interpretation is confirmed by a number of later instructions issued by secular and ecclesiastical authorities to the effect that engagement provided no basis, legal or moral, for sexual relationships. In the end the authorities saw no other way to establish the absolute status of marriage than to abolish the institution of engagement altogether by an act of law. This happened in 1799.

Now this whole process from the introduction of engagement to its abolition seems clearly to indicate that people were in fact living together as man and wife outside of wedlock and felt morally justified to do so. This pattern, I might add, was continued after the legal abolition of engagement.

To conclude I would like to suggest to you that it is indeed this historical background which must be kept in mind when one tries to understand some of the peculiarities of the present-day Icelandic family system.

Scandinavian Place Names in Scotland as a Source of Knowledge

W. F. H. Nicolaisen

Although the documentary evidence for the historical presence of Scandinavian-speaking people in Scotland is by no means as scant as that for, let us say, the Picts or other p-Celts, the isolation and study of Scottish place names of Scandinavian origin have, over the last few decades, provided certain new insights into the life and culture of the name givers and users – insights which could not easily be gained from any other existing source. In order to serve as adequately informative sources of knowledge, such place names must, of course, previously have been reliably identified as having been, fully or at least partly, coined by speakers of a Scandinavian language; they must also have been acceptably interpreted with regard to

their phonological shape, morphological make-up, and lexical etymology. Vague linguistic ascriptions, fanciful derivations, doubtful morphological analyses, and unsubstantiated semantic assertions will not do. In addition, it has to be borne in mind that place names in general, and therefore also those of Scandinavian origin, are limited as to the kind and to the amount of information they have to offer (they hardly ever refer to any particular dates, for example, and are consequently almost incapable of providing an absolute chronology of naming), but as long as they are not overrated and overstretched, they are valuable pointers and markers in aid of a number of historical and cultural enquiries. As such, they seldom function at their best as individual names since there is no such phenomenon as an onomastic vacuum; when investigated as groups, however, and with particular attention to their relationships, on several levels, to other names, they are likely to become wellsprings of knowledge, circumscribed in scope but otherwise unobtainable.

As a natural sequence to such claims, the question arises: What kind of information can toponymic evidence be expected to yield? An answer, which has at least the promise of satisfaction, is perhaps best provided by reference to those items of knowledge which have already been acquired through the study of Scottish place-names in general, and those of Scandinavian provenance in particular.

Since it is in the nature of names to have the ability to function fully and appropriately as names, even when totally bereft of lexical meaning, they tend to display much greater longevity than most ordinary words and can even be passed, without much difficulty, from one language to another. Since, in addition, especially place names are more or less firmly "anchored" to the ground, their survival in a certain locale can be taken to indicate that speakers of the language which originally coined them, lived there at one time or another. It is from this special combination of factors that the major quality of place names as a source of knowledge stems, i.e. their

faculty to make visual, on distribution maps, the places and areas in which their creators once settled. Scandinavian place names are no exception in this respect and have been used accordingly as evidence for the delineation of areas of settlement by Scandinavians in Scotland. Three parts of the country which may be described in those terms have emerged so far: (1) the Northern and Western Isles, (2) the Scottish south- west, and (3) with somewhat different characteristics, south-east Scotland.

Taking the least important of these first, we find that the Scandinavian contribution to the place-nomenclature of south-east Scotland, apart from some compound names ending in Old Norse (ON) *býr* 'settlement' (Begbie, Blegbie, Pogbie, all in East Lothian; Humbie, in East Lothian, West Lothian, and Fife; Corsbie and the now "lost" *Schatteby*, in Berwickshire; and the interesting hybrid Smeaton – *Smithetun* 1124-53, *Smithebi* 1153-65 – in Midlothian) and the intriguing Moorfoot (*Morthwait* 1142) in the same county, consists almost entirely of instances of a name type which in England has been dubbed the "Grimston hybrid", i.e. names in which the generic is Old English (OE) *tūn*, 'farm' and the specific a personal name ultimately of Scandinavian origin, as in the several Bonningtons and Dolphin(gs)tons, Elliston (Roxburghshire), Lyleston (Berwickshire), Swanston (Midlothian), and the like. It is difficult to determine how many of the bearers of the personal names involved, obviously attesting personal ownership of farms and estates, were actually Scandinavians themselves, as most of the recognisable names are known to have been quite Anglicised by the time they reached Scotland. Scandinavian, and here this term means Norse rather than Danish, settlement in this area was, according to the available evidence, scattered and sporadic at most. Even if all the persons in question were Scandinavians or of Scandinavian descent, the Old English generic *tūn* proves that many of the resulting place names were given by English speakers (for details see Nicolaisen, 1967).

The situation in south-west Scotland – mainly Galloway and Dumfriesshire – is both different and more complex. Even the names in *bý̆r,* concentrated as they are, with a very few exceptions, in Dumfriesshire (Sorbie, Crosby, Mumbie, Bombie, Canonby, etc.), cannot be linked directly with those in East Lothian, for example, but rather show strong territorial and linguistic affinities, frequently through identical equivalents, with the English north (Nicolaisen, 1964*b*). Names containing ON *bekkr,* 'stream' (Allerbeck, Fishbeck, Greenbeck, etc.), too, share this distribution and affinity, straddling the Solway Firth, while names with the generic ON *þveit*, 'clearing, meadow' (Cowthat, Slethat, Crawthwaite, Butterwhat, etc.) further reinforce the emerging picture of linguistic unity between the north of England and the south-west of Scotland (Nicolaisen, 1960 and 1964*a*). Not all the compound names in these categories have Scandinavian specifics as first elements, suggesting a productive survival of the three generics under discussion beyond the primary period of Scandinavian settlement, and *beck* in particular seems to have entered the English dialect of the Solway Firth area as a loanword, guaranteeing lexical as well as onomastic survival. Such a development is even more marked with regard to a term applied mainly to hills – ON *fell* or *fjall.* As *fell,* while showing a noticeably wider distribution than the other three, it has quite clearly become part of the hill nomenclature of the English north-west and the Scottish south-west (Ewenshope Fell, Glenkitten Fell, Balmurrie Fell) as an English loanword, and it is therefore highly doubtful whether it was ever used there toponymically by the Scandinavians themselves (Nicolaisen, 1964*b*). Even Borgue Fell (Wigtownshire) does not contradict this assumption, despite the fact that Borgue is, of course, also of Scandinavian origin, going back to ON *borg,* 'stronghold, fort'; for, as in all the other instances, the element *fell* was added to a nearby place name after it had already become Anglicised. In contrast to the area mapped out by *bý̆r, bekkr,* and *þveit,* the "*fell*-country", then, taking in the whole of Galloway and Carrick, is only indirectly evidence of Scandinavian settlement. In addition, and in spite of the ultimate identity of the generic, it has no direct links with such Hebridean

names as Liaval (Lewis), Roineval (Skye), Haarsal (South Uist), or Minishal (Rum), or with such Shetland names as Fugla Field and Hamara Field, or Fibla Fiold and Vestra Fiold in Orkney.

Of different significance yet again are those place names which contain the generic ON *kirkja,* 'church' but feature it as a first element and not, as one would expect in Germanic compounds, in final position. Because of the inverted "normal" word order, such formations are, from a Germanic point of view, called "inversion compounds", examples being Kirkcolm, Kirkcowan (Wigtownshire), Kirkanders, Kirkcudbright (Kirkcudbrightshire), and Kirkoswald (Ayrshire). The doublet Brydekirk (Dumfriesshire) – Kirkbryde (Wigtown– and Kirkcudbrightshires) nicely illustrates the morphological principles involved. Essentially it is a contrast between Germanic and Celtic word order, the latter displayed legitimately by their (Anglicised) Gaelic counterparts Kildonan, Kilfillan (Wigtownshire), Killimingan (Kirkcudbrightshire), and Kilkerran (Ayrshire), all of which contain Gaelic *cill,* 'church'. Indeed, there is evidence that at times both generics intermingle in the same place name. For these reasons, and also in view of the fact that the saints' names which function as specifics, are in the majority connected with the Irish church, *Kirk*-names point to a substantially Gaelic background and are, to a certain extent, to be regarded as part-translations of earlier *Kil*-names (for the evidence and a more detailed discussion see MacQueen, 1956 and 1973, and Nicolaisen, 1960 and 1970). They and their half-dozen counterparts in Cumberland are unthinkable within a purely Scandinavian context. There are, naturally, also several individual names of clear and indisputable Scandinavian origin in this region – Borgue, Float, Stoneykirk (Wigtownshire), Applegarth (Dumfriesshire), for example – but they serve merely to confirm what the mapping of generics has already determined so much better.

The third area of settlement delineated by place names, the Northern and Western Isles of Scotland, is the most inten-

sively Scandinavian of the three. The density of Scandinavian names and name types is such that it is possible to distinguish certain chronological layers made visually evident by a number of significant generics (Nicolaisen, 1969). Of these, ON *stadir,* 'farm, dwelling-place', appears to have been productive in the formation of place names from the very onset of Scandinavian settlement at the beginning of the ninth century. It occurs in Shetland (Gunnista, Colsta), Orkney (Grimeston, Costa), and in the most favourable coastal locations of Lewis (Tolsta, Mangersta), Harris (Scarasta, Unasta), and Skye (Connista, Shulista), as well as singly in North Uist (Hosta) and Islay (Olistadh). *Stadir* is followed chronologically by the two generics ON *setr* 'dwelling' and *sætr* 'shieling'. No longer distinguishable by phonological criteria, they seem to reflect the stage reached by Scandinavian settlement near the end of the ninth century. Their distribution not only includes the areas in which *stadir* is to be found, but also less favourable situations in the Hebridean islands in question, as well as, importantly, parts of Caithness (Seater, Syster, Thurster) and perhaps the very north of Sutherland (Linside, Fallside, Sandside). The next category, names containing ON *bólstadr* 'farm', has a wider distribution than *setr/sætr* and is likely to have been used wherever permanent settlements were formed by Scandinavians. Its scatter, including the whole of the Northern and Western Isles and the coastal districts of Wester Ross, northern Sutherland, Caithness, eastern Sutherland, and Easter Ross, reflects the area of Scandinavian settlement in the north and west *par excellence.* Examples are Norbister, Symbister (Shetland), Mirbister, Kirbist (Orkney), Lybster, Strompster, Thrumster (Caithness), Habost, Leurbost (Lewis), Carbost, Breabost (Skye), Coullabus, Cornabus (Islay), Unapool, Eriboll, Embo, Skibo (Sutherland), Ullapool, Arboll, (Ross-shire), and Crossapoll, Heylipoll (Tiree). The initially puzzling (and obscuring) variety in the modern reflexes of *bólstadr* is due to a number of factors, the most important of which must have been later contact with and filtering through Gaelic. Another generic, ON *dalr* 'valley', because of its primary application to natural rather than man-

made features, offers, through its distribution pattern, a glimpse of the sphere of Scandinavian influence instead of the less extensive area of settlement. Occurring thickly wherever *bólstadr* is to be found, it is also not infrequent in the adjacent coastal regions of the western mainland, as in Ross-shire (Udale, Ulladale), Inverness-shire (Borrodale, Scamadale), and Argyll-shire (Carradale, Easkadale). Its significance is consequently quite different from that of the other three generics which are all tied to human habitation sites. It would be quite misleading to regard these four distributions as evidence for a chronologically unstratified and spacially undifferentiated process of Scandinavian settlement in the north and west, just as the three different areas brought to light by toponymic material cannot be simply joined into one continuous, untextured overall pattern.

While place names are most useful in this kind of elucidation of historio-geographical regions, they are not limited, as potential sources of knowledge, to this kind of investigation. They are, for instance, also quite informative about certain socio-cultural conditions, as long as one does not ask for too much detail. Whereas generics play such an important part in former kinds of research, specifics are usually more helpful in the latter, as became apparent when reference was made to the value of saints names in the determination of the ecclesiastical links of *Kil–* and *Kirk–* names. There are, however, other things place names can tell us (Nicolaisen, 1963). In the Hebrides, for example, Swanibost, Grimshader, and Eoropie speak of private ownership (in the last case, probably by a woman); Croigary points to the breeding of cattle, Rossal and Hestam to the keeping of horses, Lampay and Lamalum to the pasturing of lambs on islands, and Haversay to the grazing of (he–)goats. Goats are also especially referred to in Geshader; and Galson and Griosamul are indicative of the keeping of pigs. Beyond this information about animal husbandry, there is also ample reference to the custom of transhumance (Soval, Hestaval, Neidalt), to fishing (Laxay, Shiltenish) to fortifications (Borve,

Boreray), bridges (Brue), and to the presence of the church (Kirkebost, Kirkipol). The Scandinavian place nomenclature of the Northern Isles imparts similar knowledge. Especially informative is the name Tingwall, which occurs in both Orkney and Shetland, with its implied reference to the legal organisation of the Scandinavian settlers in Scotland. As ON *þing-vǫllr* 'assize field, parliament site', it is identical with Dingwall (Rossshire), Tinwald (Dumfriesshire) and Tynwald in the Isle of Man. as well as with the Icelandic *þingvellir* and several parallels in Norway. The Scandinavians in Scotland obviously preferred to live in a society governed by law and order, and they used similar traditional legal devices wherever they lived or settled.

The question of the precise geographical and linguistic background of the Scandinavians who came to Scotland cannot be completely answered by place names, but there are valuable pointers in the Scottish toponymic evidence. A comparison of *setr*-names in Scotland and Norway (Brøgger, 1929) demonstrates neatly how the early Norwegian (Norse) emigrants to the Northern and Western Isles must have come chiefly from coastal districts of Fjordene, Möre, and Tröndelag; Möre as a major source of emigration is confirmed by the names in *bólstadr*, whereas *stadir*-names are more likely to have been given by people from Agder-Rogaland. *Land*-names, too, are most common in this latter area and, as far as Scotland is concerned, are perhaps to be associated with a secondary wave of Scandinavian immigration. Place names therefore turn out to be our major raw material for pinpointing the two great main districts in Norway which were the homelands of many of the Scandinavians who settled in the Scottish north and west. In this connection, the (nostalgic?) naming of places in Scotland after places in these homelands has, in the past, been frequently overstressed, since names were thought to have a purely denotative function. Once one accepts the notion of connotative names, however, the naming process can be seen to have other possible explanations, like the application of ready-made names by association (see Nicolaisen, 1974). Linguistically, practically

all the evidence points to settlers who were speakers of West Scandinavian dialects, and even a name like Denby (Dumfriesshire) 'Dane's settlement' indicates that Danish settlers were the exception rather than the rule; otherwise it would have been difficult for such a name to have functioned as an identifying onomastic label. For these reasons, there is not much toponymic support, in any of the three areas, for the alleged presence of Scandinavians who had come from Denmark or Sweden.

A further problem has so far remained largely unsolved, despite the intensive study of toponymic material. Apart from the situation in south-west Scotland, alluded to earlier, we still know precious little about the exact socio-linguistic relationship between Scandinavians and Celts in Scotland. Place names have so far failed to reveal exactly to what degree Orkney, Shetland, and the Hebrides were populated when the Norsemen arrived early in the ninth century, and, in particular, there has never been any convincing argument put forward, on toponymic grounds, concerning the nature and extent of potential pre-Norse Gaelic-speaking settlement in the Long Island (see also Fraser, 1974). There are numerous Scandinavian loan-elements in the Gaelic place names of the Hebrides, but evidence for the opposite process is scanty and not necessarily linkable to an *earlier* Gaelic-speaking population. Who the pre-Scandinavian people of the Northern Isles were is, from a linguistic point of view, also still open to conjecture. There is no reason why new information should not come to light as the result of new lines of research but, for the time being, the Scandinavian place names of Scotland have failed as satisfactory sources of knowledge, in this respect. Obviously, this failure, which may be partly due to a preoccupation with percentage figures based on incomplete samples, does not eliminate altogether their potential usefulness for such enquiries but only puts it into its proper persepctive.

The several major fields of knowledge, then, for which

place names, reliably etymologised and properly interpreted, have so far proved to be important sources, are the delineation of the three main Scandinavian settlement areas and spheres of influence, the establishment of relative chronological strata within the Scandinavian stratum, the definition of geographical affinities with other areas of Scandinavian settlement in Britain, the analysis of the relationship between Norsemen and Gaels in the Scottish south-west, the examination of some of the socio-cultural aspects of Scandinavian life in Scotland, the determination of the likely homelands of early Scottish immigrants from Norway, and the recognition of the probable linguistic origins of the place names in question, as well as of their namers, within the Scandinavian group of languages. Undoubtedly, there are further fields of knowledge for which the Scandinavian place names of Scotland may provide substance, and, essentially, we are still in the initial stages of exploring and exploiting such names to the full for a richer understanding of this particular phase of Scottish history.

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Brough of Birsay (NGR HY239285)

Excavations and survey 1974: Interim Report

Chris Morris

Excavations and survey took place at this site on behalf of the Department of the Environment (Scotland) and Durham University Excavations Committee for a period of 3 weeks, with 10 days post-excavation work immediately following in Durham. The operation was directed by Messrs. C.D. Morris and J.R. Hunter of the Department of Archaeology, Durham University, in conjunction with Mrs. C. Curle, and staff and volunteers were recruited from Durham University.

Excavation took place in two areas, that in House 5 completing work begun in 1973, the other beginning a new phase of excavation on the area to the west of the Cathedral.