

# LONGHOUSES BELOW THE WAVES: A PLACE-NAME ANALYSIS OF THE NORSE SETTLEMENT OF TIREE

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[Tiree] had a more ancient name, *Rioghachd bar fo thuin*, i.e. ‘The kingdom whose summits are lower than the waves’ [...] the lowest and flattest country perhaps in Scotland.<sup>2</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

It has long been a received wisdom that the Norse share of township and farm names declines from almost 100% in Orkney to 33% in Islay.<sup>3</sup> From this analysis, dubbed the ‘Ratio Approach’ by Macniven, it may have been concluded that Tiree was more lightly and more briefly settled by the Norse than islands to the north and west, fitting in a geographically appropriate way somewhere on a scale between Lewis and Islay. But a new and more detailed analysis of the place-names of Tiree has suggested that a strong Scandinavian influence was felt on the island, an influence that possibly lasted into the fifteenth century.<sup>4</sup>

## A FEAST OF PLACE-NAMES

Tiree has not detained the archaeologist long. A number of finds were made in the eighteenth century: two coin hoards dated to AD 970-80 were dug up near Iron Age forts and are now held in the British Museum;<sup>5</sup> a probable Norse gold armlet was found but is now lost; and a pagan Viking burial was discovered in Cornaigbeg.<sup>6</sup> In the only modern excavation on the island, MacKie found a Norse comb in the walls of the Iron Age broch Dùn Mòr Bhalla.<sup>7</sup>

In addition, Tiree has been handed only a minor part on the stage of the Norse literary canon. In the eleventh-century poem *Magnúsdrápa*, Björn *kreppendi* described one of the overseas expeditions of Magnús

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1 I would like to thank, in particular, Dr Berit Sandnes and Professor Richard Cox for their help with this analysis.

2 *Old Statistical Account* x, 393.

3 Macniven 2007.

4 Holliday 2016a.

5 Graham-Campbell 2011, 255.

6 *Old Statistical Account* x, 402.

7 MacKie 1974, 143-44 and plate XIIIg.

*berføettr*, king of Norway between 1093 and 1103. In it he wrote, '[...] rǫnn rauð Tyrvist innan teitr vargr í ben margri [...]' [In Tiree the happy wolf coloured his tooth red in many a wound], whilst listing an additional number of Norse island names along the west coast of Scotland, such as *Ljóðbús* ('Lewis') and *Ívist* ('North Uist').<sup>8</sup> This demonstrates that the skald's audience was familiar with the principal landmarks of the Norse expansion zone in the North Atlantic. As will be discussed later, the *Orkneyinga saga* also contains a reference to Tiree.

But if the evidence from the disciplines of archaeology and skaldic poetry is a thin gruel, the field of onomastics has given us a feast. 18 km long and 1 to 10 km wide, Tiree is a 'Goldilocks' island for the single researcher; not too big and not too small. It has a heterogeneous landscape and has been the most fertile of the Hebrides, with a population that reached 4,453 in 1831 during the kelp boom.<sup>9</sup>

In 1768, the fourth Duke commissioned James Turnbull to survey and map the post-medieval landscape of the island in exquisite detail in advance of the introduction of the crofting system, and the present Duke has inherited one of the best archives of estate records in Scotland. The strong oral traditions of the island also attracted fieldworkers from the School of Scottish Studies in Edinburgh between the 1950s and 1970s, and only Uist has more recorded material.<sup>10</sup>

The first surveyors of the Ordnance Survey (OS) paid a great deal of attention to Tiree, collecting 676 place-names at a density of 7.8 names/km<sup>2</sup>. While less than that in many of the Northern Isles, this was more than any other substantial Hebridean island; Coll has a density of 4.6, whilst Skye has 2.1. Unlike the rest of the Hebrides, the whole of Tiree was mapped at the 25 inch scale because of its widespread cultivation. This work by the OS on Tiree rescued twenty-three names with Norse elements, names, such as Tràigh Thallasgair on Craignish, which would otherwise have become extinct.

A notable contributor to their fieldwork on the island was John Gregorson Campbell, who had been inducted as the Church of Scotland minister of Tiree and Coll in 1861. Campbell, a noted folklorist, comfortable with written and spoken Gaelic, seems to have been very

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8 *Norsk-Islandske Skjaldedigtning*, 405, quoted in Jennings and Kruse 2009, 81.

9 *Argyll Estate Instructions*, xxix.

10 The Tiree recordings have all been digitised and catalogued. They are available on <http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk>.

interested in the work of the Ordnance Survey, and was noted as an informant for 88% of the names recorded by them on the island. But because of (or possibly despite) Campbell's attention, the cartographers gaelicised Tìree's Scandinavian toponyms enthusiastically; Port Aoir became Port Daor and translated as 'Dear Port', whilst Cnoc Charrastain made it to the Name Book as 'Christian Knoll' before someone put a pen through the entry.<sup>11</sup> We must therefore treat the orthography of the Norse names collected by the OS on Tìree with some caution.

Over the last thirty years, the author has collected over 3,300 Tìree place-names, adding some 126 probable Scandinavian names to the 129 collected by the OS.<sup>12</sup> This allows us to study medieval settlement on Tìree in greater detail than earlier scholars. However, we must remember that the surviving forms of many Norse place-names in the oral tradition are likely to have changed considerably over 800 years of transmission by Gaelic speakers. We can demonstrate this with names that do have early recorded forms: e.g. Cowelche in 1541<sup>13</sup> > Co' Dhèis today, and Mannawallis in 1390<sup>14</sup> > Manal today. Names that are still widely used – Ruaig, Balabhaig, or Haoidhnis – vary little between respective sources. But some names were hanging by a very fragile thread, known only to one or two people. For example, the OS collected Loch Earblaig in 1878, but the forms Loch Eallabal and Loch na Buaille were collected by the author from the only two islanders who still knew a name for the place. These 'last gasp' names, 14% of the total, are highly likely to have drifted away from their original form. Most fieldwork on Tìree has been with islanders born in the 1920s and 30s, and it is noticeable how the place-name vocabulary of the island has shrunk in the last twenty years, something also noted by Cox on Lewis.<sup>15</sup>

#### *TÌR AN EÒRNA*: THE LAND OF BARLEY

As well as its sunshine and wind, Tìree is well known for its past fertility and its ring of shell sand beaches. The island's exceptional cropping, particularly its barley harvest, were noted by many writers.

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11 *OS Name Book* 28, 59.

12 Holliday 2016a.

13 *Exchequer Rolls of Scotland* 17, 527.

14 *Acts of the Lords of the Isles*, 29.

15 Cox 2002, 14.

Walker reported in 1764 that two years previously a crop of barley was harvested thirty-five days after sowing:

Tirey has always been remarkable among the western Islands for its Fertility and the Goodness of its Crops [...] Of the 30,720 Acres which the island is supposed to contain, there appears, by the nearest Guess, to be fully two thirds or 20,000 Acres cultivated, which is a much larger Proportion than is to be found in any of the Islands.<sup>16</sup>

In 1541, Tiree was taxed at 686 bolls of bere, while Coll paid only 150.<sup>17</sup> There are eleven probable Norse enclosure names ending in *-gerði*, ‘fence, field’, or *-geiri*, ‘a triangular piece of land’, on Tiree,<sup>18</sup> compared to three in Carloway.<sup>19</sup>

Independent farming units on Tiree need access to four agricultural zones: the shore for seaweed collection, machair for winter grazing, in-bye land for arable and settlement, and sliabh for summer grazing, as well as peat and turf cutting. At least fifteen shieling place-names have survived on Tiree, and despite the island’s small size it appears that a form of transhumance was practised. Gaelic (ScG) Àirigh Fhionnlaigh, ‘the shieling of Finlay’, in Caolas, is one of a number of Tiree shieling names less than a kilometre from the site of the closest mapped post-medieval settlement. In Assynt and on Fair Isle, many shielings have also been identified close to their parent settlement, although this does not appear to fit the standard transhumance model.<sup>20</sup> These may be examples of ‘home shielings’ in tathfolds just outside the head dyke.<sup>21</sup> Thirteen Tiree shieling names were coined with the ScG *àirigh*, one, on the remote slopes of Beinn Haoidhnis, with the Old Norse (ON) *sætr*,

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16 McKay 1980, 181.

17 Dodgshon 1998, 68.

18 Àigeir, Boidhegeir, Cròinegeir, Croisgeir, Fòirneigeir, Gèisgeir, Groidegear, Hùnasgeir, Innisgeir, Òinegeir, and Sodhaigeir (see Holliday 2016a).

19 Cox 2002, 173, 268, 380.

20 Macgregor 1986, 98.

21 See Tait 2012, 303; Dodgshon 2015, 135.

whilst two were possibly coined with the ScG to ON loanword *ærgi*.<sup>22</sup> There has long been a debate as to why settlers in parts of the Norse expansion zone loaned *ærgi* alongside, or in place of, *sætr*, and it may be that further study of the Tiree material could help to shed light on this subject.<sup>23</sup>

The lack of a substantive harbour was regarded as a problem in the early modern period.

[...] all the boats in Tiree, great and small, are hauled up high and dry [...] from the end of November to the end of March. During this time, the island is nearly locked up from all intercourse with other countries [...].<sup>24</sup>

However, eight small inlets with names ending in ON *-bryggja* ('landing place'), an uncommon generic in the rest of the Hebrides, survive.<sup>25</sup> It is plausible that Tiree's location on the sea lanes to the south, as well as the island's rich harvests of barley, made it a crucial part of Scandinavian naval and trading routes.

#### TIREE BEFORE THE NORSE

Tiree is likely to have been on the frontier of the kingdom of Dál Riata, with Picts inhabiting regions to the north and west. An annalist, writing several centuries *post factum*, described a visit to Tiree by Saint Comgall in 565. There, the saint encountered a 'Pictish' raiding party ('multi de Pictonibus').<sup>26</sup> Although the language of the early church on Tiree must have been Gaelic, we cannot assume that it was the only language spoken on Tiree before the arrival of the Norse, as the

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22 From the Scottish Gaelic *àirigh*: *Àirigh a' Mheannain*, 'the shieling of the young goat'; *Àirigh Fhionnlaigh*, 'the shieling of Finlay'; *An Àirigh Bhòidheach*, 'the beautiful shieling' (two of); *Corrairigh*, 'the pointed shieling' (twice); *Àirigh Fhearchair*, 'the shieling of Farquhar'; *Àirigh an Fhraoich*, 'the shieling of the heather'; *Àirigh Mhonaidh*, 'the shieling of the moor'; *Àirigh Fhearchair*, 'the shieling of Farquhar'; *Bothag na h-Àirigh*, 'the bothy of the shieling'; *An Àirigh*, 'the shieling'; *Àirigh na h-Aon Oidhche*, 'shieling of the one night'. From the Old Norse *sætr*: *Siadar*. From the Gaelic to Old Norse loanword *áirge*: *Caltronsairigh* and possibly *Hyring* (see Holliday 2016a, 121).

23 Fellows-Jensen 1980, 64-74; Grant 2003, 128-39.

24 *New Statistical Account*, 217.

25 *Borabrig*, *Cròdhabrig*, *Dusbrig*, *Eibrig*, *Ìbrig*, *Librig* (twice), and *Sgràbraig*.

26 *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae* 2, 11; Reeves 1854, 235.

dominance of the *Scotti* may have represented elite change as much as widespread migration, and the Picts made significant military advances in the 740s.<sup>27</sup>

The principal feature of pre-Norse culture on Tiree was its strong ecclesiastical presence. Later accounts of the saints' lives present Brendan as leading the way with the establishment of a church in 541, followed by Comgall of Bangor with a monastery.<sup>28</sup> The more contemporaneous *Vita S. Columbae* recorded both Columba and Findchán setting up monasteries on the island.<sup>29</sup> Of these the Columban Magh Luinge was recorded as still functioning in 774.<sup>30</sup> Insofar as the islands have currently been identified, Tiree is mentioned by Adomnán in five passages (I:19, I:36, II:15, II:39, and III:8), compared to Mull in three (I:22, I:41, and II:22), Skye in two (I:33 and II:26), Coll in two (I:41 and I:22), and Islay in one (II:23).<sup>31</sup> Three possible *annaid*-names, perhaps representing early church sites, have survived on Tiree: Annahynich (1509) in Hynish, Tauberbafanit (1654) in Sandaig, and Cnoc na h-Annaide (ScG, 'the hillock of the *annaid*') in Caolas.<sup>32</sup> The latter is surrounded by a cluster of ecclesiastical place-names, suggesting a substantial religious centre. Four Norse headland names – navigational and therefore often thought to be early – reference churches.<sup>33</sup> And Tiree, despite the difficulties of sculpting the local gneiss, has twelve examples of early medieval Christian sculpture at six sites, compared to nineteen carvings at twelve sites on Islay, nine carvings at six sites on Colonsay, six carvings at five sites on Mull, and none whatsoever on Coll.<sup>34</sup>

Tiree has six surviving chapel names in *cill* with intact dedications to saints from the sixth to the eighth century: Cill Brighde, Cill Choinnich, Cill Fhinnein (twice), Cill Moluag, and Cill Tunnain. Four of these six names have no surviving structures, but have been stitched into the landscape of the island by its oral tradition. It is now accepted that some *cill*-names were coined in the late medieval period, and that

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27 Downham 2015, 190.

28 Reeves 1854, 236.

29 *Life of Columba*, 279, 423.

30 U775.1: 'and Conall of Mag Luinge [...] died', in *Annals of Ulster*, 229.

31 *Life of Columba*; MacDonald 2010, 219-36.x

32 See Márkus 2012, 521; Holliday 2016a, 58.

33 Three of *Circnis* and one of *Crisnis*. See Holliday 2016a, 306, 318.

34 Fisher 2001, 123-25, 136-40.

dating them is therefore problematic.<sup>35</sup> Given the evidence of a strong influence of the early Church on the pre-Norse landscape, however, some Tíree *cill*-names are surely good candidates to be regarded as early medieval in origin. This is another area that could benefit from further research.

#### NORSE SETTLEMENT

As elsewhere in the Hebrides, accepted pre-Norse place-names are thin on the Tíree ground. Watson's reconstruction of the pre-Celtic name of the island itself, \**Heth*, is the only undisputed toponym in this category.<sup>36</sup> By virtue of their onomastic obscurity and topographical significance, Cadruim (a striking rock complex with cup markings) and Taelk (an Iron Age fort site) may also have been coined in the Pictish Iron Age. Of the three Tíree monastic names recorded in the early Gaelic literature (Artchain, Bledach, and Magh Luinge), it is significant that none have reliably survived to modern times, although the location of one, Teampall Phàraig on the Kenavara headland, is still visible.

One compelling piece of evidence for the disruptive nature of Scandinavian settlement is the apparent lack of any Gaelic or pre-Norse place-names incorporated into the Norse names of Tíree as *ex nomine* onomastic units.<sup>37</sup> The usual understanding of a disruptive settlement process is the (violent) displacement of one language group by another. However, a community's internal dislocation within Tíree has also caused a substantial loss of traditional knowledge of the landscape in recent times. This was demonstrated by fieldwork in two townships. Balephetrish was cleared of its inhabitants in the nineteenth century to create a large farm that was recrofted in 1922. Fieldwork along a two-mile length of coastline added only two names to those collected by the Ordnance Survey. In Sandaig, eighty-two names were added to a similar length of shore. The indigenous — but resettled — population of Balephetrish had considerably less knowledge of their 'new' shoreline than the undisplaced crofters of Sandaig. It may be warranted to say, therefore, that we do not have to assume that the entire population of

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35 Butter 2007, 214; Márkus 2012, 537.

36 Watson 1993 [1926], 85 (e.g. *Ethicam terram* in *Life of Columba* I:19 – see Broderick 2013, 12).

37 Kruse 2005, 161.

the island had been led away in chains to account for the scarcity of pre-Norse place-names.

It is plausible that the unlocated castle of Isleborgh was in fact the Castel Loch Hyrbol shown on Blaeu's 1654 map on ScG Loch an Eilein, 'loch of the island', in Heylipol. Its name may derive from ON *íla* 'well or spring' + ON *borg* 'fort'. This fits in with one reconstruction of the well-documented but complex development of the township name Hilibol.<sup>38</sup>

#### THE SEQUENCE OF NORSE SETTLEMENT

A map of proposed primary Norse farms on Tiree has been reconstructed using well-known criteria: a simplex, unqualified form, topographical nature, relation to a neighbouring secondary settlement, early appearance in rentals, and survival as a settlement name to the present day. Because of the 'four zones' needed by an independent farming unit, later settlement of Tiree was achieved by subdividing the island into smaller 'slices' or triangles. Names in *bólstaðr* in the Norse expansion zone are regarded as secondary settlements, and it may be the case that names containing *ból* play a similar role on Tiree.<sup>39</sup> Figure 1 shows a model of Norse primary and secondary settlement.

On Shetland, secondary Norse settlement was on less-favoured ground, away from the coast.<sup>40</sup> This does not seem to have been the case on Tiree; secondary settlements developed as sizeable and independent units, often eventually worth more than their 'mother' estates. For example, the 1541 Crown Rental valued Gott (presumed primary) as two merklands and Kirkapol (presumed secondary) as six.<sup>41</sup> This implies that later Scandinavian settlements were carved out by powerful new arrivals, equal to the early settlers. This is plausible, considering Tiree was on the route of ninth and tenth-century Viking expeditions heading towards the Irish Sea. This is quite unlike secondary settlement of the more isolated Iceland.

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38 Holliday 2016b, 5-9.

39 Gammeltoft 2001.

40 Ibid., 202

41 Johnston 1991, 81, 84.





Figure 1: Norse primary (capitals) and secondary (lower case) settlements on Tíre.

### ‘PEAK VIKING’

A key question is the intensity of Scandinavian settlement on Tíre during the period of ‘peak Viking’. The 1509 Crown Rental lists thirty-one farming townships, twenty-two of which (71%) are Norse in origin.<sup>42</sup> In addition, four of the nine townships with Gaelic names today have Norse settlement or enclosure names within their boundaries. For example, Caolas contains the farm name Raonabol and the enclosure name Àigeir. All parts of the island appear to have been settled to some degree.

Detailed fieldwork is also available from Carloway on Lewis<sup>43</sup> and the island of Barra.<sup>44</sup> Carloway has 250 Norse names from a non-habitative

42 *Exchequer Rolls of Scotland* 13, 216-17.

43 Cox 2002.

44 Stahl 1999.



Figure 2: The distribution of probable Norse place-names on Tiree.

onomasticon of 3,806,<sup>45</sup> Tiree has 255 from 2,350, and Barra 196 from 2,627.<sup>46</sup> A glance at the first edition OS map shows how strongly the major landscape features of Tiree (and, to some extent, Barra) have been gaelicised, with an absence of stream, hill, and lake names ending in *-gro* (ON *gróf*), *-val* (ON *fjall*), and *-vat* (ON *vatn*). This is not necessarily because of Tiree's low-set geomorphology; the summit of Heastaval on Lewis is only 91 m, lower than Beinn Haoidhnis on Tiree at 141 m. This landscape re-gaelicisation can be interpreted, instead, to have been the result of intense competition for resources between Tiree's tightly-

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45 Cox 2002, 112.

46 Analysis by the author.

packed farming townships, leading to the renaming of hill grazings, beaches, and watercourses. For example, the island's highest hill is likely to have had a Norse navigational name in *fjall*, but was renamed to Beinn Haoidhnis and then subdivided into Beinn Mhanail and Beinn Bhaile Phuill. It is therefore reasonable to conclude that a visitor to the Norse Hebrides would have noticed relatively little difference in Scandinavian settlement intensity between the three islands.

#### THE DURATION OF NORSE SETTLEMENT

The *Orkneyinga saga* has well-recognised limitations as a historical source,<sup>47</sup> but the text and context of chapter sixty-six implies that the Norse language was understood in at least one important household on Tiree in 1135. The saga relates how Sveinn Ásleifarson was forced to seek sanctuary on the tiny island of Egilsay:

Lét byskup Svein þar vera um jólin, en eptir þat sendi byskup hann til Suðreyja í Tyrvist til þess manns, er Holdboði hét ok var Hundason; var hann þar hofðingi mikill ok tók allvel við Sveinni. Dvalðisk hann þar um ventrinn ok var vel virðr af allri alþýðu.

[The bishop let Svein stay there for the rest of the Christmas season, and afterwards sent him to Tiree in the Hebrides to a man called Holbodi Hundason, a great chieftain, who gave him a good welcome. He stayed there over the winter and everyone thought well of him.]<sup>48</sup>

The place-name evidence on Tiree supports a lengthy transition from Norse to Gaelic language dominance. Many of the Norse names of Tiree appear to have been well-‘curated’ by subsequent Gaelic-speaking islanders. We can only admire the fidelity of transmission in so many of the Norse names, for example Grianatobht, Naomhaig, Tòrasdal, Roisgal, Sgairinis, Sgaracleit, and Sgibinis. Numerous Norse loan words made their way into the island's onomasticon, as in ScG Cachaileith nam Fidean (‘gate of the spot uncovered at high-tide’), derived from ON *fit* (‘meadow land on the banks of a firth’). Many probable Norse place-names acquired the Gaelic definite article, as in An Ciaraig. 298 Gaelic

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47 See Jesch 2010, 153-73.

48 *Orkneyinga Saga*, 155; Translation from *History of the Earls of Orkney*, 127.

place-names on Tiree contain a Norse *ex nomine* onomastic unit, as in Bacanan Mòra Ghorraig ('the big dunes of *Gorraig*'). Several Norse place-names have not been lost but transferred; Creachasdal, likely to be a name in ON *dalr*, 'valley or area of ground', is now an islet name nearly 1 km offshore.

The modern Gaelic pronunciation of Tiriodh by islanders is quite different from its pronunciation by regional Gaels, a very unusual situation in the Hebrides. Local people pronounce *Tìr-eadh* [t'i: ʲəɣ] with first syllable stress and a terminal velar fricative. This has been strongly influenced by the Norse form *Týr Vist* with its emphasis on the specific first element. Regional Gaels today often say *Tìr-ì-dhe* [t'i 'ri: ʲə] with second syllable stress, which ultimately derives from the pre-Norse Gaelic *Tìr Iath*, and its emphasis on the specific second element.<sup>49</sup>

It was Watson who first pointed out that the Gaelic name for someone from Tiree – *Tiristeach* – derives from the ON *Týrvist*.<sup>50</sup> This contains the Old Irish habitation name suffix *-ach* at the end of the Norse name for the island. This implies that Gaelic speakers on Tiree were using the Norse name to describe the island for a substantial period.

Translation names occur when a place-name is accurately translated from one language to another. These are generally rare and are most likely to develop during a period when a community is fully bilingual.<sup>51</sup> An example on Tiree may be Coirceal from ON *korki*, 'oats' (itself a loan from the ScG *coirce*),<sup>52</sup> with ON *bóll*, 'rounded hill', alias ScG *Druim a' Choirce* ('the ridge of the oats').<sup>53</sup>

A greater-than-expected number of Tiree Norse place-names have a terminal *-an* or *-ain*. Some of these might be Norse to Gaelic loan words that have taken the Gaelic plural, diminutive, or locational suffix *-an*. Na Tangan and Tràigh nan Gilean are taken to be examples of this type.<sup>54</sup> But another possibility is that some contain a post-nominal (or post-positional) bound definite marker: the suffix *-inn* (m.), or *-in* (f.), which is common in Orkney, involving 12% of the names.<sup>55</sup> Examples

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49 Ailean Boyd, pers. comm.

50 Watson 1993 [1926], 85.

51 Sandnes 2010, 45.

52 Cleasby and Vigfusson 1874, 351.

53 Holliday 2016a, 181, 312.

54 *Ibid.*, 174, 337.

55 Sandnes 2010, 321.

from Orkney include Ayrean from ON *ærgin* ('the shieling(s)'),<sup>56</sup> Croan from ON *króin* ('the enclosure'),<sup>57</sup> Hewin and Hewing from ON *haug(r)inn* ('the mound'),<sup>58</sup> and Fursan from ON *forsinn* ('the waterfall').<sup>59</sup>

There are thirteen possible examples of the post-nominal bound definite marker on Tìree, including:

- Poll Bhalainn < ON *vaðillinn*, 'the shallow water': Valen is a common place-name in Norway.
- An Cnòmhainn < ON *króin*, 'the small pen, corner': this occurs in Orkney and there is a Kroan in Norway.
- Creag a' Briundainn < ON *brennan*, 'the land cleared by burning': see Brendo and Brinhyan in Orkney.<sup>60</sup>
- Eilean Greodhlainn < ON *hlíðin* (f.), 'the slopes', with ON *grjót*, 'stone': there is a Grøliin in Norway.
- Hying (twice) < ON *eyrrin*, 'the gravel bank' or ON *ærgin*, 'the shieling(s)': Øren is a common place-name in Norway, and Ayrean is found in Orkney.
- Manndalen. This form is first recorded in a Tìree rental of 1496, following the 1390 form Mannawallis, whilst the name was recorded as Manuel vel Mandalon in 1674: Manndalen is a very common place-name in Norway.

The suffix *-itt* after neuter nouns has not been found on Tìree, and also seems to be absent from the Orkney material. Case marking of the post-positional suffix, for example the dative plural *-um*, whilst present in Norway, was not found in the Orkney material.<sup>61</sup>

Other possible examples from the Hebrides are:

- Forsanan < ON *forsin*, 'the waterfall', on South Uist: Forsen being a very common name in Norway.
- Holman < ON *hólminn*, 'the islet', on Raasay: Holmen being a common name in Norway.<sup>62</sup>
- Clèithbhinn < ON *kleifin*, 'the cliff', on Raasay: Kleiven being quite a common name in Norway.<sup>63</sup>

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56 Ibid., 160.

57 Ibid., 106.

58 Ibid., 121.

59 Ibid., 231.

60 Ibid., 101.

61 Berit Sandnes, pers. comm.

62 MacKay 2013, 52.

63 Ibid., 12.

- Am Ballan on Islay < ON *balinn*, ‘the grassy bank’: Balen being a common name in Norway.<sup>64</sup>

The earliest known place-name using the post-nominal bound definite marker was recorded in Norway in 1336. However, the construction could be earlier than this, as explained by Sandnes: ‘The [post-nominal] article was traditionally seen as an innovation in the Middle Norwegian period (1350 – 1500) but the date is being pushed backwards in modern research’.<sup>65</sup>

It is possible that Norse loan-names preferentially attracted the Gaelic suffix *-an*, as seems to have happened with Gribun < Gnípan on Mull.<sup>66</sup> But the forms Greodhlainn, Hyring (twice), Briundainn, and Cnòmhainn phonologically support a derivation from *-in(n)* rather than *-an*. Only three of the Tìree examples were recorded prior to the present research, and more detailed fieldwork into the micro-toponyms of other Hebridean islands is urgently needed. The use of the post-nominal bound definite marker in the Hebrides must, therefore, remain speculative at this time, but, if correct, could push the date for the creation of Norse names on Tìree into the fourteenth century.

#### Gaelic Resettlement

The process whereby Norse hegemony over Tìree weakened, as the island came increasingly under the control of powerful Argyll chieftains, is still opaque. Gaelic township names such as Balnow – from Am Baile Nodha, ‘the new township’ – are first recorded on Tìree in the 1509 Crown Rentals. The Blaeu map of 1654, presumed to be based on a lost Pont MS dating from the period of 1583 to 1614, recorded a significant number of Gaelic settlement names on the island, for example Keulis from ScG An Caolas, ‘the narrows’. Another toponym mapped by Blaeu is Kory Finmackoul (‘the hollow of Finn mac Cumail’). This name locates the hero of the Finn Cycle of Tales (the Fiannaigheacht) to a natural amphitheatre around a striking glacial erratic on the shore of Balephetrish, covered with Bronze Age cup markings. This shows a Gaelic cultural marker strongly embedded in the island’s landscape by the sixteenth century.

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64 Macniven 2006, 358.

65 Sandnes 2010, 321-22.

66 Alasdair Whyte, pers. comm.

Norse place-names are not evenly scattered over Tìre, varying from none at all within the modern township boundaries of Kenovay and Middleton, to 27% in Hough. This variation could have been caused by incomplete Norse settlement, leaving pockets of Gaelic-speakers. A more convincing explanation, however, is that it was produced by a Gaelic resettlement that began as a focused plantation. One agent for this may have been the Church, which became an important landholder on Tìre in the later medieval period. The Prioress of Iona, for example, held Scarinish.<sup>67</sup>

There is some historical evidence for language transitions in Scotland. Sandnes has summarised the Norse-Scots transition in Orkney. The first known Scots letter from Orkney is dated to 1438, and the Impignoration took place in 1468. Yet the last documented use of spoken Norse was in the 1750s.<sup>68</sup> Norse, therefore, remained a vigorous language of the Orcadian farming community for two to three hundred years after the language of the elite changed from Norse to Scots. On Tìre, another language transition had just come to an end. The Scots-speaking ninth Earl of Argyll took possession of Tìre in 1679. The fifth Duke lived in London and communicated extensively in English with his chamberlain on Tìre from 1771 until his death in 1806.<sup>69</sup> The 1872 Education Act made education compulsory in Scotland, and English the language of tuition for all schools. Yet the 1901 Census of Tìre recorded that 44% of the island's population were still monoglot Gaelic speakers. For almost 300 years most islanders on Tìre spoke a different language from their landlord.

It seems plausible, therefore, that Norse was the dominant, high-status language on Tìre for three hundred years from the mid-ninth until the mid-twelfth century, and was widely spoken for a further two to three hundred years until the fifteenth century.

#### THE ETHNOLOGY OF NORSE SETTLEMENT

MacDonald has remarked on the treatment of the Norse in Hebridean tradition.

Mention of the establishment, or re-establishment, of Gaelic control in the Hebrides in the Middle Ages brings me to what

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67 MacLean-Bristol 1995, 81.

68 Sandnes 2010, 30.

69 *Argyll Estate Instructions*, 1.

must be one of the most remarkable features of all in this whole question of Norse tradition: that is the almost total loss of awareness in modern Gaelic oral tradition that there was at any time a powerfully established Norse-speaking, or even bilingual Gaelic/Norse population in the Hebrides [...] the surviving stories would usually confine the role of the Norse to that of a raiding and plundering enemy who were usually defeated.<sup>70</sup>

This stands in stark contrast to the flourishing ‘Viking’ industries of Up Helly Aa in Shetland and the Jorvik Centre in York.

There are a number of stories in the oral traditions of Tìree and Coll about *Na Lochlannaich*. The best-known is ScG Cath nan Sguab, ‘The Battle of the Sheaves’, recorded by Gregorson Campbell.<sup>71</sup> This tradition is a retelling, in a Tìree context, of a fourteenth-century Irish Fingalian story about the defeat of the Norsemen.<sup>72</sup> Although a version has also been collected from Colonsay,<sup>73</sup> the story has especially taken root on Tìree, remaining widely known to the present day. The tale portrays a heroic Hebridean underdog casting out the Norse villains. This recreated folk history of Scandinavian Tìree, however, is at odds with the argument presented here. Abundant place-name evidence on Tìree strongly points to a transformational and possibly violent Norse campaign to take control of the island, an extensive and prosperous subsequent Scandinavian settlement (probably alongside a lower status Gaelic-speaking population), and a later loss of Norse military and political control. This was followed by an extended period, possibly over a number of centuries, during which Norse influence slowly waned and a late medieval Gaelic culture gradually reasserted itself on the island. We know from genetic studies in the Hebrides that many descendants of the Norwegian settler population remained on the west coast. This ‘rewriting’ of Norse settlement history by later Gaels might be an echo of an earlier indigenous resentment of Scandinavian dominance.

#### CONCLUSION

Tìree, situated on the southern end of the archipelago and presently classified, both geographically and politically, as one of the ‘Inner

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70 MacDonald 1984, 277

71 Campbell 1891.

72 See *Duanaire Finn*, 55, 162.

73 MacNeill and MacLean 1953, SA1953.120.9.



Hebrides', has long been regarded as lightly brushed by the Norse wand. Prolonged fieldwork, however, has shown that the Scandinavian influence on Tiree was intense, extensive, and durable. The island's assets were its rich harvests of barley, a strategically useful location, its range of beach landing points, and, later, its highly Christianised landscape. The presence of such a large number of Norse place-names apparently containing the post-nominal bound definite marker, supports the hypothesis that Norse language and culture persisted among parts of the island's population into the late medieval period. Gaelic resettlement appears to have been gradual and only locally disruptive. Further place-name research on other west coast islands is urgently needed to develop our understanding of Scandinavian influence on the *Suðreyar*.

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