zone has a western and northern aspect, consisting of the Outer Hebrides, western Skye, Tiree, Coll, western Mull and Islay. Here, there are settlements bearing Norse names comprising topographical elements such as *vík*, *nes* and *dalr*, and settlements with habitative naming elements, such as *bólstaðr*, *staðir* and *setr*. The inner zone lies to the east of the outer zone and consists of eastern Mull, Arran, Kintyre and the western mainland littoral. Here, as in the outer zone, there are settlements with Norse topographical names. However, there are very few settlements bearing Norse habitative elements.

Nicolaisen was the first to identify this interesting distribution pattern (best explained in his book *Scottish Place-Names* (1976:87-96)), which he used to establish a model of the chronology and intensity of Norse settlement in Scotland (*Figure 3*). According to Nicolaisen, the area with habitative Norse naming elements, i.e. the outer zone, can be described as the Norse settlement area. The distribution of the habitative element *bólstaðr* indicates, he claims, the extent of Norse settlement in the Hebrides, while the distribution of the element *dalr*, where it extends beyond the distribution of *bólstaðr*, shows ‘the sphere of Norse influence’, not settlement. His argument is that *bólstaðr*, as a habitative element, specifically indicates a settlement, while *dalr*, as a topographical element, primarily indicates a topographical feature and may never have been used to indicate a settlement. Nicolaisen believes the existence of these Norse topographical names in the inner zone is due to the influence of Norse seasonal visitors, making use of grassland, timber and fish on the mainland, and bringing local Gaels with them so that the Norse names could be passed on to the native Gaelic population.

As we have discussed in greater detail elsewhere (Jennings 2004 and Kruse 2004), we believe the implications drawn from the division have been wrongly interpreted. They do indicate areas of greater and lesser Norseness, but both zones experienced Scandinavian settlement. The difference between the zones indicates a difference in the development of the settlement, primarily due to the nature of the relationship between the Scandinavians and the native population.

The underlying premise upon which Nicolaisen’s hypothesis is founded is implausible, namely that Norse seasonal visitors could have left behind a large number of Norse topographical names on the Mainland without having settled there. Resident farming populations hardly ever adopt place-names from itinerant ones. Further, the idea that only habitative naming elements (such as *setr*, *staðir*, *bólstaðr*) indicate Norse settlements is rapidly losing support. In Norway, settlements with topographical names without the definite article, such as *Vik*, *Haug*, *Nes*, as a rule of thumb, indicate the oldest, richest and most prestigious farms within a given area. There is now increasing agreement among

scholars that topographical-names were also used in the Scandinavian colonies to designate settlements, indeed the very first settlements. (See e.g. Crawford 1987:111 and 1995:10-13, Sandnes 2006:248.)

Marwick, as early as the 1950s, recognised the importance of settlements with topographical names, which, he said, 'have undoubtedly to be classed among the very earliest settlements' (Marwick 1952:248). With the application of archaeological, geographical and fiscal methods, scholars have been confirming this. Macgregor (1986) shows that this is the case in the Faroes and Shetland. Olson (1983), in a multidisciplinary study of the settlements in certain areas of Lewis, Skye and Islay, concluded that the settlements with Norse topographical names were amongst the oldest and first established by the Norse. In addition, Fraser (1995: fig. 21, p. 98) implicitly regards the Norse topographical names in Wester Ross as referring to settlements. Fraser lists 40 Norse names (including one single habitative name, Ullapool) from this section of the coastline and 12 Gaelic names, most of which he regards as post-medieval (*ibid.* 97). Most recently Sandnes (2006) has written in support of the importance and age of settlements bearing toponyms in Orkney, arguing that therefore they were amongst the most heavily taxed.

It is difficult to ascertain at this remove which of the many Norse toponyms actually represent Norse settlements, but we would suggest that those borne by present-day settlements must surely make good candidates. It is illogical to suggest that the modern *bygð* name *Strendur* in the Faroes represents an initial settlement in *strønd* 'strand', while the modern settlement called *Strond* in Harris does not. We would further suggest that a map of such settlements (*Figure: Norse settlement in the west of Scotland*) would show in a skeletal manner, the distribution of primary Norse settlement in the west of Scotland.

In a recent paper Graham-Campbell (2006) insists that we should proceed with caution when claiming toponyms as evidence of settlement. He is correct, as it cannot be proved that all of the individual examples originally represented *bona fide* primary Norse settlements and not simply topographical features. Only detailed archaeological study

will reveal the truth. On the other hand, many of the other Norse toponyms which do not survive as the names of modern settlements may also have been primary Norse settlements. Thus, such a map can only be taken as a rough guide.

It can immediately be seen that this map of potential Norse primary settlement provides a wider distribution of Norse settlement than that suggested by the *bólstaðr* generic. Those areas formerly regarded as having been heavily settled remain so, but there are many additional settlements on the western littoral. For example, around Kyle of Lochalsh there is a settlement in *-vík*, *Erbusaig*, and two in *-nes*, *Avernish* and *Duirinish*, while on Arran in the Clyde estuary there are two settlements with names in *-vík*, *Sannox* and *Brodick* and a settlement in *-dalr*, *Kiscadale*. This suggested distribution of Norse settlement is similar to that posited by Oftedal (1980).

The names in *vík* ‘bay’, we would suggest, are particularly good candidates for primary settlement sites. *Vík* was the most common topographical settlement generic in Thuesen’s (1978) study of Orkney and in MacGregor’s (1986) study of the Faroes. Since settlers in the west of Scotland were no less reliant on their ships nor less aware of the advantages of settling on the coast, there is no reason for supposing it was any the less popular amongst them.

The importance of *vík* in the west of Scotland has not been overlooked. Fraser (1994) examined a selected number along the west coast in an attempt to ascertain their suitability for settlement. He examined 18 examples from Enard Bay to Loch Duich, each one of which exhibits good settlement qualities. Fraser isolated the four characteristics which combine to establish a *vík* place-name:

- (i) the availability of shelter, good anchorage or beaching possibilities
- (ii) an available supply of arable land
- (iii) supplies of water for fishing, timber or game
- (iv) access to the sea-routes.

He then applied these criteria to two examples from Wester Ross, showing in the process the advantages of settling at *Scorraig*, which flourished in the last century, and *Shieldaig*,

with its deep anchorage and arable land. In effect, Fraser has isolated the criteria for considering *vík* as a primary settlement name.

To recapitulate, the zones do not define areas of settlement and influence because the Norse population established itself in both the inner and the outer zone. They used prominent topographical features to name their primary settlement sites in a fashion that would also indicate important settlements in Norway. The frequency and distribution of Norse names show that this initial land-taking must have been intense and surely deeply disruptive to the local population wherever it took place in Scotland. However, the importance of the division into two zones becomes clear when habitative generics are considered.

Habitative generics generally appear to be attached to secondary settlements. The habitative element *bólstaðr* has been studied in detail by Gammeltoft (2001). With the use of linguistic and extra-linguistic criteria, he finds that the element is likely to have been productive in Shetland, Orkney and the Hebrides from the end of the 9th century. This is one hundred years after the first registered Viking raids on the West Coast of Scotland, and a couple of generations after the likely land-taking period. Therefore, *bólstaðr* was probably not used during the first settlement phase in Scotland. Gammeltoft confirms this when he analyses the topographical and economic characteristics of farms bearing this element. Rather than being used to name the first farms established by the Norse, *bólstaðr* is used to name farms that are chronologically of a secondary character, created when larger farming units were split up into several smaller units. Unfortunately, we lack similar detailed studies for the other habitative elements, but there is good reason to believe that *setr* and *staðir* are also of a similar secondary character. MacNiven (2006) argues that the complimentary distribution of *setr* and *airigh* in the west suggests it was current in the 12th century. Olson's study of Hebridean place-names (1983) supported the secondary nature of the *staðir* names. He concluded that, '*staðir* was a usual name used for 'farm' when the primary units were dismembered.' (Olson 1983:227) This is close to Fellows-Jensen's (1984:159) stated opinion on *staðir* names: 'the generic *staðir* may have had the same kind of function in the Atlantic islands as *býr* 'farm' had in the

Scandinavian colonies in England. Both generics are frequently compounded with personal names and both seem to denote some kind of secondary settlement.’

It would appear, when the secondary nature of habitative generics is taken into account, that the outer zone was an area where Norse settlement, represented by the topographical generics, developed and secondary settlements were created within a Norse-speaking milieu, while the inner zone was an area where Norse settlement did not develop beyond the primary phase. Only a resident ethnic Norse community can explain today’s pattern and frequency of Norse place-names. This is as true of the inner as the outer zone. The Norse topographical names along the western littoral are indicative of a geographical continuum of settlements where Norse was once spoken (Kruse 2004). The invaders made use of the most prestigious naming elements that they knew from Norway in order to name farms in a rugged landscape that invited and enforced the use of topographical naming elements. There is hardly any use of the traditional habitative elements to indicate division of farms or the clearing of new land in this zone. This strongly suggests that the Norse-speaking community did not remain Norse-speaking for very long. They must have adopted the native language for the formation of secondary settlements.

The Carradale area of Kintyre provides an illustration of a scenario where the transition to Gaelic is likely to have happened at an early stage (Jennings 2004). Here, all the major settlements bear the Norse generic *dalr* (Figure 6). However, there are no Norse habitative names but there are secondary Gaelic elements, in *achadh* ‘field’ (*Auchnasavil*, secondary to Norse *Rhonadale*) and *peighinn* ‘pennyland’ (*Dippen*, secondary to Norse *Carradale*, *Lephincorrach*, secondary to Norse *Torrisdale* and likewise *Lepinmore*, secondary to Norse *Saddell*). The classifications ‘primary’ and ‘secondary’ are based on a set of favourable factors that characterise the settlements. This is usually reflected in the taxation value. For Kintyre we are lucky to have rentals from 1503. In these, *achadh* can be seen to refer to secondary farming settlements. *Auchnasavil* [Achinnasawle] is valued at 2 merks, while *Rhonadale* [Rynnadill] is valued at 4 merks. Similarly, in the case of *Dippen* and *Carradale*, the former [Dwpeyn] is valued at 3 merks while the latter [Ardcardale], is valued at 4 merks.

The Norse who settled in the inner zone appear to have settled in clusters. In any given area, there tend either to be several Norse names or none. For example, along the peninsula of Kintyre, the Norse names stretch in a continuous distribution along the east coast while they are found only in two limited clusters along the west coast. This is highly suggestive of the survival of a pre-Norse population. It is intriguing that, in the case of Kintyre, the Norse place-names appear to avoid the area with the greatest concentration of pre-Norse archaeological sites, where presumably there was the greatest density of native settlement. The duns on the western side of Kintyre were probably still inhabited during the 9th century (Alcock & Alcock 1987:131).

4. Conclusion & Gall-Gaidheil

The best explanation for the survival of pre-Norse place-names and the lack of Norse habitative generics on the mainland is the survival of the pre-Norse Gaelic-speaking society of erstwhile Dál Riata. However, it must have been much affected, because, although the tribal names *Cenél Loairn* and *Cenél Comgaill* survive in the onomasticon, that of the once most powerful, the *Cenél nGabráin*, does not; the territory where they were based now bears the Norse name *Knapdale*, from ON *nabbi*, m., ‘small protruberance’. Most indicative of the Norse impact is surely the loss of the name *Dál Riata* itself. The last contemporary record of the name is with the death of *Donnchóric*, king of Dál Riata, in 798. M.O.Anderson (1976) suggested this was the time when Scottish and Irish Dál Riata were severed. Perhaps we are justified in believing that, although Gaels survived, Dál Riata did not. The topographical place-names suggest it must have been a changed society with its new resident Norse component.

The lack of pre-Norse names and the existence of many Norse habitative generics in both the Inner and Outer Hebrides suggests that the Norse impact was overwhelming and there was the establishment of a long-lasting Norse-speaking community in the formerly Dalriadic islands and in the Pictish Outer Hebrides, where we have argued there is clear evidence of a linguistic break. As in the pre-Norse period, there are clear similarities between the Outer Hebrides and the Northern Isles, only now the milieu was Norse. The

Pictish Outer Hebrides, Orkney and Shetland became the most completely 'Norsified' of the Norse settlement areas in the British Isles. Norse may have continued in use in the Outer Hebrides well after the Treaty of Perth in 1266. (Ofstedal (1980:166) argued for the early 16th century as the date of its final demise).

A division within western Scotland between islands and mainland is corroborated by the early existence of a distinction between *Innse Gall* 'Islands of the Scandinavians' and *Airer Goidel* 'Coastline of the Gael' (*Argyll*). *Innse Gall* included the Inner as well as Outer Hebrides and *Airer Goidel* by the 13th century stretched from the Mull of Kintyre to Ullapool at least. In 1255, the parishes of Kintail to Loch Broom were described as 'the churches of Argyll belonging to the foresaid church [of Rosemarkie, base of the medieval diocese of Ross]' (Theiner, *Vetera Monumenta* No.172, here in translation after Grant 2005:88). The division has a parallel in Norse tradition where the mainland, or *Airer Goidel*, is referred to as *Skotland*, but the islands are never regarded as part of this territory. They are consistently referred to as *Suðreyjar* 'Southern Isles'. This division is confirmed in *Magnus Saga* (chapter 11), where it is stated:

Magnús konungr hélt liði sínu til Suðreyja, en er hann kom þar, tók hann þegar at herja ok brenna bygðina, en drap mannfólkit, ok ræntu alt, þar er þeir fóru; en landslýðr flýði undan víðs vegar, sumir inn í Skotlandsfjörðu, en sumir suðr í Satíri eða út til Írlands; sumir féngu grið ok veittu handgöngu.

[King Magnus and his men set course for the Suðreyjar, and when he came there he instantly began to lay waste and burn the settlements, killing the people and plundering wherever they went; and the people living in the country fled in all directions, some into the firths of Scotland, others south to Kintyre, or out to Ireland; some were granted life and safety and entered into his service.]

And in chapter 12:

Magnús konungr var um vetrinn í Suðreyjum, þá fóru menn hans um alla Skotlandsfjörðu, réru fyrir innan eyjar allar bæði bygðar ok úbygðar, ok eignuðu Noregs konungi eylönd öll.

[King Magnus stayed in the Suðreyjar during the winter, and then his men rowed around in all the firths of Scotland, they rowed inside of all islands both settled and unsettled and claimed all islands for the Norwegian king.]

A parallel is found in the name *Pétlandsfjörðr* (*Orkneyinga saga*, chapters 25-29) which refers to the Picts across the firth on the northern Mainland of Scotland.

By the 12th century there was both a *Ri Innse Gall* 'King of the Islands of the Scandinavians' and a *Ri Airer Goidel* 'King of Argyll', Somerled was the latter before his conquest of the Hebrides, when he also became the former. *Innse Gall* was in use at least by AU989 when the obit of *Gofraid mac Arailt* refers to him as *ri Innse Gall*, although it may go back to 851 with the obit of *Gofraid mac Fhergusa*, who is referred to as *toiseach Innsi Gall* in the *Annals of the Four Masters* (Sellar 1966:134). There is every reason to believe that the territorial name *Innse Gall* came into use during the 9th century when Norse settlement was taking place throughout the islands. Bruford (2005:54) is likely to have been correct when he suggested that *Airer Goidel* also came into existence during the 9th century. *Airer Goidel*, we would suggest, was the new territorial unit created by the surviving Gaelic-speaking population at some point after Dál Riata in Scotland was severed from Dál Riata in Ireland due to Norse pressure post-798. The change of name indicates the loss of the islands of the Inner Hebrides and a refocusing of the Gaelic world along the coast. Woolf (2007:64,100), in his recent interpretation of the evidence, suggests that Dál Riata was occupied from c.793 to 806 by the Norse, whom he identifies as the Hörðar from Hordaland. The kingdom then rallied briefly under its native kings, until Aed son of Boanta was killed in 839. He suggests the Frankish chronicler, Prudentius of Troyes, under 847, recorded the conquest of the island portion of Dál Riata and the effective ending of its existence: 'the Northmen also got control of the islands all around Ireland and stayed there without encountering any resistance from anyone' (Nelson 1991:65; here quoted after Woolf 2007:100).

Several things suggest the new territory of *Airer Goidel* may have allied itself with the Norse. Firstly, a Gaelic society survived, whereas the Pictish society in the Outer

Hebrides did not. Secondly, after 825 there appears to have been a cessation of attacks on the monastery of Iona, until the unfortunate events of 986. Iona seems to have continued as a religious house throughout the period (Jennings 1998). There are a series of annal entries which record the obits of abbots and other important figures at the monastery, for example AU880 *Feradach m.Cormaicc, abbas Iae, pausauit* [Feradach son of Cormac, Abbot of Iona, rested] and AU978 *Fiachra, airchinnech Ia, quieuit*. [Fiachra, superior of Iona, rested.] Thirdly, in the 850s there is the appearance of the *Gall-Gaidheil* in Ireland under the Norseman *Caitil Find*. These are surely the inhabitants of *Airer Goidel* as seen from an Irish perspective: a grouping of Norse and Gael acting together. The *Gall-Gaidheil* can only have sprung from an area where a continuing Gaelic community was in intimate contact with the Norse (Jennings & Kruse, forthcoming). The only clear option for such a situation was the mainland of the western seaboard of Scotland, where there was primary Norse settlement, shown by the topographical Norse place-names, but where the presence of a surviving Gaelic population, stopped it from developing a secondary phase.

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