

the end of George IV Bridge, however, (hopefully by 1977), and with the future development of a national 'open air' folk museum, one of the aims of the Scottish Country Life Museums Trust, the place of Scottish material within the fuller northern context should become more generally appreciated.

#### EMPTY ISLANDS OR INTEGRATION ?

#### AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL ESTIMATE OF THE NORSE IMPACT ON THE NORTHERN ISLES

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The study of place-names, ogam inscriptions and Pictish symbols has long contradicted Snorri Sturluson's belief that Orkney and Shetland were uninhabited when the first Norse colonists arrived (Egil's Saga). An apparent lack of archaeological evidence for settlements has, however, given rise to the idea that by the 8th century the native population was sparse and at such a low ebb in cultural terms that it was wholly submerged and replaced by Norse culture. Current research is now indicating that the Northern Isles were participating in the mainstream of 7th and 8th century Pictish culture, and that the Norse colonisation of the 9th century was a peaceful process of integration with the native population.

The difficulty of identifying Pictish settlements and graves should be resolved by the same premise that allowed symbols to be attributed to the Picts: if an archaeological site belongs to the accepted geographical territory and chronological period of the historical Picts, and cannot be attributed to any known intrusive element in the population, it must be Pictish. This premise is justified by the correct use of the term 'Pictish' in archaeological contexts, as a cultural rather than an ethnic label.

The Picts in the Northern Isles inhabited the stone-built housing complexes which grew up around abandoned broch-towers from the 3rd century onwards; they also built freestanding homesteads, of which the first coherent site to be excavated was Buckquoy in Orkney (NGR HY 243282). Here were three major building-phases of the 7th and 8th centuries, underlying a 9th century Norse farmstead. The last of the Pictish houses was an architecturally advanced building consisting of four rooms in linear plan-form; associated artefacts included small bone pins, a painted pebble and an ogam-inscribed spindle-whorl. The Norse farmstead (partially destroyed by coastal erosion) consisted of two outbuildings and a dwelling-house, and the associated material culture included

nothing that need be identified as of intrusive Norse origin - all the bone pins and combs, for example, were purely native types.

The Buckquoy excavations have two important implications concerning the nature of the Norse impact on Orkney: 8th century Pictish life on the site was by no means culturally impoverished, and there was sufficient integration to allow the Norse colonists to acquire a continuing supply of native Pictish artefacts throughout the 9th century.

Topographical and economic factors in the Northern Isles were similar to those in the Norwegian homeland, and there were also close similarities in cultural development between the Picts and the Norse colonists. These included a rectilinear house-form, the use of inscribed memorial stones, burial rite and the use of cist-graves, flat cemeteries and burial in existing mounds. Norse colonists in Scotland acquired Christianity and the idea of building rectilinear grave-enclosures from the Picts. The steatite industry in Shetland appears to have been revived by the Norwegians after a period of decline in the two or three centuries before 800 A.D.