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Aspects of Norse Place Names in the Western Isles

I

St. Gregory the Great (d. 604) has long been recognized as an outstanding literary interpreter, particularly by those who acknowledge the principle of polysemy or multiplicity of meaning. In a striking passage (quoted here from memory) he suggests that the words of Holy Writ could be compared to square stones; since it is impossible to observe all the sides of such a stone simultaneously, we must turn it over in order to see each of its facets. The same applies, he argues, to the words of the Bible: individual expressions have several meanings and functions, which we cannot properly grasp without observing them from different viewpoints. The learned pope is here, of course, concerned with the 'literal', 'allegorical', 'moral' and 'anagogic' meanings which were supposed to be a special quality of the Bible, but in recent decades the basic principles involved have become fashionable in certain critical circles dealing with secular literature as well (Frye 1957, 72 and elsewhere).

Like the multi-faceted or polysemous words of the Bible, Norse place names in the Western Isles have several aspects to them, and it seems desirable that no facet should be omitted from consideration. It is proposed to use St. Gregory's exegetical principle as an intellectual framework for the purpose of organizing a systematic and comprehensive programme for the investigation of those names. When I allude to the three-dimensional Gregorian model in this context, I have in mind that each facet of our notional stone represents a particular area of research, and that once we have satisfactorily dealt with all six aspects of a particular name, the investigation of it has been completed. As will be argued below in connection

with the HISTORICAL aspect, place names are not studied exclusively for their own sake but also in order to glean information about the people who created them. The six aspects of Norse place names in the Western Isles can be defined in the following terms:

1. First there is the strictly FORMAL aspect when we consider different manifestations of a name, not only its written forms but also the current pronunciation in Gaelic and English. Ideally, every traditional Hebridean name, irrespective of its linguistic background, should have a standardized written form; unfortunately, however, the spelling of many names on the Ordnance Survey maps leaves a lot to be desired. Phonetic transcripts of a name will serve as an obvious starting point for researches into its origins, functions and meanings. The investigation of the Hebridean nomenclature is greatly hampered by the fact that numerous names in the islands still remain uncollected; others, through neglect, are irretrievably lost.

Place names are either simplex, i.e. consisting of a single stem: Uig < ON *Vík* (f.) 'a creek, bay'; Siadar < ON *Sætr* (n.) 'a shieling, summer pasture', Stoth < ON *Stoð* (f.) 'a natural harbour', or compounded, i.e. made up of two or more components: Bosta < ON *Ból-staðr* (m.) 'a farm'; Kirkebost < ON *Kirkju-ból-staðr* 'a church farm'. The gender of place names is an important factor, and so is their grammatical number. As Magne Oftedal has rightly pointed out, some of the names appear to represent an ON oblique case rather than the nominative, as one would expect.

2. The PHONOLOGICAL aspect. At this stage we treat our place names essentially as Norwegian loanwords borrowed into Gaelic; the principal aim here is to identify the Norse elements that went into their making, and also to account for the phonetic changes involved. The sound systems of Norse and Gaelic are very different, and the process by which Norse words and names were adopted into Gaelic is still obscure in certain respects. Forty years ago, Magne Oftedal wrote in his monograph on the village names of Lewis: "It is impossible, with the limited amount of material yet available, to make anything like a complete survey of the phonetic changes that

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have taken place from Old Norse to Modern Gaelic. It has been attempted by Watson in his *Place Names of Ross and Cromarty* and by Henderson in *The Norse Influence on Celtic Scotland*, but with little success, partly owing to the fact that both authors use the completely inadequate Gaelic spelling as their point of departure, instead of some kind of phonetic notation" (Oftedal 1954, 366-367). In this context, Oftedal refers to Carl Hj. Borgström's *The Dialects of the Outer Hebrides* which still remains an indispensable work for those who want to make sense of the phonology of Norse place names in the Western Isles. Notwithstanding the splendid work of more recent scholars such as W. F. H. Nicolaisen and Donald Macaulay, the situation has not improved very much since the Norwegian Celticists Borgström and Oftedal published their investigations of Gaelic dialects in the Western Isles.

3. Next we proceed to the third side of our notional stone, which is the SEMANTIC aspect. The search for meanings and functions inevitably entails the comparison of Hebridean names with their counterparts in Norway and the insular settlements in Shetland, Orkney, the Faroes and Iceland. At the same time, we explore the etymology of each individual stem, not only in Germanic, but also in other branches of Indo-European. The derivation of a word will often help to solve problems relating to its meaning. The basic meaning of the prolific IE root **per-*, **por-* was 'to force one's way through something, or to cross it', so it is not surprising that the original sense of *fjorðr*, which derives from this root, was 'a place where a ferry operates'; its cognates in other languages include E. *ford* 'a place in a stretch of water where it is possible to cross by wading', and Latin *portus* 'a harbour, haven'. The use of the term *fjorðr* for 'a sound, channel' as in ON *Pétlandsfjorðr* (E. Pentland Firth) is consistent with the original sense of the root. In this connection, Arne Kruse has drawn my attention to two other open-ended 'fjords': Vestfjorden in Nordland and Boknafjorden in Rogaland. Elsewhere in Norway, *fjorðr* usually means 'a long and narrow inlet of the sea, typically between high steep cliffs', but in Iceland it is also used about broad bays, such as Breiðfjorðr, Øxarfjorðr and Þistilfjorðr; it should be noted here that the proper term for a bay which is as wide as it

is long is *flói* (cp. *Húnaflói*, *Héraðsflói*, *Faxaflói* in Iceland and *Scapa Flow* in Orkney); *Floen* occurs in Norway as the name of a lake (NSL, 111). Gruinard Bay west of Ullapool must represent ON *Grunnafljorðr* 'the shallow bay' (the name occurs also in Norway and Iceland); here as in the case of the three Icelandic bays mentioned above, the use of the term *-fljorðr* deviates from normal Norwegian practice. In Gaelic, the term 'loch' sometimes replaces *fljorðr*; thus Loch Vatten in Skye is a rendering of ON *Vatnsfljorðr*. In Old Irish, it should be noted, one of the meanings of the term *loch* was 'an inlet of the sea'.

For the purpose of making sense of Hebridean names, it will often be helpful to use the Icelandic situation as a starting point. Most of the numerous Icelandic place names that are mentioned in the sagas and other early sources are lexically transparent. There are, however, some intriguing exceptions. Certain Icelandic names include archaic Norwegian components which had ceased to be intelligible by the twelfth century when the Icelanders began to record history, genealogy and other kinds of native tradition. Here it is worth noting that in medieval Icelandic texts, names which are not easily understood are often accompanied by an onomastic gloss. Thus the *Book of Settlements* (1972, 17) explains the origin of the name *Faxaóss* (now *Faxa-flói*, see above) with an anecdote about a Hebridean called *Faxi*, after whom the bay is supposed to have been called:

As they sailed round Reykjanes and the bay opened up wide so they could see westwards to Snæfellsnes, *Faxi* had this to say: "It must be a big country we have found: the rivers are big enough." After this the bay was called *Faxaós* [i.e. 'Faxi's estuary'].

However, it is doubtful if the personal name *Faxi*, let alone such a Hebridean, ever existed, but *Faxi* (m. 'white with foam') was one of many uncompounded fjord names in Norway, corresponding to the river name *Faxa* (f.). Another legendary character of dubious onomastic origin is mentioned in *Kjalnesinga saga*; an Irish lady called *Esja* is said to have made her home at Esjuberg (see below). The ethnic background of

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Faxi and *Esja* is a clear indication that their names, and hence the place names supposed to derive from them, were regarded as strange and unusual. In the north of Iceland there is a valley called *Svarfaðardalr*, the first element of which must be the old river name *Svörfuð* (f. 'the sweeper'), but according to *Svarfðæla saga* the valley got its name from the first settler Þorsteinn svörfuðr. The original name of the river is long forgotten; since the thirteenth century at least it has been known as *Svarfaðardals-á*, 'the River of Svarfaðardalr'.

One of the weaknesses in certain attempts to identify Norse stems in the Hebridean nomenclature has been the tendency to consult dictionaries rather than actual place names in Norway, Iceland and elsewhere. Here, I would like to mention just three nouns which do not figure in ON texts although they are well established as place name elements: *Ríp* (f.) 'a crag' occurs as a farm name in Iceland and is probably the first element in *Loch Ribevat* in Lewis. *kjóss* / *kjós* (see below) is not recorded as a common noun in ON, to the best of my knowledge, but as a place name it occurs in Norway, Iceland and Lewis. The common noun *vottr* (m.) 'a glove' is to be found as the first component in place names both in Iceland (*Vattarnes*, *Vattarfjorðr*) and Norway (*Vattedal*, *Vattøy*, *Vattagarðr*) (See NSL, 336, and ÁBM, 1111). The precise onomastic function of this element is not entirely clear, but the most likely explanation is that it serves to indicate the shape of the topographical features involved. *Vaternish* in Skye corresponds to *Vattarnes* on the east coast of Iceland. *Trotternish* in Skye, on the other hand, should be compared to Trondenes (< ON *Þrándarnes*) in the north of Norway, the first element here could be ON *þróndr* (m.) 'a boar' which occurs in mountain names (NSL, 322; ÁBM, 1195).

It can often be taken for granted that a component in a place name has the same meaning as the corresponding word in common speech; this applies equally to nouns and adjectives. The Norse compound in the name *Loch Grunavat* < ON *Grunnavatn* means literally 'the shallow lake', just as *Loch Langavat* < ON *Langavatn* denotes 'the long lake', and what is marked on the Ordnance Survey map as *River Laxay* < ON *Laxá* indicates 'a salmon river'. But it may prove impossible to

know precisely why a certain element occurs as a component in place names, even though we understand its usual sense. It has been suggested that Iceland's most famous mountain, *Hekla*, which in medieval Europe was supposed to be 'a place of punishment for the damned', the Hebridean *Hecla* on South Uist (there is a smaller one on Mingulay), and their Norwegian counterparts *Heklen*, *Hekletinden*, *Hekleffjellet*, etc. got their names from the common noun *hekla* (f) 'a hooded coat' or some other such garment, but the explanation is not entirely satisfactory. What salient features, if any, does a modest hill like Hecla on Mingulay (700 ft.) have in common with a ferocious volcano like Hekla in Iceland (4,746 ft.)? Superficially, the meaning of the island name Bernera < ON *Bjarnarøy* does not seem to present any difficulties; its first component appears to be the personal name *Bjørn*, which is also the normal term for 'the bear'; animals figure in place names for several reasons. It is quite possible that the three Hebridean Bernera(y)s (off Lewis, Harris and Barra) were called after Norwegian islands. The same may be the case of *Bjarnarey* and *Bjarnareyjar* (pl.) off Iceland.

4. The TYPOLOGICAL aspect. Here we classify each Norse name according to its relevance to topography or human activity. On the one hand, there are basic terms suggestive of agriculture, animal husbandry, fishing, etc., and on the other those names which describe particular features in the landscape, such as islands, rivers, lochs, mountains, hills, hollows, glens, creeks, bays, headlands, and so on. Here, I shall confine my remarks to the certain names of farms, rivers and fjords.

In Iceland, several of the terms denoting farms and crofts derive from the same root as the verb *búa* 'to live, keep house, run a farm', which is cognate with the English verb to *be*, Latin *fui* 'I have been', and Old Irish *biu* 'I am'. The Norse term for 'a farmer' is *bóndi* (m.). The following terms mean basically 'a farm, homestead, dwelling, etc.', but there are certain differences between them: *bú* (n.), *bú-staðr* (m.), *ból* (n.), *ból-staðr* (m.), *býli* (n.), *bæli* (n.; in Iceland this term is often used in the sense 'a den, lair, nest'), *bær*, *býr* (m.). Hebridean examples of such farm names abound: Crossapol (ON *Krossaból*) and

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Kirkapol (ON *Kirkjuból*) on Tiree, Garrabost (ON *Garðabólstaðr*), Habost (ON *Háibólstaðr*) on Lewis, Paible (< ON *Papbyli*) etc., etc. The term *garðr* (m., probably a cognate of L. *hortus* 'a garden') and its derivative *gerði* (n., borrowed into Gaelic as *geàrraidh*) have different connotations; apart from meaning 'a homestead, farm' *garðr* denoted 'a garden; wall'; *gerði* 'a fenced field' suggests a small croft rather than a proper farm. The term occurs in the genuinely Gaelic name An Geàrraidh Mór and also in the Norse compound Croigary (< ON *Króargerði*; Oftedal, 1954, 401). As a second element in farm names, *heimr* (m.; its meanings include 'the world; homestead; abode'; it is cognate with English *home* and Gothic *haims* 'a village') is supposed to have been redundant by the time Iceland was settled, but that is probably a mistake. The most common final element in Icelandic farm names is *-staðir*, pl. of *staðr* ('a place', from the same root as the verb to 'stand'; cp. such Latin nouns as *status* and *statio*); the first component in the *-staðir* farms is often a personal name. Magne Oftedal has suggested that Mangersta in Lewis represents ON *Mangarastaðir* 'peddler's farm', and Skeggirsta ON **Skeggárstaðir*, with the river name *Skeggá* as the first component. Then there are elements denoting buildings, such as *-hús* 'a house', *-skáli* 'a hall', *tóptir* (pl.) 'the foundation of a house', *-sel* 'a shieling'. *Hof* 'a pagan temple' occurs frequently as a farm name in Iceland. Finally, a mention should be made of terms indicating cultivation: *-tún* 'a home-field', *-akr* and *-ekra* 'a corn-field'.

River names in Iceland fall into two main categories; they are either compounds ending in a term denoting 'a stream of water': *-á*, *-fljót*, *-kvísl*, *-votn* (pl. of *vatn*), *-lækr*, or uncompounded such as *Blanda* ('a mixture of clear and glacial waters'), *Bugða* ('the meandering one'), *Fura* (< *fura* 'fir'), *Gígja* (cp. the musical instrument *gígja* 'a fiddle'), *Gryta* ('the gravelly one'), *Hemra* ('the rocky one'), *Hnefla* (?), *Kisa* ('the gravelly one'), *Korpa* (< *korpr* 'a raven'), *Kreppa* ('the narrow one'), *Ljá* ('the cutting one'), *Lýsa* ('the shining one'), *Mórilla* ('the dusky one'), *Skálm* ('the fork of a river'), *Skjálgr* (< *skjálgr*, adj. 'crooked'), *Skráma* ('the shining one'), *Skrauma* ('the noisy one'), *Slenja* ('the cascading one'), *Stjórn* ('the straight one'), *Sog* ('a stream'). All are feminine except *Sog* (n.). Numerous

uncompounded river names in Norway appear to be very old.

There is no semantic difference between the names *Grjóta* and *Gryta*; the first is a compound of *grjót* (n.; cp. E. *grit*) 'gravel, pebble, stones' and *á* 'a river'; the second is a simplex name, consisting of the stem *grjót* alone with a vowel mutation. Various uncompounded old river names are to be found as the first component in the names of Icelandic fjords and valleys, such as *Bera* (< *bera* 'a female bear': *Berufjörðr*), *Bílda* (< *bílda* 'an axe': *Bíldudalr*), *Birna* (< *birna* 'a female bear': *Birnudalr*), *Bitra* ('the bitter or biting one': *Bitrufjörðr*), *Leira* ('the clayey one': *Leirufjörðr*, *Leiruvágr*), *Otra* (< *otr* 'an otter': *Otrardalur*). Three of those mentioned above are to be found in Lewis, as Magne Oftedal has shown: *Gryta* (now the River Greed), *Stjórn*, as the first component in the name Stornoway, and *Leira*, south of the River Greed. He has also convincingly argued that Abhainn Gheardha north of Tolsta is < ON *Gerða* (see NSL, 124), the Gress River < ON *Grœða* (< *grœða* 'to make grow'; cp. NSL, 134), and the River Barvas, Abhainn Bharbhais, < ON *Borga*; Barvas, he suggests, is ON *Borgu-óss* 'the mouth of the river *Borga*'. It has occurred to me that Fasgro in Lewis may represent the ON river name *Fáskrúð*, which is also to be found in Iceland. The Icelandic evidence and Hebridean compounds like *Stjórnarvágr* and *Leiruvágr* serve to show the importance of river names in the onomastic pattern.

Names of Icelandic fjords, bays and creeks are mostly compounds in *-fjörðr*, *flói*, *-vík*, *-vágr*. However, two fjord names are without such endings: *Skjálfandi* and *Rangali*. The first components in the following appear to be old fjord names: *Álptafjörðr* (*Álpti* < *álpt* 'a female swan, pen'), *Finnafjörðr* (= **Firnir* < *firm* 'a wilderness'), *Hellisfjörðr* (= *Hellir* < *hallr* 'stone, rock'), *Trékyllisvík* (= *Trékyllir*). Other fjord names are called after rivers, in addition to those already mentioned: *Furufjörðr* (< *Fura*), *Skálmarfjörðr* (< *Skálm*). The first elements in various compounded fjord names allude to fauna or flora: *Arnarfjörðr* (< *orn* 'an eagle'), *Hrafnarfjörðr* (< *hrafnn* 'a raven'), *Hrútafjörðr* (< *hrútr* 'a ram'), *Kvígindisfjörðr* (< *kvígindi* 'a young cow'), *Reyðarfjörðr* (< *reyðr* 'a kind of whale'. *Reyðr* is also the name of a mountain), *Hvalfjörðr* (< *hvalr* 'a whale'), *Urthvalafjörðr* (< *urthvalr* 'a kind of whale'), *Þorskafjörðr* (< *þorskr* 'a codfish'),

Bjarnarfjörður (< *björn* 'a bear'), Dýrafjörður (< *dýr* 'a deer; animal in general'), Hestfjörður (< *hest* 'a horse, stallion'. *Hestr* is also the name of a mountain), Skötufjörður (< *skata* 'a skate'), Eskifjörður (< *eski* 'ash wood'), Þistilfjörður (< *þistill* 'a thistle'; the term occurs also in the names of skerries). The first components in certain Icelandic names point to Norwegian nature.

5. The CONTEXTUAL aspect. At this stage we study each name in the light of its neighbours. No place name is totally isolated from all others. There is, as we have seen, an obvious connection between the names of rivers on the one hand and those of valleys and fjords on the other. In contrast to the convention mentioned above, however, many rivers in Iceland take their names from the valleys through which they run (*Vatnsdals-á*, *Svínadals-á*) or the fjords they flow into (*Hrútafjarðar-á*, *Eyjafjarðar-á*). Donald Macaulay's article on the place names of Bernera in the *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness* is concerned with the name pattern for a whole island (Macaulay 1971). For the purpose of studying the context of Norse names in the Western Isles it is, of course, essential that all the Gaelic names should be taken into consideration. One of the pertinent questions we ask when exploring the contextual aspect of any given Norse name is simply this: which of its Gaelic neighbours, if any, appear to be translations from Norse? As is clear from Macaulay's article, a careful study of the names on an island like Bernera, whether or not their meanings are now understood by the local native speaker, may reveal traces of bilingualism suggestive of the period when Norse was still at least passively understood in the Western Isles, even after Gaelic had become the normal language of communication. It can hardly be a mere coincidence that the partly Norse *Loch Sannдавat* 'the sandy loch' in Lewis lies close to the genuine Gaelic *Loch na Gainmheich* which has the same meaning; such a situation occurs more than once there. No less intriguing, though, is the name *Loch Uisg an t-Soluis* which is located on the Ordnance Survey map a short distance west of Stornoway. I suspect that the Gaelic form is a mistranslation of ON *Ljósavatn*, which is a compound of the adj. *ljóss* 'light, bright, shining' and *vatn* 'a loch'; such a name occurs in Iceland, and the adjective

ljóss is used in Norwegian river, fjord and island names (see NSL, 206 and 211). In my view, the Gaelic translation of Ljósavatn is a very clever double pun, which depends not only on the fact that the adjective *ljós-* and the noun *ljós* (n.) 'a light' = Gaelic *solus* (m.) are identical in sound, but also on the ambivalence of the term *vatn*, which means both 'a loch' and also 'uisge, water'. The humorous Lewisman who was responsible for the Gaelic version *Loch Uisg an t-Soluis* may have been poking fun at the name giving habits of his Norse-speaking ancestors.

What makes it particularly difficult at this stage to reach satisfactory conclusions about the contextual aspect of Norse place names is the fact mentioned earlier that not enough names have been collected; our evidence is therefore inadequate.

Looking beyond the Western Isles, it is intriguing to note that four significant names *Leirehbagh* < ON *Leiruvágr*, *Eshaval* < ON *Esjuffjall* (see Oftedal 1954, 395), *Ceose* < ON *Kjós(s)* and *Lachasay* < ON *Laxá*, which occur in Lewis not very far from each other, have namesakes in Iceland where they are neighbours: *Leiruvágr*, *Esja*, *Kjós* and *Laxá*. The river name *Laxá* is extremely common, but the other three names *Leiruvágr*, *Esja* and *Kjós* are quite rare. The river which flows into the bay of *Leiruvágr* is now called after it, *Leirvogsa*, but the original name must have been **Leira*, as I have indicated earlier. *kjóss* (m. in Norw.) = *kjós* (f. in Icel.) denotes 'a hollow' or, on a larger scale, 'a low lying area surrounded by high hills or mountains'; *esja* (f.) means 'soapstone, steatite'. What is interesting about the Icelandic situation is that this region has firm Hebridean connections. The *Book of Settlement* (1972, 23-24) includes the following account:

Hrappr, Björn Buna's son, had a son called Ørlygr whom he gave in fosterage to the Holy Bishop Patrekr of the Hebrides (*Suðreyjar*). He had a great desire to go to Iceland, and asked the bishop for guidance. The bishop provided him with church timber, an iron bell, a plenarium, and consecrated earth which Ørlygr was to place beneath the corner posts of his church. The bishop told him to settle at a place where

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from the sea he could keep two mountains in view, each with its valley. He was to make his home below the southern mountain where he was to build a house and a church dedicated to Saint Columba. [...].

Ørlygr and his men put out to sea, and had such a rough passage they had no idea where they were. Then Ørlygr made a solemn vow to Bishop Patrekr that if they made land he would name the place after him. Shortly afterwards they sighted land, having drifted west of Iceland. They came ashore at a place now called Ørlygshöfn, but the fjord that cut into the land from there they called *Patreksfjörður*. They stayed there over the winter.

In the spring Ørlygr got his ship ready to sail, but some of his crew settled down there [...]. Ørlygr journeyed east round Barð, and once he had got beyond Snæfellsjökull and sailed into the bay he could see two mountains, each of them with a valley cutting into it. Then he knew this was the place he had been guided to, so he made for the southern mountain. This was Kjalarnes, which his cousin Helgi had already claimed. Ørlygr stayed the first winter with him, and in the spring with Helgi's approval he laid claim to the land between Mógilsá and Ösvífrslækr, making his home at *Esjuberg* where he built a church as he had promised, [...] There was a man from Caithness called Svartkell. He took possession of land between Mógilsá and Eilífsdalsá. [...] Valþjófr Ørlygsson of *Esjuberg* took possession of the entire *Kjós*, and made his home at Meðalfell.

One historical detail is evidently wrong here: no Hebridean bishop in the ninth century, neither holy nor otherwise, is known by the name of Patrick. It is generally now taken for granted that the anecdote alludes to St. Patrick of Ireland. The 'southern mountain' Ørlygr was guided to is *Esja*, and *Kjós* lies on the other side of the mountain. *Leiruvágr*, it should be noted, is located not far from *Esjuberg*; it marked the boundary of the land-claim of Ørlygr's brother. The historical value of the *Book of Settlements* should not be overrated, but it would be short-sighted to reject out of hand its relevance to the study of Icelandic place names. It seems quite possible that certain

names in Iceland may have been given by settlers from the Hebrides. I also believe that further investigations of the distribution of place name elements will probably throw new light on the Norwegian background of the onomastic situation in Iceland and the Western Isles.

6. The HISTORICAL aspect. Like other humanistic subjects, the study of place names impinges on various other disciplines, including history. From Norse place names in the Western Isles we glean certain snippets of information relating to the islanders from the ninth century onwards. Here, however, I shall confine my remarks to a single topic: names compounded with *papi-*, a term denoting 'an Irish priest or hermit'. It was borrowed from Irish into Norse, but originally it came from the Latin *pápa*, *pupu* 'father, pope, priest, anchorite'. The earliest Irish source using the term in the sense 'a hermit' is the *Féilire Oengusso* (c. 800), but the noun turns up in several Norwegian and Icelandic writings from the twelfth-thirteenth centuries.

The distribution of *papi*-names is quite interesting. There is one such name on the Isle of Man, Glen *Phaba*, which evidently represents ON *Papá*, and another in Cumberland: *Papcaster*. Altogether there appear to be ten *papi*-names in the Hebrides: five islands bear the name Pabbay (< ON *Papey*) and three places are called Paible (< ON *Papbyli*); in North Uist, Taransay and Lewis. Finally, there is Papanish (< ON *Papanes*) on Bernera, and Papadil on Rhum (< ON *Papadalr*, a name that also occurs in Orkney). Two *papi*-names are to be found in Caithness, seven in Orkney, at least ten in Shetland, two in the Faroes, and five in Iceland: *Papbyli*, *Papafjorðr*, *Papafell*, *Papey* and *Papi* (the name of a pool in a certain river). One of the Hebridean Christians who settled in Iceland was Órlygr's cousin Ketill (see above) who "made his home at Kirkjubœr, where the *Papar* had been living before and where no heathen was allowed to stay" (*Book of Settlements*, 1972, 123). Ketill is said to have sailed from the Hebrides to Iceland, and one is bound to wonder whether he had been in touch with some *Papar* before he set out from the Western Isles. The Icelandic *Papbyli* was probably located not far from Kirkjubœr.

Did the *Papar* reach Norway? There is no documentary evidence to support the idea, but the name *Papholmane* which

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refers to a group of small islands in Hordaland suggests that some ambitious Irish hermits may have tried to convert the Lochlannaigh to Christianity, perhaps for the purpose of repaying them for all the murder and mayhem they caused in Ireland.

II

Two 13th century Norse documents which are now lost would have been relevant to the study of Hebridean place names had they survived. In his important article on encyclopaedic works from the library of Sturla Þórðarson (1214-1284), the author of *Hákonar saga*, *Íslendinga saga* and other historical works, Stefán Karlsson discusses among other items of medieval learning a map of the world (*mappa mundi*) which once belonged to Sturla. Before the map was destroyed in the fire of Copenhagen 1728, Árni Magnússon, the manuscript collector, made several references to it. On the basis of Árni's notes, Stefán Karlsson has shown that the map was far more accurate and contained more names than other Icelandic maps from the medieval period (Karlsson 1988, 43-44). Since the number of names was a striking feature of the map, it is highly likely that the Western Isles of Scotland would have been well represented. In this context it is worth bearing in mind that before the Treaty of Perth in 1266, when the boundary line between Norway and Scotland was fixed to coincide with the Pentland Firth, the political status of the Hebrides was a major concern for the Norwegians. Sturla lived in Norway from 1263 to 1271 and 1277-1278. It is not known whether the map was made by Sturla himself or by someone else, and its precise date is a matter for speculation; however, it appears to have been drawn some time during the period 1251-1284.

In his detailed account of Hákon's expedition to the Western Isles in 1263, Sturla makes the following statement: "King Hákon had had a list made of all the islands that he claimed for himself to the west of Scotland. And the King of Scots had named those that he would not let go; they were Bute, Arran, and the Cumbraes. But about the rest there was little conflict

between the claims of the kings." There can be little doubt that a copy of King Hákon's list of the Hebrides must have been in the Royal Archives in Bergen when Sturla was compiling his *Hákonar saga* (1264-1265), and that he used the list when he described various voyages west of Scotland undertaken by King Hákon and his men. It is a great pity that both Sturla's map and King Hákon's island list should have been lost. The earliest extant catalogue of the Western Isles of Scotland is the one compiled by Dean Munro in 1549.

III

Considering the fact that the Icelandic sagas taken as a whole contain numerous references to the Hebrides (*Suðreyjar*), it seems extraordinary how few Hebridean place names actually occur in them, apart from those in *Hákonar saga*. *Orkneyinga saga*, for example, mentions the Hebrides frequently, yet the only actual name from the islands mentioned in the prose part of the saga is *Ljóðhús* = 'Lewis'. However, the saga author quotes an eleventh century Icelandic poet called Arnórr who was associated with Earl Þorfinnr of Orkney and states in one of his poems that the earl fought an important battle at a place called *Vatnsfjorðr*. No commentator annotating *Orkneyinga saga* or the poem concerned knew the location of *Vatnsfjorðr* until 1930 when A. B. Taylor identified the place as Loch Vatten in Skye.

While there is ample documentary evidence to show strong cultural and historical links between Iceland and Orkney from the eleventh century to the thirteenth, there is no indication that such links existed between Iceland and the other two Scottish island groups: Shetland and the Western Isles. And in spite of the Icelandic *Færeyinga saga* which deals with certain events belonging to the early eleventh century, there seems to have been hardly any cultural intercourse between Iceland and the Faroes before and during the period of saga writing. Most of the references in the Icelandic sagas to Shetland and its inhabitants reached Iceland through Orkney, and then probably in a written form. Also, it should be noted that the

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historical information contained in *Færeyinga saga* appears to have come from Norway, with which Iceland had much closer ties than with any other country before the fifteenth century. There is a simple reason for this cultural situation in the North Atlantic, namely that both Norway and Orkney had important intellectual and political centres which attracted Icelandic poets, the principal tradition bearers in Northern Europe in the Middle Ages. Nothing like Trondheim and Bergen in medieval Norway or Birsay and Kirkwall in Orkney ever existed in Shetland, the Hebrides or the Faroes. As a result of this, very little is known about Shetlanders, the Faroe Islanders and the Hebrideans in the Viking Period and later, and there are very few Shetlandic or Faroese place names to be found in early Icelandic sources. The fact that the total number of Hebridean place names in the sagas is much bigger than that of those in the two northern archipelagos is easily explained. References to Shetland, the Faroe Islands and the Hebrides in early Icelandic sources are almost exclusively confined to certain episodes in the history of Norwegian and Orcadian rulers. The most famous of such episodes are, of course, the two Norwegian expeditions to the Western Isles; the first in 1098 which is described by Snorri Sturluson in *Magnúss saga berfætts*, and the second in the summer of 1263 of which there is a detailed account in Sturla Þórðarson's *Hákonar saga*. The Hebridean place names mentioned in connection with the first expedition – *Ljóðhús* = Lewis, *Ívist* = Uist, *Skíð* = Skye, *Týrvoist* = Tiree, *Sandey* = Sanday and *Íl* = Islay – are preserved in two contemporary poems, quoted by Snorri, but there is no indication that he had any real knowledge himself of Hebridean topography. On the other hand, as I have already mentioned, the much more numerous Hebridean names in *Hákonar saga* probably depended on the list King Hákon had compiled before he set out from Norway. One thing is certain: Sturla never visited the Western Isles; in fact, he did not leave his native shore until 1263 when he was banished from Iceland and forced to go to Norway.

When we consider all the Hebridean names in *Hákonar saga* and other Icelandic sources, we can hardly fail to realise that they fall into two distinctive groups. On the one hand are those

which were evidently coined by native Norse speakers using native materials: *Eyin helga*, *Iona*, *Raunøy* (< *Hraunøy*), *Rona*, *Sandey*, *Vatnsfjörðr*, *Vestriðfjörðr*. These names have Norwegian analogues. But most of the Hebridean names in the sagas appear to be adaptations of earlier (Celtic) names, even though they give the impression of being Norse: *Bót*, *Bute*, *Myl*, *Mull*, *Hirtir*, *St. Kilda*, etc., etc.

No one should be fooled by the superficial Norseness of names like *Kjarbarey*, *Melansey* and *Kumreyjar* to name but three examples. They belong to a considerable number of foreign geographical terms which were given such plausible Icelandic or Norwegian forms that the native speaker could not detect any foreign flavour about them. Such names are rooted in alien cultures, yet they look and sound just as thoroughly vernacular as any other names; they have been completely assimilated to the Norse language. As an example one could mention the name *Jórsalir* which sounds a perfectly normal Icelandic name: it is a strong masculine i-stem, plural in form, and there is nothing Hebrew about it although it actually refers to the holy city of Jerusalem. The problem posed by the question: What is the derivation of *Jórsalir*? cannot be solved by phonological means, and it would be misleading to claim simply that it comes from Jerusalem; rather it is a Norse compound of the elements *jór* (cp. *Jór-vík* = York) and *salir* (pl. of *salr* 'a hall', which serves as the second element in certain settlement names, such as *Uppsalir* in Sweden, Norway, Iceland); however, *Jórsalir* faintly echoes the name of the town Jerusalem in *Jórsalaheimr* or *Jórsalaland* (*Orkneyinga saga*). Other native sounding geographical names of distant places abroad are *Anþekja* (Antiochia), *Anþekjuþjóðr* (the Bay of A.), *Átalsfjörðr* (the Bay of Attalia in Asia Minor), *Buslaraborg* (Basel), *Feneyjar* (Venice), *Norvasund* (the Strait of Gibraltar), *Bláland* (Ethiopia), *Serkland* (North Africa), *Akrsborg* (Acre), *Dyrakksborg* (Durazzo in Albania). And there are many more.

The name *Ljóðhús*, 'Lewis', which is a neuter noun in the plural, sounds and looks like a Norse settlement name. One of the principal trading centres in Scandinavia in the Viking Period had the same name; the market town *Ljóðhús* was located not far from Gothenburg in Sweden. It is difficult to

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avoid the suspicion that the Norsemen simply named Lewis, or a particular place in it, after the Scandinavian market town. In this connection, it is worth noting, as Arne Kruse has pointed out to me, that several places in Norway are called Bjarkøy after the Swedish market town of that name (now Birka), which was the other main trading centre in Viking Age Scandinavia. However, in spite of the Norse appearance of *Ljóðhús* the name may go back to a long forgotten Celtic ancestor. We should not forget the lesson we have learnt from both Jerusalem and *Jórsalir*, its elegant Norse alternative form.

Note

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