

The Norse Landscape of Skye and the Western Isles



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Thesis for the degree of Philosophiae Doctor (PhD)
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ABSTRACT

This thesis sought to answer the questions: why did the Norse choose to settle in Skye and the Western Isles? What was so attractive about the Skye and the Western Isles that it would attract generations of Norse settlement over the span of four-five centuries? In order to answer these questions, the Norse archaeological landscape in Skye and the Western Isles was examined. In particular, this thesis attempted to understand settlement patterns, power, and ethnicity within the region. In addition, a centre-periphery model was used on the basis of an excavation and fully published multi-period Norse elite site, Bornais, in order to understand settlement and power within the region. Due to the paucity of the archaeological record in the area, this thesis utilizes a landscape approach to the data. All available Norse-period (Viking Age – 800-1087 AD, and Late Norse, 1087-1250 AD) sites were compiled into a database. This database includes excavated material, finds through survey, chance or stray finds, and evidence from antiquarian investigations. Placename data was also utilized.

All available data were sorted by state of provenance. Sites without provenance or without accurate findspots were left out of the analyses. Sites with provenance were further divided into settlement, burial, stray find, or other. Using a methodology of spatial analysis, this thesis attempted to understand siting for Norse-period sites by several different methods. This thesis examined the landscape surrounding each site: if a site is in relation to a pre-Norse site (such as a site dating to the pre-Norse Iron Age); to place a site in its natural environment including agricultural land, elevation, and access to freshwater; and placing sites in their maritime landscape.

This thesis shows a high and significant level of the re-use of sites, and that the Norse deliberately chose to settle in locations already established as farmsteads in the pre-Norse Iron Age. The likely reason was that these sites often occupied strategic points of both the landscape and seascape, where the Norse could have utilized both farming and fishing at these locations. It does not appear that the Norse chose sites as a way of continuing the previous settlement patterns of the pre-Norse peoples, since sites that did not fit into a Norse settlement pattern do not seem to have been occupied in the Norse-period. Both the Norse settlement and burial pattern shows that the Norse settlers had a hierarchal settlement system with centres and peripheries. The largest and most important centres occupied the most strategic points of the seascape while still having access to arable land. This thesis was unable to add to the debate on ethnicity in the region, finding the archaeological record too difficult to interpret

anything substantial or new. However, it can be said that the Norse did not take into consideration non-Norse peoples when siting settlements and appear to have established communities based on their own needs and culture.

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Chapter 1 The structure and area of study of this thesis

1.1.1 Introduction

The first chapter will summarize the thesis. The second chapter will cover the natural landscape, including geology and the maritime landscape. The third chapter will examine previous research. The fourth chapter will be the theoretical perspectives of this thesis. The fifth chapter will be the methodology employed to examine the data. The sixth chapter will introduce the sites and data analysis, further divided by settlements burials¹, hoards, stray finds and other evidence. Chapter seven will examine the potential relationship of Norse settlement sites with pre-Norse settlements and monuments. Chapter eight will examine the Viking-period burial evidence, Chapter nine Viking and Late Norse hoards, and Chapter ten Viking and Late Norse stray finds. Chapter eleven is the data analysis of Norse settlement location. Chapter eleven is discussion of the data, followed by chapter twelve which will be

¹ Thus far, there have been no burials dated to the Late Norse period.

conclusions. Finally, the appendix will include non-provenanced sites and sites suspected to be Norse, but left out of the analysis.

This subsection will introduce the terminology and chronology related to the area of study. I will outline and define my terms, particularly those of ethnicity. This is due to the ambiguity and challenges related to the subject of ethnicity within archaeological scholarship. A chronology used for this area of study and thesis will also be defined, since the period such as defining the Viking Age in Scotland differs from the chronology used in Scandinavian scholarship.

1.1.2 Defining terms and ethnicity

Norse: Norse-speaking people from Scandinavia/Norse cultured or predominantly Norse cultured people between the late 8th to 13th centuries.

Picts: Pre-Norse, Celtic speakers of the Hebrides. There is no consensus on whether the Hebrides were populated with Picts, though there does appear to be Pictish culture present in the form of Pictish and Pictish cairns throughout the area of study. The presence of Irish monks due to historical and placename sources, and influence and potential territorial control from the historical Kingdom of Dál Riata further complicates the issue. The pre-Norse, Iron Age peoples are referred to as *Picts* for simplicity while I recognize there may have been a more complex ethnic and political situation in the pre-Norse Hebrides.

Irish: people from Ireland, Irish-speaking with a predominant Irish culture.

Hiberno-Norse: people of mixed Norse-Irish descent and or culture.

Gaels: Gaelic speakers from mainland Scotland, who are likely to have begun to immigrate to the Hebrides after the 11th or 12th centuries AD.

1.2.1 Area of Study



Figure 1: Skye and the Western Isles. Generated with Google Earth.

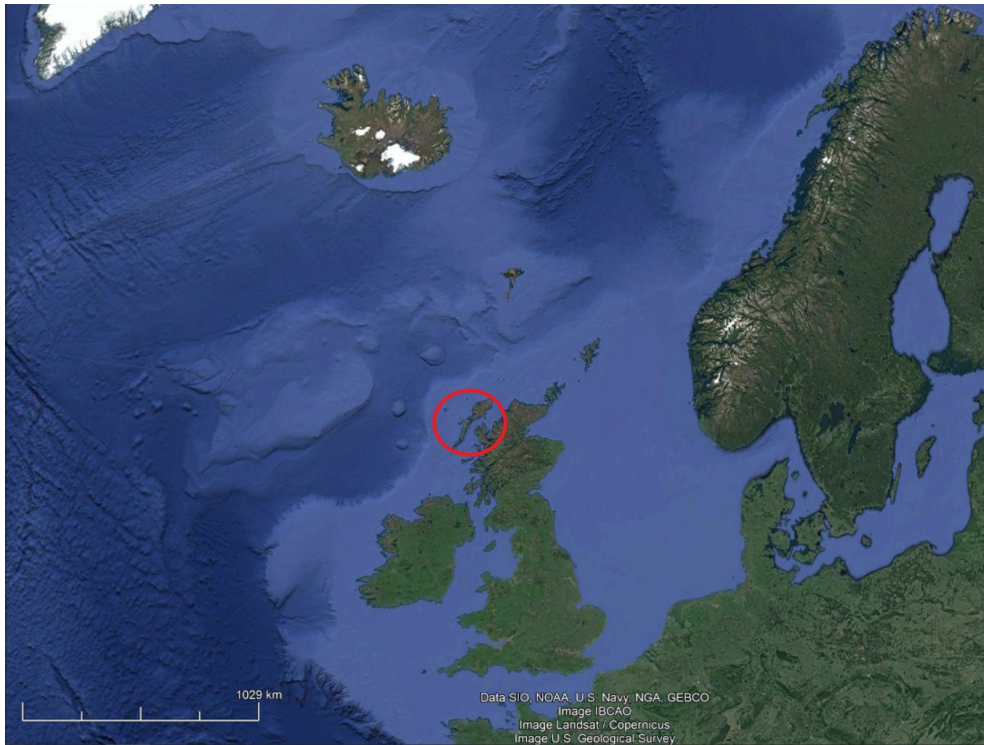


Figure 2: Skye and the Western Isles in relation to the North Atlantic world. Generated with Google Earth.

The area of study here is Skye and the Western Isles. These borders are semi-arbitrary: it is usual that Skye and the Small Isles are part of the Inner Hebrides. I have taken inspiration from Ian Armit who demarcated his area of study (1996). It is unknown if the Norse or others would have separated these islands or if they were considered separate from the mainland which they border.



Figure 3: major placenames mentioned in the thesis.

1.2.2 Chronology

The chronology for the Hebrides is as follows, as used by Ian Armit in *The Archaeology of Skye and the Western Isles* (1996):

Late Iron Age or Pictish Iron Age: 4th to 8th centuries AD, the pre-Norse Iron Age of the islands.

Viking Age: 790 to 1087 AD (Establishment of Kingdom of the Isles)

Late Norse Period: 1087 to 1266 AD (Treaty of Perth)

Late Medieval (also known as the Gaelic Renaissance): 1266-1500 AD

It should be noted that these divisions are largely arbitrary, and there is a lack of an archaeological chronology for the area of study.

1.3.1 Terminology

The term “Norse” can be ambiguous, but there is no clearer or to describe the peoples that arrived in this area of study in the late 8th century and remained as cultural distinction until the 13th or 14th centuries. That is not to say that there were not any divisions or complicated identities among the Norse, or that they would have used the term Norse. It is known from historical sources, such as the Irish Annals, that the Norse were often separated from others by their Paganism (ten Harkel, 2006) yet it is still likely that there were Christian or Christianized Norse in the Hebrides before the official conversion of Scandinavia in the late 10th century to mid-11th centuries (Abrams, 2007), and this may have not made them less “Norse”. Through genetic research, it is believed that most of the Norse came from Western Norway (Gilbert et al., 2019; Goodacre et al., 2005), but it is possible that they came from elsewhere, that others had mixed ethnicities, or represented other ethnic groups that “became” Norse (Raffield et al., 2016). The Norse is the simplest distinction, and “Scandinavian” may be used interchangeably, while I keep in mind the various problems associated with these terms.

1.4.1 Thesis summary

The main thesis of this research is to explore concepts of settlement, ethnicity and power within the Viking and Late Norse periods of Skye and the Western Isles through the archaeological record. In the Hebrides, and much of Norse Scotland, the problem of ethnicity has been prevalent within research of the Norse in Scotland in general (Jennings & Kruse, 2009). The role of ethnicity within Skye and the Western Isles has been particularly focused on placename evidence, due to the prevalence of Old Norse placenames and lack of pre-Old Norse placenames. Though the archaeological material has been utilized to explore relationships between the pre-Norse and Norse in Scandinavian Scotland (Crawford, 1987; Jennings & Kruse, 2005; Sharples et al., 2016), this study intends to synthesize the entire corpus of material from the area of study to explore these questions of ethnicity and power.

This thesis will conduct a landscape archaeological analysis, detailed in **4.1.1-4.1.2**.

Landscape archaeology can aid in interpreting an area of study where there is a disparity in the quantity and quality of data. Landscape archaeology can explore not only where the Norse had settled, but where they settled in relation to the pre-Norse settled landscape, and

topographical utilities such as natural harbours, agricultural and pastoral ground. A landscape analysis can thus further elucidate on archaeological data that would be difficult to analyse. A landscape analysis can be used to produce a fuller picture of the Norse landscape, and thus a fuller picture of Norse society.

The corpus of material from this area of study contains all available material ascribed to the Viking Age and Late Norse periods, from published excavations to antiquarian finds. This study includes all cases of available material, for example, a settlement site will be utilized for its excavated contents and their significance, along with its geographical location. A corpus of data will be constructed, and each Norse findspot will be examined through its archaeological, topographical, geographical and placename context.

1.4.2 Introduction to the area and material culture

Historical, archaeological (such as pottery, furnished Norse burials, Norse-style architecture), linguistic and genetic evidence suggest a migration from West Norway of Germanic/Scandinavian cultured peoples to Skye and the Western Isles during the Viking (790 - 1087 AD) and Late Norse (1087 – 1266 AD) periods of Scotland (Armit 1996), in what can be termed as the Norse period (790-1266 AD). The Norse period of Skye and the Western Isles is characterized by a dominance of Norse culture, exemplified in the archaeological record. The archaeological record of Skye and the Western Isles shows an abrupt end to pre-Norse, Iron Age culture (often called Pictish) such as the construction of the Atlantic roundhouse which terminates around the late 8th, and early 9th centuries (Armit, 1996; Graham-Campbell & Batey, 1998). This is exemplified by sites such as the Udal, North Uist, and Bostadh, Lewis, where late 8th century buildings are either abandoned or destroyed in favour of subsequent Norse settlement sites (Crawford, 1981; Crawford & Switsur, 1977; Selkirk, 1996). The placename evidence similarly shows an unusual and abrupt end to the pre-Norse

language² spoken in the islands (Crawford, 1987). In the pre-Norse period, the peoples of the Hebrides spoke a Celtic language, or languages (P and/or Q Celtic), but by the end of the

² There is no consensus on the exact Celtic language, or languages, spoken in the pre-Norse Hebrides at the moment.

Norse period in the 13th century, the original Celtic language was extinct (Armit, 1996). Old Norse (Norrøn) is the earliest stratum of placenames, barring names of islands such as Skye attested to in earlier historical sources, or names of “outfield”³ features, such as hills or heathland (Crawford, 1987).

The placename evidence shows a steep demographic and power shift in the form of *Celtic* (Pictish chiefdoms, the Kingdom of Dalriada, and Irish ecclesiastical power) to Norse/Scandinavian chiefdoms, jarldoms or *Sea Kings* (Griffiths, 2010) in the Hebrides, along with the Northern Isles, Caithness and western Scotland and likely elsewhere in northern Scotland. However, while this shift in power, demographics, culture, and language is not controversial, many aspects and consequences of Norse settlement have been historically disputed in scholarship, and Leslie Abrams has stated that even the “basics” of Norse settlement patterns has been contested or poorly understood (Abrams, 2007). These include the impact, and degree, of Norse settlement on the pre-Norse “Picts”, whether Pictish people survived and in what capacity, and the fate of Christianity in the Hebrides, along with no official (re)conversion date of the Hebrides after Norse colonization. The paucity of the historical sources until the 13th century *Chronicles of the Isle of Man* and later medieval clan histories furthermore lead to a difficulty in understanding Norse society (Armit, 1996, p. 204). It is assumed that the Hebrides were under the Jarldom of Orkney, but to what extent is difficult to discern, and what influence or authority the Jarldom of Orkney had over the Hebrides is unclear. The historical sources are all together silent on whether or not the monasteries or other Christian centres survived the Norse colonization, and recent re-evaluations of the monastery of Iona show that despite being raided multiple times in the 9th century AD, the monastery at Iona flourished (Thomas, 2004). Similarly, the monastery at Kildonnan, Eigg, likely survived Norse rule and colonization (Thomas, 2004, p. 37), though archaeological evidence has not been able to identify clear activity at monasteries, either Norse or pre-Norse monasteries in the Hebrides outside of Christian sculpture, and mentions of monasteries and church figures in the Irish Annals. The Hebrides, encompassing the major artery of sea-travel between Ireland and Norway would have played a role in politics in the North and Irish seas, yet the historical sources, especially for the Viking age, seldomly mention them. The Irish Annals discusses the Kingdom of Lochlann, a proposed, unlocated

³ The outfield and infield system is believed to have been in place since the Scandinavian Iron Age, and is believed to have been imported to the Hebrides. The infield designates the area of the farm primarily lived in, whereas the outfield designates the liminal areas mostly used for pasture..

kingdom where the Norse invaders stemmed from (Crawford, 1987). The possibility that this kingdom was located in the Hebrides has been raised, perhaps on the Isle of Eigg (Steinforth, 2019). However, the existence of this Kingdom in my area of study is difficult to prove archaeologically, and Arne Kruse has suggested the most likely location of this kingdom was in Western Norway (Kruse, 2017). I do not think there is enough evidence at the moment to prove this proposed kingdom in the Hebrides, and will not be a focus of my research.

1.4.3 Historical Background and sources

Historical sources for Skye and the Western Isles are scant in comparison to written sources from other areas of Norse colonization (Caldwell 2014). However, the historical sources have been pivotal in placing the area within both the Norse and Hiberno-Norse world, especially before the excavations and survey on South Uist. The Viking Age begins in the Hebrides in the late 8th century based on accounts in the Irish Annals, the Late Norse period begins with the formation of the Kingdom of the Isles, and the Late Norse ends with the Treaty of Perth in 1266 (Macleod Rivett, 2016, p. 153).

The historical sources include the Irish Annals, which recorded the Viking raids, particularly on Skye in 794. However, there were not much written sources for the area until the 13th century, when the chronicles of the Isle of Man were written that detailed the previous two centuries of 1000-1200 (Caldwell 2014). Icelandic sagas such as the Orkney Saga have been used for historical research within Skye and the Western Isles. The *Saga of Icelanders*, for example, mentions that Iceland was colonized partially by migrants from the Hebrides (Fellows-Jensen, 1984, p. 165).

An overview of the historical sources has been conducted recently by (2018, pp. 580-588), where she summarized the political history of the isles as constructed from various historical sources. *The Lewis Chessmen: New Perspectives (2014)* includes a chapter by Caldwell that places the Lewis Chessmen in their geo-political context,

proposing them to be an indicator of a rich Late Norse world (Caldwell 2014: 90). Though it is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss the difficulties of using historical sources, the historical sources for this period cannot be ignored, and will be utilized when appropriate in the thesis.

The historical background for the western coast of Scotland likely consisted of two separate ethnic groups before the arrival of the Norse: the Gaelic Dál Riata and the Picts (Armit, 1996, pp. 161-162). Neither of these peoples were literate, and evidence, terminology, and names of notable figures appear in other sources, such as the Irish Annals (Armit, 1996, p. 162).

Dál Riata was a Gaelic-speaking kingdom that stretched from Argyll to the Ardnamurchan peninsula at the height of its power (Bannerman, 1974), and likely had some kind of political presence north of the peninsula, in Skye and the Small Isles (Fraser, 2009). Mentions of the Kingdom of Dál Riata cease in the early 9th century and this has led to Alex Woolf suggesting that Norse took control of the kingdom (Woolf, 2007, p. 100).

The northern Hebrides, particularly Skye, Eigg, the Uists and Barra seem to have been under influence by peoples that could be called Picts from the historical record (Jennings & Kruse, 2009), also known as peripheral Picts (Alcock, 1971). The historical record for the Picts of the Hebrides is scant but archaeologically, Pictish symbol stones are known from the region (Fisher, 2002, p. 11), and distinctive square cairns, that have been identified as Pictish have been excavated in the region (Parker Pearson, 2018). Early incursions of Norse around Scotland in the late 8th and early 9th century seems to be a reason for the merging of the Kingdom of Picts and Scots and the disappearance of mentions of the Picts in historical sources in the 9th century (Woolf, 2007, p. 100). Overall, the disappearance of both Dál Riata and the Picts from the historical record is matched by the archaeological disappearance of pre-Norse cultures by the 9th century AD as well.

The first historically recorded Norse activity in the Hebrides occurred in 793, when the first “Viking raid” was recorded in the Irish Annals on the attack on Iona. Norse settlement is believed to have begun shortly after, and the earliest archaeological trace of the Norse date to the early 9th century, or perhaps before⁴. The Norse began colonizing the Hebrides after the first raids began, and the Annals of Ulster record that the Hebrides and Skye in particular had been devastated by “gentiles” (Crawford, 1987, p. 40), though no archaeological evidence of this event has been found.

⁴ The latest dates of the brooch at Beirgh, Lewis, stretch into the early 9th century (Thoms 2004: 208), though whether those living there were “Pictish” or “Norse” is difficult to say.

A group of mixed Gael-Norse origin from the Hebrides are mentioned in the Irish and later medieval literature, called foreign Gaels (Crawford, 1987, p. 47), which Jennings & Kruse have argued originate during the 9th century wave of Scandinavian settlers (2009).

Skye and the Western Isles would have originally come under the Jarldom of Orkney, but by 1078, the Kingdom of Man had been established and they were incorporated into this kingdom. The Kingdom of Man was the most politically important centre in the region from the 11th century to the end of Norse power in the isles (McDonald, 2007).

The isles are believed to have been Christianized after King Olaf Tryggvason forced Orkney to convert in 995 AD (as recorded in the *Orkneyinga saga*), and there is historical evidence for the Bishop of Skye, but there were probably Christian monastic communities active throughout the entirety of Norse activity in Skye and the Western Isles (Armit, 1996, p. 186), and Iona likely remained a centre of Gaelic Christianity throughout the Viking Age (Jennings, 1998).

In 1262, the war between the Magnus IV of Norway and Alexander III of the Scots ended with the Treaty of Perth (1266), when the Norwegian crown ceded the islands to the Kingdom of Scotland. Afterwards, Gaelic culture became dominant and Norse culture disappeared, but perhaps Old Norse was spoken as late as the 14th, or 15th centuries in the region before Gaelic became the sole language spoken (Gammeltoft, 2007, p. 480).

The historical record, while potentially useful to explore ethnicity, religion and power within the archaeological record, is not the focus of this thesis, and will only be drawn upon to augment the archaeological sources where necessary.

1.4.4 Archaeology and problems with archaeological sources

A study of the Norse archaeological record is the best way to explore Norse society and all its facets in Skye and the Western Isles. However, there is also an asymmetry in both the quantity and quality of available data. Very few sites have been excavated or excavated entirely. Many sites, including rare burials such as ship or boat burials, were investigated by antiquarians or amateurs and not recorded sufficiently. One important site, the Udal, a high-status Viking and Late Norse settlement site superimposed over a Late Iron Age Pictish site (Crawford & Switsur, 1977; Selkirk, 1996), has not had its Iron Age and Norse material published, despite being excavated decades ago. Where there is a great amount of evidence of

Norse occupation, such from South Uist, there is a bias in recovery of sites from coastlines or agricultural areas due to threats from coastal erosion, livestock, lagomorph burrowing, ploughing, and wind, all of which can ruin the context of archaeological sites. Moreover, the settlement pattern is skewed toward coastal areas and therefore renders it difficult to explore the nature of “outfield” activity in pastures, heathland and moors. Finally, the majority of Norse settlement sites are identified on the basis of Norse pottery (Lane, 1983, 2007, 2010 2014), which without further excavation or recovery of different artifact types, can only grant a broad chronology of approx. 800-1250 AD. The nature of the archaeological material recovered means that Norse activity can be pinpointed to certain areas, but without additional aspects involved, such as topography or soil quality, it is very difficult to argue for one site being a settlement or an otherwise not-understood site, such as a burial. This is why a landscape analysis will be conducted for this thesis, as a way to accumulate the available data, and not only mend the issue of Norse archaeological data recovery but utilize this often-meagre data to discuss Norse settlement patterns and other questions pertaining to this thesis.



Figure 4: Eroding settlement mound at Aiginis, Lewis. An example of how a great deal of Norse settlement material is recovered. The mound has produced archaeological material from the Neolithic to Later Medieval times. © the author.



Figure 5: Unidentified pottery sherd from the settlement mound at Aiginis. An example of what is often recovered. The pottery could be Iron Age or Norse. © the author.

Most Norse settlement activity, particularly mounds, is based on the recovery of Norse pottery with a broad chronological range of 800-1250 AD. As a result, this has a consequence for attempting to research Norse society in Skye and the Western Isles as a whole, particularly regarding settlement patterns. Results from excavated Norse mounds show a variety of chronology. For example, Norse activity at Bornais could be dated as early as the first Viking raids (Sharples, 2019, p. 537). On the other hand, two excavated mounds that produced Norse settlements date to the late 10th, early 11th centuries (Cille Pheadair and Barvas), several generations later than many Viking Age burials and the earliest phases of two other Norse settlement sites from the same islands.

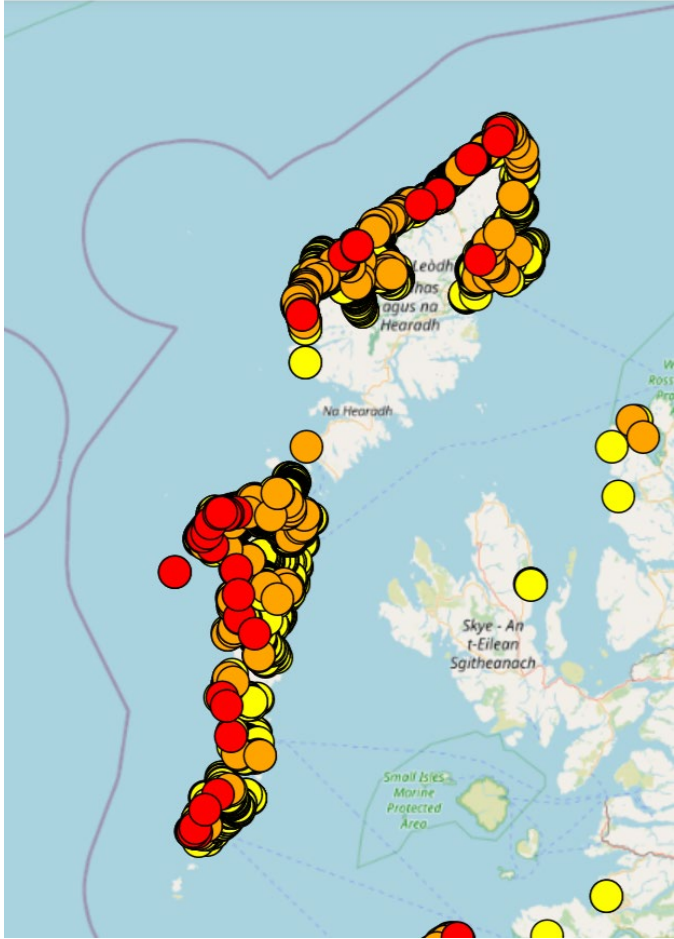


Figure 6: Clusters of eroding sites recording by archaeological survey as of April 2023 in the area of study. Red is most severely threatened, orange is in moderate threat, and yellow threatened by stable. @SCARPE.



Figure 7: Distribution of some Norse placenames in Skye and the Western Isles. After Armit, 1996, p. 187.

The evidence is also difficult to assess due to an asymmetry in artefactual recovery. Islands such as Skye which has over 86% of its farm names of ON extraction has only ambiguous archaeological evidence for Norse settlement outside of burial, hoards, and unprovenanced or stray finds. This is likely due to a difficulty in identification, as a great majority of Norse settlements sites likely lay under modern

houses or the ruins of 18th-21st century blackhouses.

For example, South Uist is unique in that its western coast was thoroughly surveyed and two settlement sites underwent modern excavation

with full publications (Parker Pearson, 2012; Sharples, 2005, 2019, 2020, 2023; Sharples et al., 2016; Sharples & Pearson, 1999; Sharples & Smith, 2009). However, most settlement mounds dated to the Norse period on South Uist will likely never be excavated, and its more stable and rougher eastern coast has not been as thoroughly surveyed and produced no dateable Norse artifacts (Parker Pearson, 2012). No other Hebridean island underwent such a thorough investigation, which skews the data toward the west coast of South Uist as being viable to research Norse settlement patterns. While Niall Sharples has convincingly argued for a seat of power in the Hebrides situated at Bornais, South Uist, on the basis of the size of its structures and richness of the recovered finds, larger and richer than comparable excavated settlements in Orkney and Shetland (Sharples, 2019, p. 596), the rest of the islands lack the quality of excavations and quantity of excavated material. For example, Skye possessed the seat of the Bishop of the Isles at Skeabost cathedral on Skeabost island in the 12th centuries (Thomas, 2015), indicating that it was of great importance in the Late Norse period, but the island has not been thoroughly investigated by archaeologists, no archaeological material dating to the Norse period has been identified.



Figure 8: Possible Viking Age house. This is an example of the ambiguity of settlement structures in the Hebrides. The bow-shaped walls and three-aisled house is typical of the Norse period, but also of Medieval and Modern period houses. My photo, taken via drone. © the author.



Figure 9: Arnol blackhouse, 19th century, Isle of Lewis. Preserved traditional blackhouse. Vernacular architecture in the Hebrides is a descendant of Norse architectural forms. The foundation of this house would be nearly identical to the foundation of a Norse period longhouse. Photo from Historic Environment Scotland.

A good example of this is the corpus of Viking Age burial data in Skye and the Western Isles. There are circa 30 burial sites identified in Skye and the Western Isles. Only two of these sites have been excavated using modern scientific methods of excavation, recording and conservation (Cnip cemetery, Lewis and Nisabost, Harris). The rest of these burials were discovered through antiquarian investigations, erosion, or ploughing, which has led to a difficulty in understanding the chronology and assessing the integrity of assemblages of artefacts and human remains. Graham-Campbell & Batey suggested that the lack of pagan burials discovered in South Uist could have been a result of early Christianization, among other factors such as coastal erosion or lack of identification (1998, p. 82). In my opinion, the lower number of Viking-period burials from Skye and the Western Isles compared to other regions in Scotland such as Orkney is likely the result of a lack of excavation and recovery. This is due to many Viking-period burials known in the area of study being discovered in the 19th and early 20th centuries, when conspicuous or imposing funerary monuments were targeted for excavation. Therefore, the ratio of settlements verses burials is not a precise measure to use when assessing social, political or religious patterns and changes in the islands. Skye and the Western Isles have produced less hoards than elsewhere in the Norse Atlantic world, particularly Ireland and England (Horne, 2021), but it is not likely due to

different economic or cultural practices that led to less hoards being deposited, but rather a lack of metal detectors active in the Hebrides.



Figure 10: Cist burial recorded at Norton, Harris. This burial can either be Iron Age or Norse. © the author.

Skye and the Western Isles still have difficulties for archaeologists and other researchers that appear unique to Scandinavian Scotland. The first is a five decade long scholarly dispute on the so-called “fate” of the Picts in Northern and Western Scotland after Norse contact. The pre-Norse peoples spoke a Celtic language, but Old Norse is the oldest set of placenames in the Western and Northern Isles. The unique placename situation in both the Western and Northern Isles has often been described as an indication of a genocide in the modern sense (Smith, 2001). The archaeological record has been used to argue for both continuity (Sharples & Pearson, 1999; Sharples & Smith, 2009) (Sharples and Parker Pearson 1999; Sharples & Smith 2009) and genocide (Crawford, 1987; Crawford, 1981; Crawford & Switsur, 1977; Jennings & Kruse, 2005). A question of ethnic continuity, discontinuity or processes of

hybridization, acculturation and assimilation have all been subjects of debates in both the Viking Age and broader archaeological discourse over the last few decades.

Though the Norse archaeological record in Hebrides is fraught with problems, many problems are not unique to Skye and the Western Isle or the Norse period. The post-Norse medieval period of Skye and the Western Isles is even less understood archaeologically than the periods before it (Armit, 1996, p. 205). Both Viking and post-Viking, medieval houses in Western Norway are notoriously difficult to identify and likely lay under modern settlements (Myhre, 2000, p. 37; Sørheim, 2005, p. 162), but this view has changed in recent years after more Viking-period houses have been identified through archaeological investigations, including LIDAR. The archaeological knowledge of the region is largely due to rescue archaeology due its fragile coastlines and estuaries, particularly on the western coast of the Outer Hebrides (such as those monitored by ShoreUPDATE (The Scape Trust, <https://scapetrust.org/sites-at-risk/>, fig. 6). A landscape archaeological synthesis can mend this problem by compiling the data, findspots of the data and utilizing topographical and geographical information, along with placename data.

1.4.5 Archaeological Research in Skye and the Western Isles

The Norse period (800-1266 AD) of the Skye and the Western Isles has seen considerable research conducted within the last few decades (Armit, 1996; Cowie & Macleod Rivett, 2010; Graham-Campbell & Batey, 1998; Horne et al., 2023; Hunter, 2004; Parker Pearson, 2012; Raven, 2005; Ritchie, 1993; Ryder, 2021). Most notably, the excavations and publication reports of Viking-Norse-Medieval settlement sites at Cille Pheadair (Parker Pearson, 2018) and the Bornais complex (Sharples, 2005, 2019, 2020, 2023; Sharples et al., 2016; Sharples & Pearson, 1999; Sharples & Smith, 2009) which have allowed for a greater understanding of Norse society in the Hebrides and particularly in South Uist. Parker Pearson has stated the research of the settlement sites at the western coast of South Uist allows for one of the greatest case studies for research of Norse settlement patterns in the Hebrides, Scotland and perhaps the entire Norse world (Parker Pearson, 2018, pp. 14-15).

The western machair coast of South Uist has been thoroughly surveyed by the SEARCH team in the 1990s, with over 24 Norse settlement mounds identified due to coastal erosion,

ploughing, lagomorph damage and wind damage (fig.11) (Parker Pearson, 2012, p. 41). Cille Pheadair and Bornish underwent extensive excavation, where settlement sites spanning the Norse periods were revealed there, with important information on diet, contacts with the wider Norse world, and status have been discussed as a result. Two other Norse mounds



Figure 11: Viking Age settlements and Norse placenames on South Uist. From Parker Pearson, 2012, p. 30.

underwent small trial excavations at Aisgernis and Frobost which did not reveal structural remains (Parker Pearson, 2012, p. 47), and a Norse-era church was identified at Cille Donnain (Fleming & Woolf, 1992; Parker Pearson, 2012, p. 52). Finally, a Norse period site was excavated at Drimore in the 1950s, the first Norse settlement site to be identified archaeologically (Maclaren, 1974). South Uist remains the most well studied and understood island within the Hebrides for the Norse period. However, further survey and excavation has revealed sites and surveyed settlements (Brannigan, 2000; Cowie & Macleod Rivett, 2010; Neighbour & Burgess, 1997; Parker Pearson, 2012; Sharples, 2005, 2019, 2020).

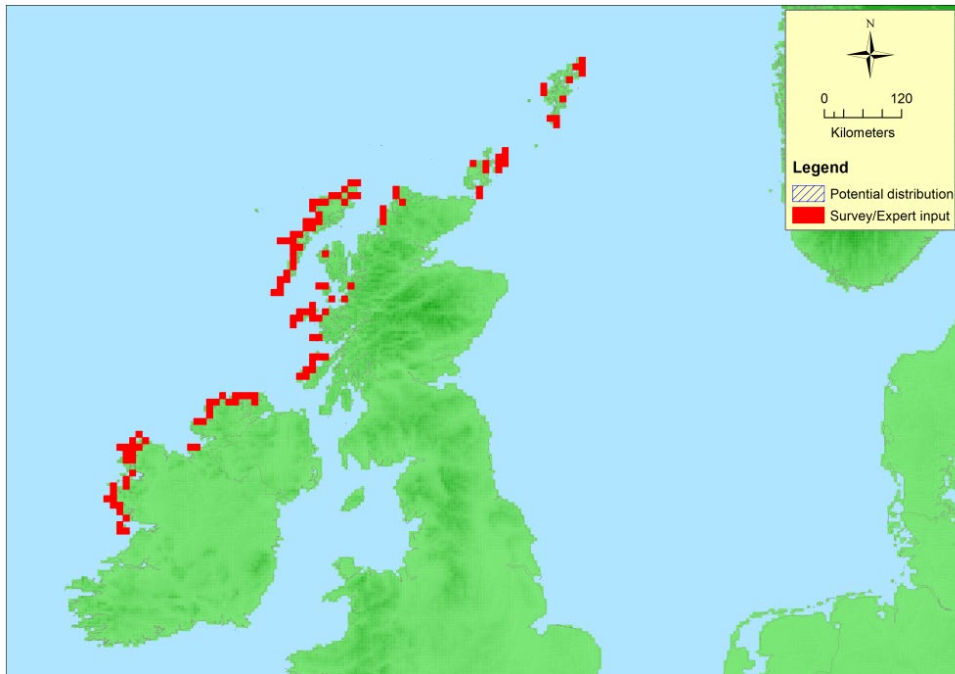


Figure 12: Map showing distribution of areas deemed to consist of machair surveyed by the European red list of habitats. Note the concentration on the western coast of the Outer Hebrides. @European red list of habitats.

Though the Norse settlement of the Hebrides has been illuminated in recent years, this has largely been confined to South Uist machair (Parker Pearson, 2012). Orkney on the other hand has received a great deal of attention in regards to mound building, mound re-use and the landscape of mounds (Harrison, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c), and the re-use of prehistoric landscape (Leonard, 2011). In the case of mounds, the construction of Norse settlement mounds has been linked to the establishment of political and social power, along with the ancestral power over the pre-Norse peoples (Harrison, 2013a). David Griffiths and Jane Harrison, exploring the ancestral power of the landscape of Viking Orkney, have noted that the interpretations of Cille Pheadair and Bornish have lacked “archaeologically demonstrable factors – the size, commodification, complexity and geographic reach of the site’s rural economy, its spiritual or ancestral power, and the call it had upon its surrounding population in terms of family or social obligation” (Griffiths & Harrison, 2011, p. 133). The presence of circa 24 settlement mounds on South Uist, as well as other settlement mounds or evidence of settlement in the rest of Skye and the Western Isles allows for a deeper examination of Norse

society in the Hebrides and the Norse world. This previous research, through surveys and stray finds, will provide the foundation for my thesis.

1.4.6 Migration and ethnicity in the Viking Age

The subject of migration in archaeology has been of considerable debate in the last few decades. The very idea of migration tied to archaeological material culture, and thus the movement of ethnic groups, was the origin of the “first” archaeological school of thought, what is now termed culture-history in the late 19th, early 20th centuries (Hakenbeck, 2008). In the post-war period, the idea that large groups of people can be seen moving through the dissemination of artifacts was criticized sharply in both processual and post-processual archaeology (van Dommelen, 2014). In present day archaeology, within the “New Scientific revolution”, pre-modern migrations are illuminated by developments in DNA and isotopic analysis and are less controversial now in archaeological discourse, and archaeological research on migrations can now focus on looking at multi-layered migrations and impact on diaspora and homeland rather than proving migrations have taken place (Downham, 2012).

The concept of Norse migrations and the presence of a Norse diaspora, however, has not been as controversial in archaeology, though there are criticisms of the idea of an overarching Norse identity of diaspora (Svanberg, 2003). The argument proposed by Frederik Svanberg is that there is a great diversity involved in Norse ritual practice, particularly burials and that the idea of a Norse identity is tied to nationalism in Scandinavian countries in the 19th century. Stefan Brink & Neil Price have answered Svanberg, arguing that while there is much diversity in ritual practices such as burial rites in the Viking Age, there is still an overarching Norse identity that bond disparate communities of people of Norse culture and descent across the Norse world (Brink & Price, 2008). Judith Jesch has also argued in favour of a broad Norse identity or common Norse diaspora (Jesch, 2015). Bjørn Myhre argued that the expression of Norse identity came increasingly important after the 8th century due to a heightened contact between Norse and non-Norse groups (Myhre, 1992, p. 197). Likewise, it has been argued that in the Isle of Man, expressions of Norse rituals, in particular a possible human sacrifice, was an expression of Norse identity and culture to a non

Norse, conquered people who were exposed to a dramatic expression of a foreign religion and ethnic identity (Wilson, 2008, pp. 30-36). Shane McLeod has argued for a similar process where human sacrifice was practiced by the Norse as an expression of their identity in the British Isles (McLeod, 2018, p. 88). Anne-Sofie Gräslund argued that the Norse in Greenland identified as Norse and retained Norway as the homeland (Gräslund, 2009, p. 132). Magdalena Naum has argued for a stratification of a Slavic underclass serving a Norse overclass on Bornholm (Naum, 2008). Clare Downham has argued that while there were many mixed identities within the Norse world, from Hiberno-Norse in Ireland to Slav-Norse in what is now modern Russia, a demonstrably Norse identity did exist (Downham, 2012). Despite these arguments, it must be cautioned that Norse ethnicity is not simple and may show great variables and present difficulties for research, and questions may be raised that are unanswerable. A good example of this is a pair of two typical Viking pagan burials from Ireland which DNA analysis revealed no detectable Norse ancestry, and these two individuals displayed entirely Irish genomes, suggesting that they were local “converts” to the Norse religion and ethnicity (Raffield et al., 2016). This argument, though perhaps simplistic and not without its problems, is bolstered by historical sources that discuss Irish nobleman along with slaves who joined “the heathens”, and at least one case of a Frankish monk who “renounced Christ and joined the Vikings” (Downham, 2012, p. 6). Likewise, the Norse settlement of Normandy in the early 10th century led to the “Frankification” of the Norse who settled there and led to the Norman identity, very distinguishable from Norse or “Vikings” at the conquest of England by 1050 AD (Downham, 2012, pp. 6-7). Ethnicity could be seen as fluid and there appears to have been an ability to cross ethnic boundaries that various groups and individuals did for a myriad of different reasons (Barth, 1969). These changes can be seen in the archaeological record of Skye and the Western Isles through Norse pottery, Norse architectural styles, accompanied pagan burials, hoards, and other finds of ethnic signifiers of Norse identity.

As Downham has argued, the Viking Age diaspora offers an opportunity to study multi-faceted levels of migration (Downham, 2012, p. 8). An archaeological focused study of status and power is not only possible but often fruitful. For example, the recent study of the status of those hosting feasts in Orkney Isles showed that not only was feasting integral to Viking and Late Norse power structures of the earls of Orkney, that there may preference for cattle over pigs in the earlier years due to the influence of Celtic or Hiberno-Norse peoples, who tended to feast on beef, while Scandinavians tended to feast on pork (Mainland & Batey, 2018). Size

of mounds and control of resources have been used to argue for the status of certain settlement sites (Dockrill & Bond, 2014; Parker Pearson, 2018; Sharples, 2019; Steinberg et al., 2016). Moreover, it has been noted that settlement patterns reflect the actions of elite individuals or families in migration. It is often argued that Norse elites generally take the most fertile and important farms such as in Iceland (Steinberg et al., 2016) and Greenland (McGovern, 1985), after which families of lesser status arrive and take smaller farms. This is in lieu of research based on just who exactly would have been leaving Norway. Logistically, the elites during the Norse period would have the means to migrate, at least in the early decades of the Viking Age (Jennings & Kruse, 2009; Macniven, 2013, 2015). In Orkney, it has been deduced that the higher status families took over already existing, high status farms (Barrett et al., 2000), and a similar argument has been proposed for Norse-colonized Southern Finland (Jansson, 2011). I agree with the above research that the elites would have migrated first and likely targeted already established farmsteads (where they already have existed, such as in Scotland or South Finland), particularly farmsteads on the “best” available land and possessing natural, sheltered harbours which would be suited for a maritime economy. The archaeological evidence can thus explore questions of power, migration and ethnicity and the interrelation between these three concepts. Interpretations of the impact and role of migration on both native and Norse in Skye and the Western Isles is one of the aims of this thesis.

The nature of Scandinavian migration has in the last 10 years been highlighted by various research involving a myriad of different methods, from examining metal detector finds to DNA research throughout the broader Viking world (Lund & Sindbæk, 2022, pp. 9-10). Interestingly, they state “Many studies still struggle with the task of even attesting the presence of Scandinavian populations and producing a timeline and scale to their occurrence (Lund & Sindbæk, 2022, pp. 9-10). Scandinavian Scotland is in a unique position where, while some nuances exist, there are few scholars that would argue that the physical migration of Scandinavians did not occur, due to a combination of archaeological, historical, linguistic and genetic evidence. Nevertheless, it is important not to take the migration of Scandinavians to Skye and the Western isles for granted.

Regardless of biases in migration theory in archaeology, the Norse period can be defined as a period of Scandinavian/Norse style migration. New architectural styles, vessel types (both in imported material such as steatite, and a form of ceramics), burial practices and all change abruptly (Armit, 1996, p. 292; Graham-Campbell & Batey, 1998, p. 154) (Armit 1996: 292, Graham-Campbell & Batey 1998: 154), as does fishing strategies with an introduction of

deep-sea fishing to the Hebrides, which was not present in the British Isles during pre-Norse periods (Harland et al., 2016). The presence of a Norse culture is supported not only by archaeological and placename evidence, but later medieval/early modern Norse-originated law such as the Hebridean *ounceland* (Macniven, 2013), and the presence of *Udal law* (derived from *odalsrett*) in Orkney and Shetland (Ryder, 1989). Moreover, the physical migration of Norse is not disputed, since there is genetic data from the modern Hebrideans suggest a high amount of Western Norwegian male lineages, which has been interpreted as evidence of mixed couples of male Western Norwegians and female locals or other non-Norwegians, similar to the genetics of modern Icelanders (Goodacre et al., 2005). While there can be an endless debate about the impact or physical presence of the Norse in the isles, a migration from West Norway to the Hebrides is undisputed. There has been a five-decade long debate on the survival of the Picts (Crawford, 1987; Jennings & Kruse, 2005; Ritchie, 1993; Sharples & Pearson, 1999; Sharples & Smith, 2009), but it is also largely undisputed that the Norse displaced at least the elites of the pre-Norse period (Armit, 1996, p. 202). Questions remain about the survival of the pre-Norse Picts, ethnic identities within Skye and the Western Isles, and possible differences of identity or ethnicity when comparing Skye and the Western Isles to the rest of the Norse world, and also differences within the area of study itself.

1.4.7 Topography, geography and the maritime landscape

This thesis will be exploring the connection between the Norse landscape and the maritime environment. In particular, this thesis will incorporate sea-routes and harbours by comparing known Norse sites to sea-routes and harbours.

Sources for sea-routes, landing-places, and harbours for the west of Scotland is difficult for a few reasons. Firstly, coastal erosion may have changed the landscape significantly, and the higher water table in the medieval warm period may have presented a somewhat different maritime landscape. However, Norse placenames have been used to attempt to piece together the Viking and Late Norse maritime landscape, such as anchorages by (Macniven, 2020). Ports have also been highlighted in past research using placename, topographical and ethnographic evidence, for instance in the Hebrides by David McCallough (2000).

Secondly, people in pre-modern times would not have followed or generated the same safety regulations that exist for modern seamanship, such as docking at rougher landing-places. Finally, the sources for the past maritime landscape are limited, and as of 2023, a project headed by Alexandra Sanmark to investigate harbours, landing-places and other maritime features in the Norse Hebrides has been launched in order to fill in the gap of this knowledge (Sanmark, Kalmring and Wilken forthcoming). Nevertheless, it is possible to reconstruct the potential maritime landscape of the Norse period. To do so, I will use British admiralty charts available through open source internet databases, as well as the books *Sailing Directions and Anchorages* (Lawrence, 2017; Mason et al., 2022), and *The Scottish Isles* (Haswell-Smith, 1997).

The maritime landscape has been highlighted as pivotal to the development of the proto-states and petty states of Norway, as well as the development of Norway itself as a kingdom (Kruse, 2017; Skre, 2014, 2017). The maritime landscape of the Hebrides is considered to be exceptionally dangerous (Haswell-Smith, 1997). The Hebrides, though indented by several sheltered, natural harbours (McCullough, 2000, p. 47), is subjected to unpredictable weather, winds, currents, eddies, dry rocks, and large swathes of land without suitable harbours in poor weather (Lawrence, 2017, p. 4).

The Norse, as a maritime people, relied heavily on nautical technology and knowledge. The logistics of sea travel, particularly from Norway to the British Isles, has been discussed in recent years by Macniven (2013), Sheehan (2018), Gammeltoft (2018) and Kruse (2020). The dependence of the Norse on the sea, harbours, and sea-routes is well known, but some particular examples include the importance of Danish landing places (Ulriksen, 2004), and impact of Norse activity in Europe, both in the Norse world and rest of Europe (Barrett et al., 2016). The Hebrides lay strategically between Norway and Ireland, and all traffic that flows between must have passed through the Hebrides (*fig. 13*).

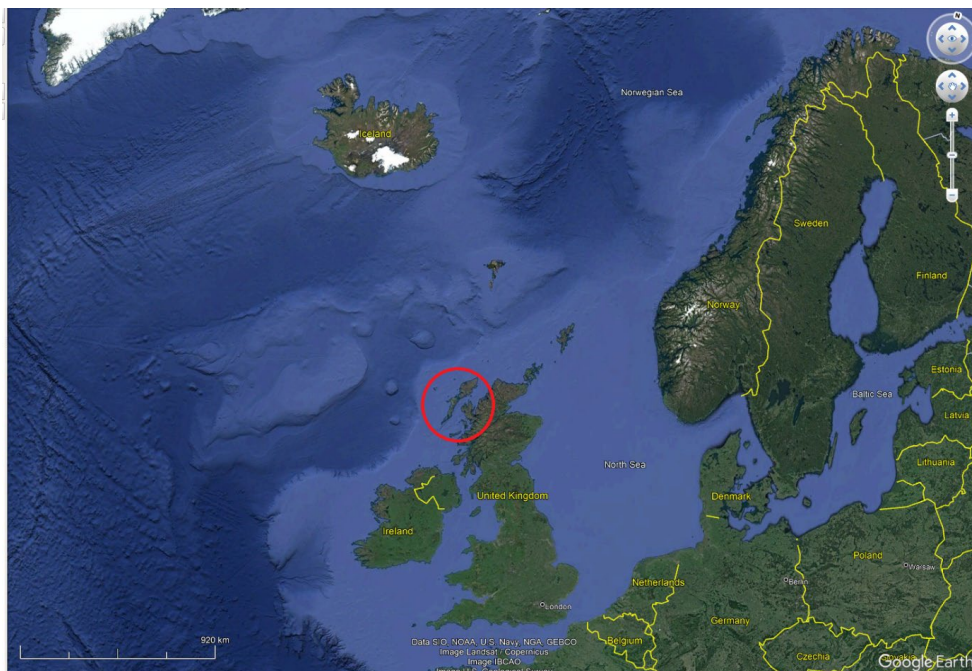


Figure 13: The Hebrides in its North Atlantic and Northwestern European context. Generated with Google Earth.

Sailors who travel in the modern era from West Norway to West Britain or Ireland often avoid the Hebrides due to the unpredictability of the weather (Eldar Heide pers. comm. 2018). Present-day sailors traveling from Norway to Ireland often avoid the Hebrides, opting to travel down the eastern side of Mainland Britain, particularly due to Cape Wrath. Cape Wrath is perhaps one of the most difficult capes in Europe due to the full power of North Atlantic gales without shelter (Crawford, 1987, p. 67). An alternative route between Norway and the Hebrides may have been through the Great Glen, traveling west through modern-day Scotland and then north through several portages overland, avoiding Cape Wrath altogether (Crawford, 1987, p. 67). The Minch, the sea-route between Skye and the Western Isles, is the most frequently used sea-passage in modern times, with the Outer Hebrides providing shelter from the North Atlantic current. The Norse, from the first raiders to the later



Figure 14: Lewis and Harris, showing the many natural harbours. Generated with Google Earth.

settlers, must have been aware of both the dangers and benefits of the maritime landscape of the Hebrides.

A recent article by Stephanie L. Blankshein explored Neolithic sea-routes around the Outer Hebrides (Blankshein, 2022). In the article, Blankshein employs least-cost analysis to argue that Neolithic seafarers utilized overland routes (portages) to traverse across Harris and Lewis in order to avoid dangerous sea passages. This article provides a solid case for viewing the maritime landscape as means of least resistance and low-cost effort in regard to landing-places and routeways.

The seascape has not changed significantly along the east coast of the Outer Hebrides since the Neolithic due to a stable rock base in the east (Blankshein, 2022, p. 745). The presence of Norse placenames designating places of portage lining up with Neolithic stone circles is probably not coincidental, indicating that some of the same portages were used both in the Neolithic and Norse periods, and this includes Loch Seaforth, where Blankshein identified such a portage between Loch Seaforth and Loch Eireasort (Blankshein, 2022, p. 749).

Seafaring across the North Atlantic involves much planning, preparation, and motivation due to both the unpredictable nature of the sea, tides, and its weather, along with the skills needed to sail in the open ocean before modern technology (Dugmore et al., 2010). Dugmore et al argue convincingly that a series of factors led to the colonization of the North Atlantic islands (Faroës, Iceland, and Greenland), including both technology and a willingness (motivation) to cross the sea despite severe risks (Dugmore et al., 2010, pp. 17-18). The Norse colonization of Skye and the Western Isles would have involved similar sea-journeys across the open ocean. A “pull” factor from these islands must have existed in order for Norse settlers to make this (repeated and consistent) journey.

The importance of harbour sites and their relation to people has been emphasized by Adam Rogers (Rogers, 2013, p. 183). Harbour sites and their relevance to the Norse have recently been explored, in an article on the harbour site of Leiruvogur in Iceland (Wilken et al., 2016). Using a method that involved excavation and pollen analysis, the authors determined that at Leiruvogur, the harbour site moved from an inland lake

to the shore of the sea. It seems that in the pre-medieval Viking Age, the Norse preferred inland bodies of water at this harbour site (Wilken et al., 2016, p. 309).

Though research of that nature has not been undertaken in the Hebrides, there is reason to believe that the prevalence of inland lochs in the Hebrides would have been attractive for the Norse. For example, there are at least two examples of inland, freshwater lochs being used to store boats, ships and parts in my area of study. The first is at the so-called *Viking harbour* and canal at Rubha An Dúnainn on Skye (Martin & Martin, 2010; Martin & Martin, 2018). The second is a pair of sterns from a longship that was discovered after the draining of an inland loch on Eigg (Grieg et al., 1940, p. 179). In the first case, the boat parts were radiocarbon dated to circa 1100 (Martin & Martin, 2010). The excavators of the site also noted storage houses, nausts and a stone-lined canal. None of these features could be dated, but the harbour may be as old as the early Viking Age.

1.5.1 Summary of methods

Most of the data from my area of study is recovered through survey of areas affected by threats to archaeological sites, such as coastal erosion, lagomorph damage, and ploughing. Except for fully excavated and published excavated settlement sites and burials, the majority of the sites in my corpus of data are either recovered through survey or partially published. The majority of sites dated to the Norse period are so based on artefactual recovery. A landscape analysis however allows this data to be utilized to explore and interpret the Norse period. There are both positives and limitations here.

A landscape analysis allows for the data to be analysed on multiple layers. For example, a single pottery sherd dating to the Norse period, while meagre, is a signifier of Norse activity. If the provenance is known, then it can be put into its landscape context. This sherd can be connected to the greater landscape: is the soil arable or pastoral? Is there a harbour or sea-route nearby? What pre-Norse monuments or sites, such as Iron Age settlement sites, are known? Are there post-Norse settlements or churches nearby? Is there an Old Norse placename in association with Norse artifact findspots?

Moreover, a landscape analysis can allow for inter-regional comparisons. Distribution maps of Norse settlements, burials and other finds can allow to compare different islands. Is there a difference in distribution between say, Lewis and South Uist? If so, what does this mean for chronology, settlement and practices?

There are limitations to this approach. As mentioned earlier, most Norse sites cannot be dated to a more precise period other than “Norse”, i.e. between 800-1260 AD due to the broad period of time when Norse-style pottery was manufactured (Lane, 1983). Some sites can be dated more precisely, even without excavation, due to the typology of artifacts recovered, though this is rare. However, a landscape analysis still allows for macro-scale research, including a focus on multiperiod or “deep time”, where a landscape is examined through its anthropogenic modifications in combination with its topography, geography and geology (Scharf, 2014). This allows for data that is normally insufficient for detailed analysis to be plotted into broad analysis through space and time. This macro-scale analysis where a broad period is examined (the Norse period) is what I intend to utilize for the area of study.

1.6.1 Summary: Aims, objectives and research questions

This thesis seeks to synthesize all available research done on the Norse in Skye and the Western Isles to explore concepts such as landscape, including settlements, burials and hoards, and re-use of monuments in relation to the pre-Norse landscape and people, and ethnicity.

The area of study, as shown by figure 1, is Skye and the Western Isles. Why this area in particular? First, as mentioned above, it is due to the scant research on the islands in comparison to other parts of the North Atlantic. Second, recent research conducted by Sharples & Parker Pearson has revolutionized our view of the islands. Despite their reputed political significance through historical sources, it has been argued that Skye and the Western Isles (the latter in particular) were always isolated, scarcely populated, liminal areas (Armit 1996: 5). Research has shown that from the Viking Age and through the Early Medieval era, the islands were interwoven in a network of trade in the North Atlantic, and perhaps were so populated that their overpopulation led to the colonization of Iceland (Fellows-Jensen, 1984, p. 165). However, the impact of the Norse on the islands is now better understood, and with this new information, it

is possible to further explore important aspects Norse society on Skye and the Western Isles, such as overall settlement and burial patterns.

1.6.2 Why the Hebrides? A potential microcosm into the Viking Age expansion

In recent years, the argument on why the Viking Age expansion occurred has resurfaced (Ashby, 2015; Barrett, 2008; Baug et al., 2018; Griffiths, 2019; Price, 2014). This centuries-old debate has been in focus for the so-called “push” factors that led to the migration of Norse-speaking people out of Scandinavia, as raiders, conquerors, and merchants, but also as settlers and colonizers. Some recent arguments, reiterating arguments from as far back as the 19th century, have been proposed by Neil Price and Ben Raffield who using evolutionary theory, argued that the lack of women in Scandinavia led to men who sought wives elsewhere (Raffield et al., 2016). Another reason proposed for the Viking Age expansion is a surplus of landless elite men (Barrett et al., 2000). Due to the *odelsrett*, or land inheritance in Scandinavia, many men after the migration period were left landless due to a change in inheritance laws and an amalgamation of smaller farms into larger farms. According to this argument, elite men formed raiding bands and left the Scandinavian homeland to seek land elsewhere. Other arguments for the Viking Age expansion include overpopulation brought upon by surplus crops due to the warming climate (Dugmore et al., 2007) or political developments and pressure (Sawyer, 2003). A market demand for luxury goods such as Walrus ivory has been proposed as being the catalyst for the colonization of Greenland beginning in the 10th century (Frei et al., 2015, pp. 19-20.) Similarly, Christian Keller has argued for the colonization and exploration of the arctic as a market drive for walrus ivory and furs, as well as seeking tribute from non-Norse (2010). Keller particularly emphasizes, using archaeological and literary sources, that the Norse exhorted non-Norse people such as the Sami and Finns (2007, p. 4). He ultimately argued that the Norse had an economic mindset that led to the colonization of areas of non-Norse peoples, such as North Norway and Finland (Keller, 2010, p. 23). These theories may not be in contention with one another, and it is doubtful that scholars will reach consensus on this centuries old debate. However, the pull factor has not been explored thoroughly regarding Skye and the Western Isles. Exploitation of natural resources and luxury goods, an abundance of landless elites, a lack of marriable women, and seeking tribute or slaves could all be factors that led to the colonization of Skye and the Western Isles. Why did the Norse choose to settle in Skye and the Western Isles? What was so attractive about the Skye and the Western Isles that it would attract generations of Norse settlement over the span of four-five centuries?

A study of Norse settlement in Skye and the Western Isles can answer this question through a landscape survey. Where did the Norse settle in Skye and the Western isles and why? Did Norse settlement patterns reflect similar settlement strategies in the rest of the Norse Atlantic world? What is the relationship between Norse settlement patterns and pre-Norse, Iron Age settlement sites? Do settlement patterns in Skye and the Western Isles differ from each other and if so, why?

1.6.3 Aims & research questions

The aims of this study are:

1. To explore the relationship between the Norse and the pre-Norse population of the islands through material culture (settlements, burials, hoards, findspots, and material culture).
2. To reach a greater level of understanding of the Viking and Norse periods of Skye and the Western Isles.

To do so, this thesis will attempt to answer the following central research questions:

1. What can the possible reuse of monuments tell us about the relationship between the pre-Norse and Norse populations? Why did the Norse reuse some sites, and not others, and what does this tell us about Norse society?
2. What can be said about ethnicity and identity in the islands at the time of the Viking and Late Norse periods?
3. Why was Skye and the Western Isles settled when it was? What was the pull factor of Norse migration this area?

A methodology (1.8) will be formed and employed to attempt to answer these questions.

1.6.3.1 Secondary objectives

1. To identify additional Viking/Norse sites in Skye and the Western Isles to expand the corpus of data through a re-analysis of the archaeological evidence.
2. To create a corpus of data of the Norse period sites for future researchers. After completion of this thesis, the database will be public and allow for additions as more discoveries are made.

Chapter 2 The natural landscape, geology, and environment

2.1.1 Overview

The Hebrides in total make up over 589 islands, excluding skerries and sea-stacks (Murray, 1973, p. 23). The Western Isles act as a barrier that shelters much of Skye and the west coast of Scotland from the North Atlantic current. As a result, the waterways of the North Minch and Little Minch are both protected by the Western Isles as a natural barrier against the North Atlantic current (Murray, 1973, p. 23).

2.1.2 Geology and descriptions

Skye

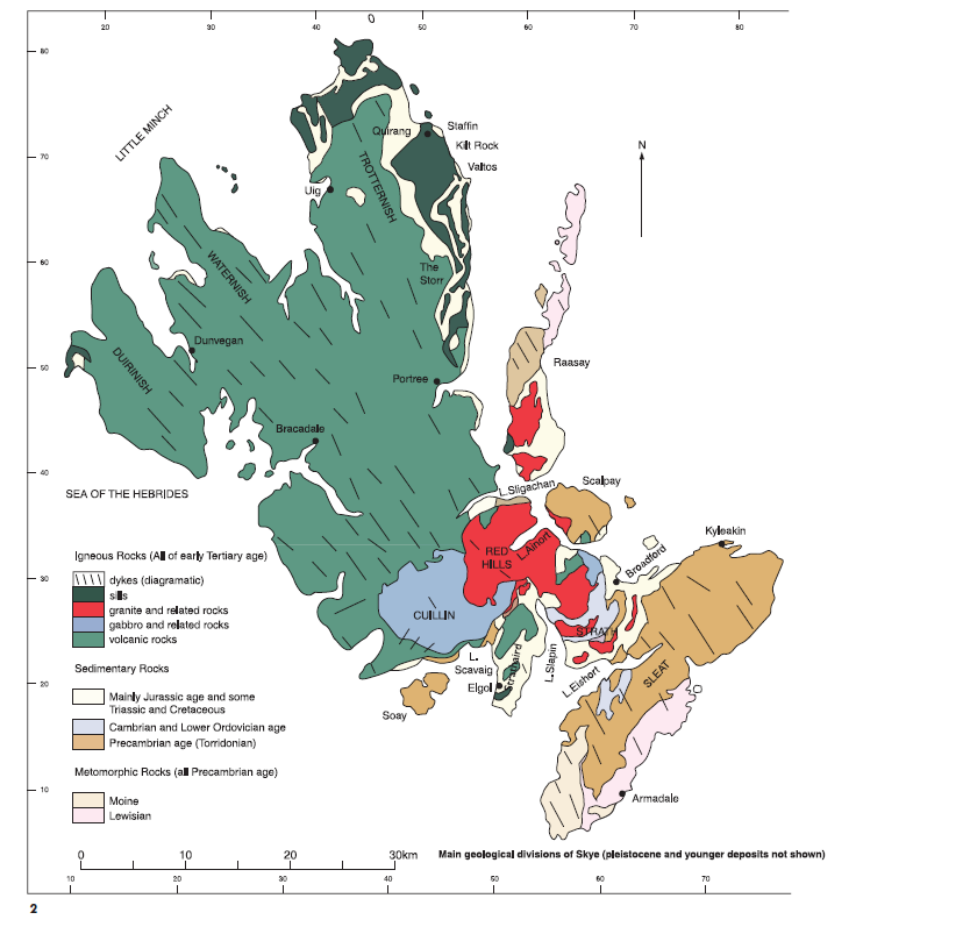


Figure 15: Geological map of Skye, after (Stephenson & Merritt, 2006).

Skye, including the smaller islands and outliers around its coast, has a total of 165,625 hectareage (MacDonald & MacDonald, 2010, p. 215), making it the largest island in the group. The island has four major, long peninsulas, three on its northwest side and one on its southeast side. The northern side of the island is the most fertile region of the island, due to its bedrock being composed of basalt which gives it brown soil, along with a lower amount of rainfall, whereas in the south, its bedrock is Torridonian and gabbro, and receives a higher amount of rainfall (Murray, 1973, p. 37). Southern Skye has fertile soils however, around the Broadford area and Sleat peninsula where limestone rock is exposed (MacDonald & MacDonald, 2010, p. 215). Skye has better moorland soils for grazings than the Outer Hebrides (Murray, 1973, p. 86). Skye is

surrounded by a handful of smaller islands. The largest is Raasay, a thin and long island found north of central Skye, totalling 6,405 hectares (MacDonald & MacDonald, 2010, p. 61). It is mostly fertile due to its limestone and sandstone based soils, and also possesses extensive forests (MacDonald & MacDonald, 2010, p. 230).

The Small Isles (Eigg, Rhum, Canna, Muck).

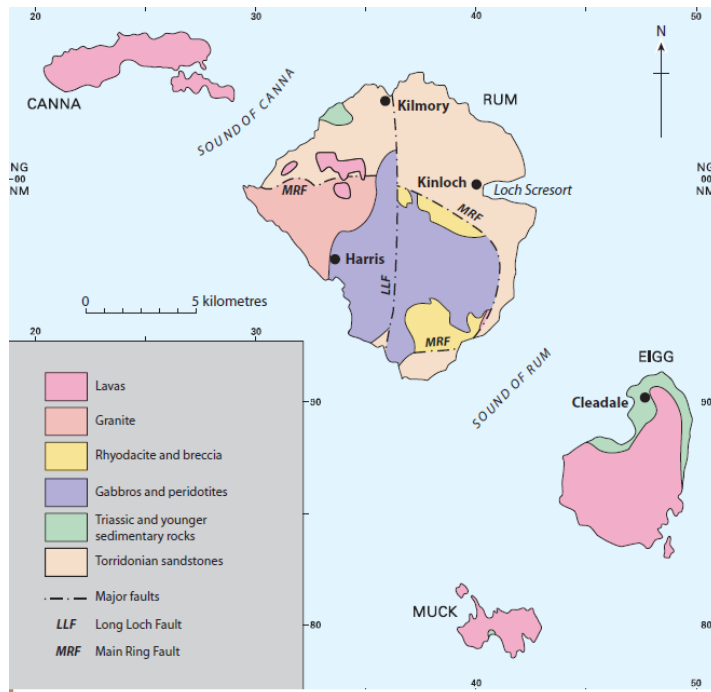


Figure 16: Geological map of the Small Isles, after Goodenough & Bradwell, 2004.

The islands have different geological characteristics, with Canna, underlain by tertiary tuff that gives it fertile soil, whereas Eigg is mostly composed of basalt, which makes it less agriculturally productive but nevertheless still fertile. Rum, 10,463 hectares is composed of sandstone and gabbro, and therefore composed of different bedrock than the other 3 islands (MacDonald & MacDonald, 2010, p. 129). The island is mostly not fertile, historically utilized in the 18th-21st centuries for sheep grazing and deer parks (Murray, 1973, p. 36). Muck and Canna are known for containing particularly rich basalt soils and are fertile (Murray, 1973, p. 86).

The Western Isles (Outer Hebrides)

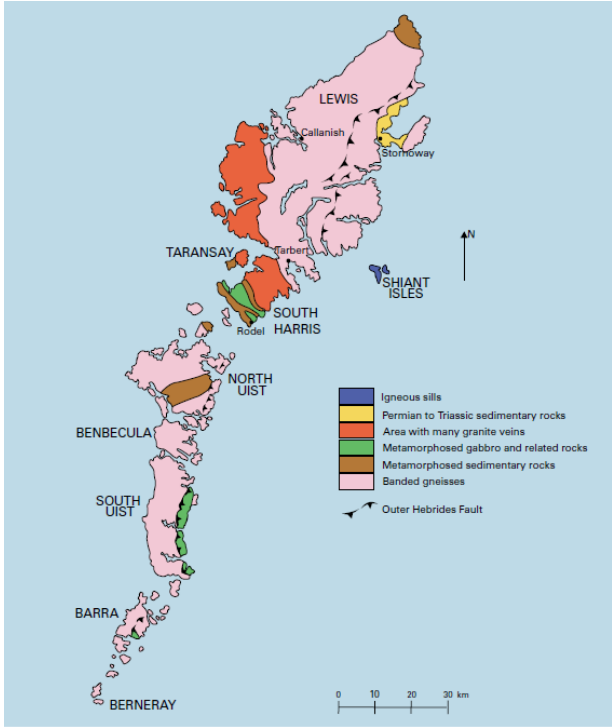


Figure 17: geological map of the Outer Hebrides, after (Goodenough & Merritt, 2011) Goodenough & Merritt 2011.

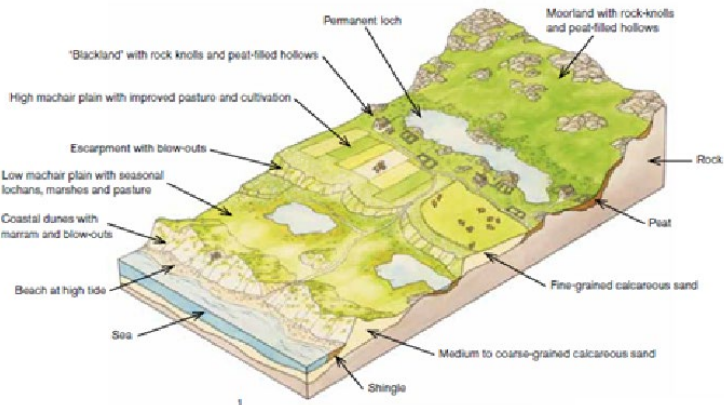


Figure 18: a cross-section of the machair, after Goodenough & Merritt, 2011, p. 39.

The Outer Hebrides are nearly entirely composed of Lewisian gneiss (Boyd, 1990, p. 30). The western coast of the island chain possesses ca. 160m of shell-sand (Murray, 1973, p. 82), with lime content ranging from 16% to 84%. The uncovered sand usually lies between the ocean and the machair, calcareous grassland that can range as shallow as 3m deep to several hundred meters (Murray, 1973, p. 82). After the machair, there is the blackland, a mix of peaty gley soils and machair which is arable, and often where freshwater lochs can be found. The interior of the islands tends to be moorland or mountainous (Boyd, 1990, p. 111). The islands are mostly treeless, with woodland surviving in small, sheltered pockets, usually on the eastern side of islands, protected from the wind and animal grazing (Boyd, 1990, p. 136).

Lewis is ca. 64km long by 20 to 38 km wide and is 170,000 hectares in size. The majority of Lewis is inhospitable, with the centre of the island composed of mostly peatland and bogs called *the Black Moor*. Southern Lewis is mountainous, with deep sea-lochs giving its southern half many natural bays (Murray, 1973, p. 38). Machair is rare but present along the west coast and around the northeast (Murray, 1973, p. 84). The majority of the people live on the coastal fringe, with the exception of the Butt of Lewis, which is arable (Murray, 1973, p.

84). The Black Moor, however, is not sterile, and has been historically used as pasturelands for cattle (Murray, 1973, p. 86).

Harris, 43,673 hectares in land area (MacDonald & MacDonald, 2010, p. 61). Harris is traditionally considered an island and separate from Lewis, though there is no natural separation. The traditional border between Lewis and Harris are the hills that lay in South Lewis/Northern Harris, along the upper part of Loch Seaforth. The east side of Harris is mostly composed of bare gneiss indented by bays with good anchorage, while the west side is mostly composed of sandy beach with a machair plain (Murray, 1973, p. 38). The island is nearly separated by a thin isthmus of ca. 600m in width, where the urban town of Tarbert is today.

North Uist is a total of 30,305 hectares in land area. It is 19 km long by 25 km wide and has a rocky east coast with freshwater lochs, good harbours, but limited arable land (Murray, 1973, p. 39). However, the northern and western parts of the island are arable, and economically viable (Haswell-Smith, 1997, p. 197), due to the presence of an extensive machair plain.

Benbecula is ca. 8,203 hectares in land area (MacDonald & MacDonald, 2010, p. 61). It is 12 km west to east and ca. 12 km north to south. The island has a sand-dune system and arable machair plain in the west, and is indented by sea-lochs in the east which is mostly moorland and mountains (Haswell-Smith, 1997, p. 194).

South Uist is 32,026 hectares in land area (MacDonald & MacDonald, 2010, p. 61). It is roughly rectangular in shape, 32 km long and roughly 9km wide at its widest. The eastern half of the coast is mostly mountainous and rocky, with deep sea-lochs that offer good anchorage. The western half is flat, with a machair plain system that runs north to south along its coast. This is portioned by the blacklands, peaty dark soils with little agricultural potential. The centre of the island possesses a many large freshwater lochs, some of them linked by canals by at least the 18th century (Angus, 2018).

Barra is the largest and only populated island of the Barra head island chain, with 12 km long by 6km wide, with a 5,875 total area of hectares (MacDonald & MacDonald, 2010, p. 61). The north and west of the island contains sandy beaches with machair plains, while the south and southeast side is mostly hilly with small inlets.

The St. Kilda archipelago is the westernmost islands in the Outer Hebrides, today it is legally a part of Harris due to administrative purposes, but it was historically distinct. The islands of St Kilda, Hirta, Soay, Boreray, and Dun are 670 hectares in area (MacDonald & MacDonald, 2010, p. 61). The islands are found 64 km from the nearest point in the Outer Hebrides, North Uist (MacDonald & MacDonald, 2010, p. 72). The islands are composed geologically of granites, gabbro, breccias, and dolerites (Gannon & Geddes, 2015, p. 138). Hirta, where the community of St. Kilda was traditionally located, is fertile with an adequate harbour and the archipelago has an abundance of sea bird resources (MacDonald & MacDonald, 2010, pp. 72-73).

2.1.3 Climate

Summer temperatures in the Hebrides can range from 12 C in the north to 13.8 C in the South (Murray, 1973, p. 76). In the winter, the temperatures range from 5 to 5.56 C (Murray, 1973, p. 73). Due to the North Atlantic gulf stream, westerlies ensure that the islands are both warmer and windier in the winter than in other parts of Scotland. Snowfall is rare and mostly affects higher ground, such as in the mountains, and it rarely reaches below -1 or -2 Celsius on the coldest days of the year.

The islands are one of the wettest region in Europe (Murray, 1973, p. 79). Precipitation is however related to land height, with taller mountains receiving significantly more rainfall than the lowlands. Wind is heavy in the region, reaching up to 10 m/s in the winter, and 5 m/s in the summer. The high amount of rainfall, combined with heavy gales due to the North Atlantic drift, stunt the growth of vegetation and is partially responsible for the large tracts of moorland, peatland, and bog on the islands (Murray, 1973, p. 79).

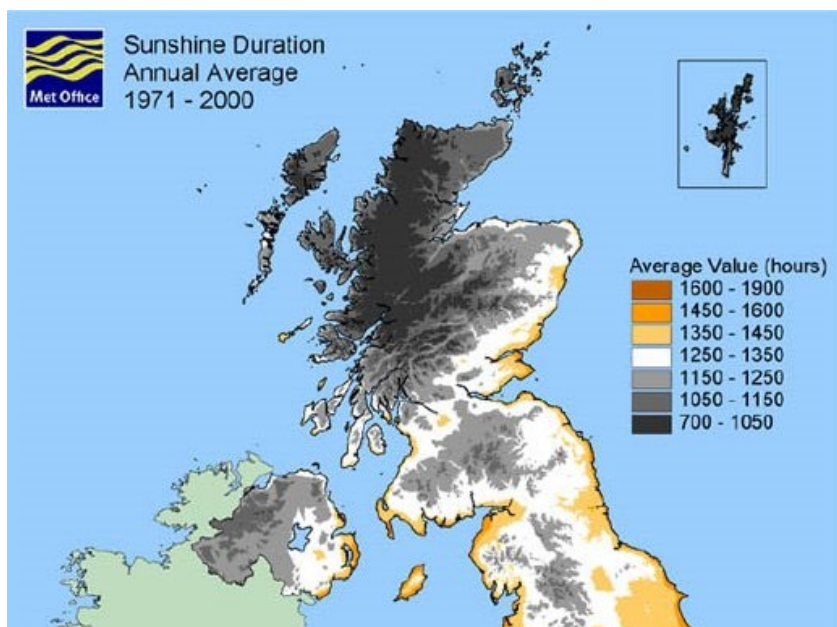


Figure 19: Annual sunshine duration from 1971-2000 in Great Britain, after the UK met office.

2.1.4 Resources

The machair is able to produce a wide-range of crops, with barley and oats being prominent (Boyd, 1990, p. 130). Livestock raising is the principle agricultural asset in the modern day, which relies on grazing both the marram and on the machair after the harvest (Murray, 1973, p. 83).

Woodland cover disappeared from islands such as South Uist in the Bronze Age due to human activity (Parker Pearson, 2012, p. 121). Today, trees are rare in the islands, but there are some pockets of woodland found in naturally sheltered places, including holly, aspen, and silver birch, but most trees are small and can be classified as scrub (Murray, 1973, p. 87), particularly around the lochs of east North Uist (Boyd, 1990, p. 130). In the modern period, there was a great importance on driftwood and importing wood from elsewhere for building materials.

The Hebrides is home to thriving and important habitats of fish, such as the common herring, mackerel, and whitefish all important today for European fisheries (Murray, 1973, p. 92). Salmon are not as important due to their low numbers, but Skye is known for its salmon fisheries, and trout populations have been historically fished, and Loch Roag, Lewis is known as one of the best trout fisheries in Europe (Haswell-Smith, 1997, p. 241). The largest and best quality herring shoals are found west of the Outer Hebrides (Murray, 1973, p. 92). Mackerel shoals are also heavily fished from the Hebrides when they migrate through the region. Cod are numerous to the west of St. Kilda (Murray, 1973, p. 93). Cod fishing and other deep-sea fishing was likely introduced into the region by the Norse during the Viking Age (Barrett, 2003).

Grey seal populations are found throughout the isles, and were hunted for their meat, oil, and skins into the 20th century (Murray, 1973, p. 98). Sea mammals, besides seals, are occasional visitors to the islands. They include whales, dolphins and porpoises, though some are permanent residents. Whale hunting was part of the Hebridean economy as late as the early 20th century (Murray, 1973, pp. 97-98).

The islands are known for their thriving and important sea-bird populations, such as gannets, petrels, and auks (Murray, 1973, p. 99). Traditionally, sea-bird eggs made up a large portion of the diet of the islanders, particularly on St. Kilda (MacDonald & MacDonald, 2010, p. 61).

Land-mammals native to the islands include the hedgehog, shrew, mole, bat, hare, rabbit, vole, mouse, brown rat, stoat, weasel, pine marten, otter, fox, and deer (Murray, 1973, p. 107). The European grey wolf was found on Skye until the 15th century AD, going extinct later than Mainland Britain. The islands are also home to many feral populations of domestic animals, such as sheep, goat, dog, cat, and ferret (Murray, 1973, p. 93). The domestic rabbit was also a recently-introduced animal (mid-20th century) that has had a negative effect on crops, has damaged or exposed archaeological sites (Parker Pearson, 2012, p. 17).



Figure 20: Modern-day areas of inshore fishing. The numbers represent coordinates. <https://blogs.gov.scot/marine-scotland/wp-content/uploads/sites/23/2020/10/OHP-Map-of-area-resized.png>

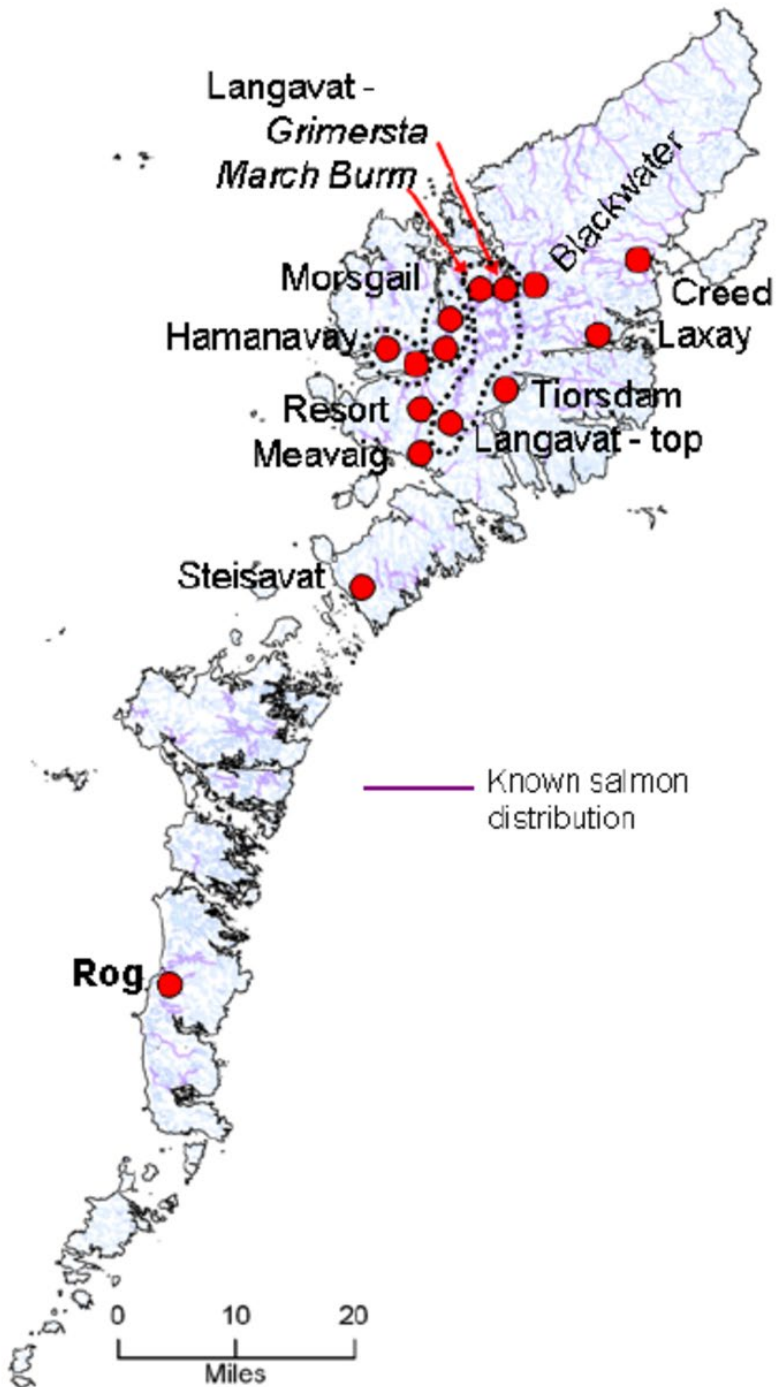


Figure 21: confirmed habitat of salmon in the Outer Hebrides. https://www.researchgate.net/figure/A-map-of-the-Outer-Hebrides-with-sample-sites-that-are-involved-in-this-report_fig1_288493410

2.1.5 The Machair

The machair is a term used for fertile coastal plains found in the Western Isles and elsewhere in Scotland. Settlement sites from the Bronze Age to the Medieval period cluster upon the machair (Parker Pearson, 2012). This subsection will define the machair and its relevance to this thesis.

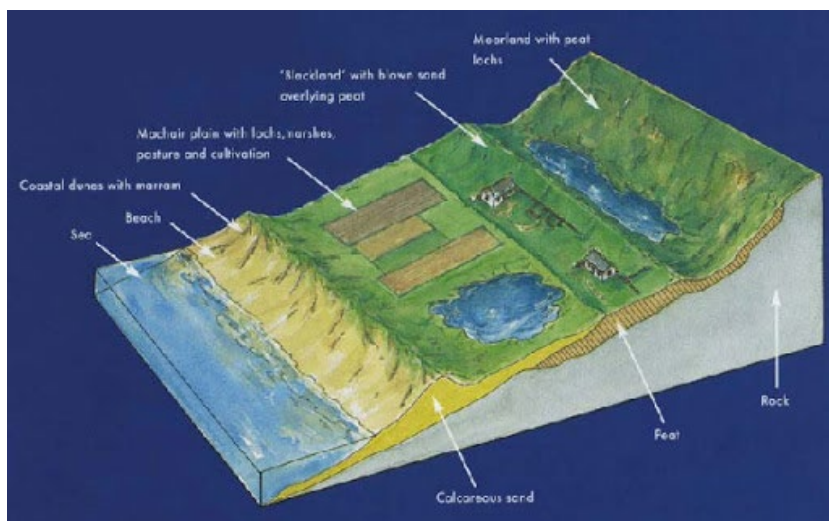


Figure 22: Cross section of machair, from the European forum of nature conservatism and pastoralism (efncp.org).

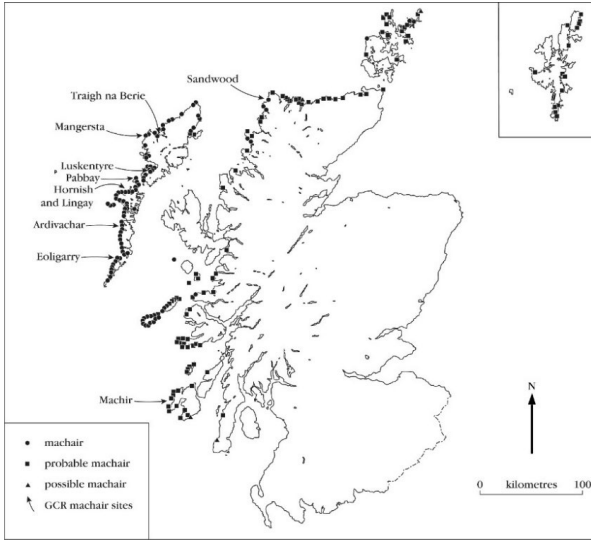


Figure 23: Map of the machair in Scotland. From *Coastal geomorphology of Great Britain, Volume 28, Chapter 9*.

The term machair is a Gaelic word used to describe fertile soil, but it is used in geology to describe a specific grass-covered, calcareous soil (Love, 2009, p. 3).

The machair is a geological phenomenon present in western and northern Scotland and north-western Ireland (fig.19) which can be defined as having a pH quality of more than 7 (alkaline) soil with

a high calcium concentrate and generally low mineral quality (Ritchie, 1976, p. 42).

Machair however can be described as a socio-ecosystem (Love, 2009, p. 4).

The machair in the Western Isles has been cultivated since the Beaker period, and has been the focus of agricultural production, and centre of human activity in the Hebrides from the Bronze Age to the 14th, 15th centuries

(Sharples, 2005, p. 196).



Figure 24: the machair plain with undated settlement mound. Cnip, Lewis. © the author.

The machair is fertile but also fragile and requires management to deal with sand drifts, flooding, and depletion of soil nutrients (Sharples, 2005, p. 196). There is extensive evidence that the Norse settled and exploited the machair extensively, from the earliest phases of the Viking Age and into the Early Medieval period on the west South Uist plain (Parker Pearson, 2012). There is furthermore evidence of Norse settlement on the machair from other islands, such as Lewis, Harris, and North Uist. This thesis will take into consideration the distribution of machair in relation to Norse activity, and incorporate it into the wider landscape such as harbours and other resources.

2.2.1 Harbours, landing-places, and inlets

As noted above, the western coast of Scotland is unique in that it resembles the western coast of Norway, whereas a sea-route can be established via a series of shelter from off-shore islands, yet is still hazardous (Crawford, 1987; Kruse, 2017).

Moorings and anchorages are considered rare in the Outer Hebrides for modern vessels (Lawrence, 2017, p. 9). They can be found today at Berneray and Loch Maddy on North Uist, Rodel on Harris, Acairsaid Mhor on Eriskay, Loch Roag on Lewis, and at Castlebay on Barra (Lawrence, 2017, pp. 9-10).

2.2.2 Sea-routes and travel

The main route through the Hebrides is the Minch (Gaelic: milk), a sea-channel that runs between the eastern side of the Outer Hebrides and the north/western coast of Skye. The Minch is sheltered from the strong tides of the Atlantic Ocean and is where most ship traffic passing through the Hebrides is located today. The Little Minch, which runs between Lochalsh and Skye, is the other major sea-route through the archipelago.

Sea-routes can be difficult to reconstruct due to changes in the physical geography over the course of the millennia, as well as increased safety measures taken in modern times for sea-travellers. Nevertheless, some sea-routes can be postulated in the past using modern sea-routes.

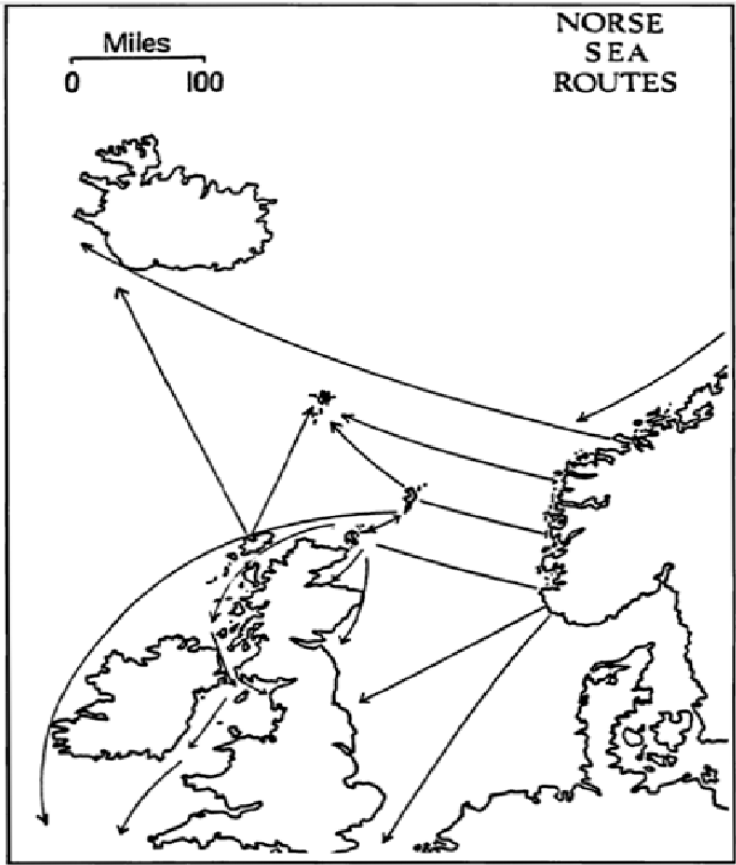


Figure 25: Sea-routes in the western Scandinavian world, showing a sea-route from Loch Roag, Lewis, to Iceland and the Faroe Islands. After Small, 1969, p. 2.

2.2.3 Lewis

East Lewis possesses many natural, sheltered harbours: Loch Bhrollum, Gob Rubh Uisenis, Loch Shell, Gob na Miolaid, Loch Claidh, Loch Ordhairn, Loch Valamus, Loch Mariveg, Loch Grimshader, Stornoway, and Loch Seaforth (Lawrence, 2017). The latter however is dangerous to approach though it is calm inside the loch (Lawrence, 2017, p. 111) (Lawrence 2017: 111). Stornoway is the “the largest harbour in the Hebrides” (Lawrence, 2017, p. 128). It is sheltered from all winds and tides, and therefore has easy accessibility.

Rounding the butt of Lewis is dangerous, and is seen by some seamen as being more dangerous than Cape Wrath (Lawrence, 2017, p. 152). West Loch Roag is considered one of

the best harbours on the west side of the Outer Hebrides (Lawrence, 2017, p. 147). Loch Roag has been historically a node in the maritime landscape between the Hebrides and Iceland and the Faroe Islands (*fig. 25*).

2.2.4 Harris

On South Harris, Leverburgh and Rodal offer natural, sheltered harbours and anchorages (Lawrence, 2017, p. 86). Southeast Harris has a total of 5 anchorages, at Loch Finsbay, Loch Flodabay, Loch Grosebay, East Loch Tarbert on Scalpay, and at Tarbert.

Tarbert, a natural Isthmus just 200m wide, is a usual hub of travel when travelling from Harris to Skye in modern times, across the Little Minch (Lawrence, 2017, p. 101).

Before the modern ferry terminal at Leverburgh, Harris, the two major sea-passages in the Sound of Harris were either the deep, tidal channel between Ensay and South Harris, or the shallow passage between Berneray and Killegray (Lawrence, 2017, p. 73). The Sound of Harris however is considered dangerous in general and should be avoided in adverse weather conditions, such as heavy winds, or the tide reaching 5 knots or over (Lawrence, 2017, p. 73).

The Little Minch, the stretch of water between Harris and Skye, is considered dangerous in bad weather conditions due to wind, tidal stream and an uneven sea bottom. From Dunvegan or Uig on Skye, it is an easy voyage, whereas from Skye to Harris or Lewis, it is more difficult (Lawrence, 2017, p. 107).

The western side of the Outer Hebrides is known for being dangerous to sail, possessing no natural, sheltered harbours, or havens from Barra Head to the Sound of Harris (Lawrence, 2017, p. 131), with just a few safe harbours on the west side of Lewis north of the Sound of Harris (Lawrence, 2017, p. 131).

Traveling along the west of Harris and Lewis, there are multiple shelters along the way, for example at West Loch Tarbert, the Sound of Taransay, Loch Meavig, Loch Leosavay, the western side of Scalpay, Mealista, Camus Uig, Loch Resort, Loch

Tamanavay, Loch Roag, particularly at Shiaran Mor, Pabbay Mor, and Eileann Teinish, Loch Carloway, and Bernera Harbour (Lawrence, 2017, pp. 137-146).

Taransay possesses a natural, sheltered harbour at Loch na h'Uidhe, particularly on the south side of the isthmus (Lawrence, 2017, p. 139).

2.2.5 Harris Sound

Berneray

Berneray just has one safe anchorage, at Bays Loch, but anchorages in other bays of the eastern island is possible for temporary shelter (Lawrence, 2017, p. 79).

Ensay

Ensay Ho is a natural sheltered harbour located on the east side of the island (Lawrence, 2017, p. 85), offering the best shelter in the Sound of Harris.

2.2.6 North Uist

“The east coast of North Uist, given a reasonable berth, is free from off lying dangers” (Lawrence, 2017, p. 62). There are multiple natural, sheltered harbours along the east coast of North Uist, for example a Floddaymore, Moray Harbour, Loch Eport, and Loch Maddy (Lawrence, 2017, pp. 61-63). Northern North Uist has two good, natural sheltered harbours at Calm Bay and Cheesebay on the north-eastern side of the island, both with anchorages (Lawrence, 2017, p. 75).

On the northern side of North Uist, safe passage in the Sound of Harris through the Sound of Pabbay is possible but only under ideal conditions (Lawrence, 2017, p. 134). Griminish Harbour west of the Vallay Sound possesses anchorage, but should be approached at half-tide or above, because Vallay is a tidal island. The harbour is dangerous under anything but ideal conditions (Lawrence, 2017, p. 134).

The island chain of Heisker is dangerous to travel to except in exceptional weather conditions (Lawrence, 2017, p. 123) with shelter at Croach harbour, and South Harbour (Lawrence, 2017, pp. 132-133).

2.2.7 Benbecula

It is usually advised to travel on the eastern side of Benbecula when traveling to and from North Uist to South Uist (Lawrence, 2017, p. 52), due to the western side of Benbecula being dangerous, because of strong easterly winds and often poor visibility. Anchorage can be found in the harbour of Peter's Port (Lawrence, 2017, p. 53), on the south-eastern side of the island, while other anchorages can be found on the eastern side of the island, at Loch Uiskevagh and Caolas Wiay Beag (Lawrence, 2017, pp. 53-57).

2.2.8 South Uist

South Uist is rectangular shaped, with four natural, sheltered harbours on the east side of the island, and just two landing-places on the west side at Rubha Ardvule and Orosay. Loch Boisdale, Loch Eynort, Loch Skipport, and Loch Carnan are natural harbours on the east side of the island. Loch Eynort is more difficult, with many reefs and small islets in the north side of the bay, and no shelter from the wind in the southern side (Lawrence, 2017, p. 43). Loch Skipport is "favourable" and often a stoppage for modern vessels (Lawrence, 2017, p. 47).

2.2.9 Eriskay

Acairseid Mhor is "an outstanding natural harbour" (Lawrence, 2017, p. 36), with a wide and long bay with very good shelter. It is one of the safe havens from the southern point of South Uist to and from the Sound of Barra.

2.2.10 Barra Island chain

There are recorded anchorages on the east sides of the following islands: Bernary, Mingulay, Pabbay, Sandray, and Vatersay, all providing Minch-facing natural, sheltered harbours for sea-vessels (Lawrence, 2017, pp. 21-22).

Barra itself possesses three natural, sheltered harbours. One on the southeast at Breivig, one at the south at present-day Castlebay, though the best shelter in all weather conditions at Cornaig bay, in the sound of Vatersay (Lawrence, 2017, pp. 22-24), and in the north of the island at North Bay. The south and eastern side of Barra can be dangerous due to drying rocks and shoal patches, and it is preferable to sail around the west side of the island if traveling to or from Eriskay (Lawrence, 2017, pp. 26-27).

2.2.11 St Kilda

The island chain possesses one natural, sheltered harbour, at Village Bay on Hirta (Lawrence, 2017, p. 155), offering anchorage with hard sand, though with some swell. The island should only be visited in ideal weather conditions (Lawrence, 2017, p. 155).

2.2.12 Shiant Islands

It is dangerous to approach the islands from the east side (Lawrence, 2017, p. 107), but Sound between Harris and the islands is safe (Lawrence, 2017, p. 116). The Shiant islands are composed of three islands, with one natural, sheltered harbour that offers anchorage: on the east side of Mol Mor. The islands may have been a stopover between North Skye and Lewis in the past, or altogether avoided due to strong and unpredictable tides (Blankshein, 2022, p. 751).

2.2.13 The Small Isles

The Small Isles (Eigg, Canna, Muck, and Rum) all possess deep anchorages, but the only sheltered harbour in all directions of the wind is at Canna harbour (Mason et al., 2022, p. 42).

Muck possesses one sheltered harbour and anchorage at Gallanach Bay (Mason et al., 2022, p. 45).

The best anchorage and shelter on Eigg is found at Poll Nan Partan, while the modern ferry terminal is further south, at Galmisdale point, which is also an anchorage (Mason et al., 2022, p. 46). Additional anchorages can be found on the island of Eilean Chathastail on the north, as well as the bay of Laig on the north (Mason et al., 2022, pp. 46-47).

Canna possesses the best harbour in the Small Isles, at Canna harbour (Mason et al., 2022, p. 55). The island has another sheltered anchorage at Tarbert on the mid-south side of the island. This was historically an entry point for a portage across the island (McCollough, 2000).

2.2.14 Skye

The island of Skye possesses many anchorages and harbours.

On the west coast, they are at Tarskavaig, Loch Eishort, Loch Slapin, Soay harbour on the island of Soay, Loch Harport, Loch Bracadale, Loch Pooltiel (Mason et al., 2022, pp. 54-62). The best harbours are at Loch Dunvegan, Loch Snizort, and Uig Bay (Mason et al., 2022, pp. 63-68).

At the Sound of Sleat on the southern of the island, there are anchorages at Armadale, Ornsay, and Kyle Akin (Mason et al., 2022, pp 71-73).

On Raasay and the Inner Sound, there are anchorages at Rona, Fladday on Raasay, Straffin, the Narrows of Raasay, the south side of Scalpay (Mason et al., 2022, p. 87).

Portree harbour, where there is a modern port and the largest settlement on Skye, is the most sheltered natural harbour on Skye (Mason et al., 2022, p. 110). In the Sound of Raasay, Broadford bay provides shelter for winds but “not much else” (Mason et al., 2022, p. 106).

There are anchorages at Pabay, Loch Aionort, and Loch Sligachean (Mason et al., 2022, p. 106).

Chapter 3 Research history

3.1.1 Introduction to the research of Skye and the Western Isles

The archaeology of Skye and the Western Isles has been historically an understudied area compared to the rest of the British Isles. The islands have been in the past considered a periphery of Scotland and even Europe, historically seen as a backward, marginal place where technology and progress reach last (Armit, 1996, p. 5). Though this view has been criticized in recent years (Sharples & Smith, 2009, p. 105), the islands remain a relatively understudied area of Scotland in comparison to other areas of the country, especially in regards to the archaeology of the Viking Age and Late Norse Periods. The exception has in recent decades been the research done on South Uist, with two Norse settlement sites excavated and 24 Norse settlement mounds identified through survey, undertaken by Cardiff and Sheffield University between 1992-2006 (Parker Pearson, 2012; Sharples, 2005, 2019, 2020; Sharples et al., 2016; Sharples & Pearson, 1999; Sharples & Smith, 2009).

The general historiography of the islands has been discussed at length by John Raven (2005), and the general archaeology of Skye and the Western Isles has been discussed by Ian Armit in the *Archaeology of Skye and the Western Isles* (1996). Norse Scotland in general has been discussed by James Graham-Campbell & Colleen Batey (1998), Anna Ritchie (1993), as well as Barbara Crawford (1987), and considerable attention has been given to the archaeology of Orkney, Shetland and Caithness (Sharples & Pearson, 1999, p. 42), due to the larger number of excavations that have taken place. Since the focus of this thesis is the Norse period between 790-1266 AD, the focus of this chapter will focus on the Norse activity of Skye and the Western Isles. The history of archaeological research has recently been highlighted by Olwyn Owen (2023), in the volume *The Viking Age of Scotland: Studies in Scottish Scandinavian archaeology* (Horne et al., 2023).

Some general overviews of the archaeology of the Norse period of Skye and the Western Isles have been conducted. Most recently, the final two publications of the results of the

excavations of Bornais, South Uist, have been released and include overviews of Norse-period archaeological research (Sharples, 2019, 2020). Barbara Crawford discussed at length a full summary of the Norse settlement and history in the Western Isles in relation to the excavations of Cille Pheadair on South Uist (2018). The book by Angela Gannon and George Geddes on the archaeology of St. Kilda surveyed some of the known archaeological evidence, with a focus on the evidence from Hirta (2015). Niall Sharples and Rachel Smith have also given an overview of the Norse settlement on the Western Isles, with a particular regard to the west coast of South Uist, where evidence is the strongest (2009). John Hunter synthesized much of the archaeological evidence as of 2004 in the Western Isles along with evidence of Christian activity (Hunter, 2004). James Graham-Campbell & Colleen Batey summarized the totality of the archaeological evidence from Skye and the Western Isles, including touching on some of the lesser known or overlooked evidence (1998), and Ian Armit included a chapter of the Norse period for his book the *Archaeology of Skye in the Western Isles* (1996).

Archaeological studies on the landscape of the Norse period in Skye and the Western Isle were difficult before the SEARCH project recorded 24 Norse settlement mounds on the west coast of South Uist.

Sharples and Parker Pearson initially argued, on the basis of the Norse settlement evidence from South Uist, that the Norse takeover was not as genocidal as described by Ian Crawford (Sharples & Pearson, 1999, p. 57). The reasons for this is that the Norse longhouses at Cille Pheadair and Bornish displayed a distinctly Hebridean character in being single-skinned and subterranean, as well as the settlement patterns of South Uist found along the western coast without easy access to sea routes (Sharples & Pearson, 1999, p. 57). They however agree with Armit that the takeover perhaps mostly consisted of replacing the Pictish elites, which would explain the absence of Norse activity in brochs. Contra to Ian Crawford in particular, they argued that there are complicated social practices involved in the abandonment and construction of houses, and hostile takeover, which Crawford suggested at the Udal, is not the only possibility (Sharples & Pearson, 1999, p. 57).

Additional research of the settlement patterns at South Uist have led Sharples and Rachel Smith to further disagree with previous researchers, such as Barbara Crawford, on the nature and implications of the Norse settlement patterns from South Uist (Sharples & Pearson, 1999). They argued that the Norse mounds overlaying the Pictish mounds shows a continuity

between the two periods. Sharples and Smith have argued that the Norse settlement evidence can be demonstrated to show two distinct patterns. One, that the mounds show a continuity from the Iron Age to the Norse period since the majority overlay pre-Viking, Iron Age mounds (Sharples & Smith, 2009, p. 48), and two, that the Norse settlement mound cluster is similar to the divisions of the modern townships, showing a long *durée* of occupation and border division within South Uist (Sharples & Pearson, 1999, p. 58). Both points will be discussed further below at section.

David Griffiths and Jane Harrison, exploring the ancestral power of the landscape of Viking Orkney, have noted that the interpretations of Cille Pheadair and Bornais have lacked “archaeologically demonstrable factors – the size, commodification, complexity and geographic reach of the site’s rural economy, its spiritual or ancestral power, and the call it had upon its surrounding population in terms of family or social obligation.” (2011, p. 133). This argument however has been answered in subsequent publications of South Uist (Pearson, 2012), Cille Pheadair (Parker Pearson, 2018) and Bornais (Sharples, 2019, 2020) where trade routes and the complexity of administrative centres have been explored thoroughly.

However, the landscape had been explored by previous scholars, primarily through placename and historical data. The unpublished master dissertation of David Olson examined the Norse landscape through use of historical sources, data for the soil qualities, landscape locations, placenames and limited contemporary archaeological material (1983). In his dissertation, he developed a model which argued for the locations of Viking Age settlement sites based on location, placename, soil quality, and historic land worth. In two of his study areas, Bostadh and Galson both on Lewis, he argued for the locations of Viking Age settlements where settlement sites had been corroborated through subsequent archaeological excavations.

John Raven explored the Late Norse and Early Medieval period of South Uist, with a focus on the development of lordship and feudalism in the later medieval landscape (2005). Using an approach that involved historical documents, oral traditions, and landscape archaeological analysis, Raven argued that the original Viking farmsteads evolved into high status medieval farmsteads in the Late Norse period. Furthermore, he argued for the re-occupation of pre-Norse monumental structures, such as duns, brochs and crannogs, based on Late Medieval activity. Raven, however, has dated this reoccupation to the 13th century or earlier. Unfortunately, there is no archaeological evidence as far as I am aware to support his assertions that the brochs, crannogs, and duns were reoccupied in the Late Norse period;

however, there is Viking and Late Norse material including burials and structures that have been dated in the Southern Hebrides (Raven, 2005, pp. 193-194). Though this absence of evidence could be the result of either a lack of excavation or disturbance from post-Norse periods, it remains difficult to prove in Skye and the Western Isles. For the situation on South Uist, Raven has mostly based his assertion on the presence of Norse style-longhouses. However, this is quite problematic in the Hebrides. For example, a structure originally thought to be a Norse longhouse on a promontory fort at Gob Eier was found to be Neolithic in origin when excavated, without any identifiable Norse presence (Nesbitt et al., 2011). As far as my knowledge goes, the only monumental structures to produce archaeological evidence for Norse material are three of the brochs (Dun Beag, Dun Carloway, and Dun Cuier). However, I do not discount the arguments of Raven and his study remains relevant to this thesis.

3.1.2 Antiquarian inquiries and excavations

The first monograph to include Norse evidence from Skye and the Western Islands was by the antiquarian Joseph Anderson in the late 19th century, *Scotland in pagan times* (1883), where he discussed the finds from the Viking Burials discovered, particularly the burials at Eigg. Though at the time of writing, the Norse material was limited to grave goods, stray finds, and hoards, Anderson did however posit that many of the artifacts found from Viking graves, such as interlaced artwork on the Eigg sword hilt, were the result of Celtic-Norse interaction, showing that even as far back as

the 19th century, the idea that cultural interaction between Norse-speaking and Celtic-speaking peoples led to changes in material culture. Sigurd Grieg included the known Norse material of Skye and the Western Isles in volume II of *Viking Antiquities in Scotland*, in what was part of *Viking Antiquities in Britain and Ireland* (1940). However, the first identifiable Norse settlement site was not excavated until the 1950s, and unpublished until the 1970s (Maclaren, 1974). The work of Grieg was thus limited, as that of Anderson, to artefacts recovered from burials and stray finds.

The antiquarian and historian Erskine Beveridge described Norse material culture from settlement sites as well as from burials found on North Uist, and undertook excavations and

surveys of Norse sites on North Uist, Harris and the sound of Harris (1911). He described material from what would be later identified as the Viking and Late Norse settlement site at the Udal, a settlement site on Vallay, and boat burials from Otternish. Beveridge excavated an Iron Age “earth-house”, which Lane would later identify as having contained Norse material culture (Lane, 1983), and James Graham-Campbell and Colleen Batey have argued that Beveridge excavated a sub-rectangular Norse structure at Garry Lochdrach (Graham-Campbell & Batey, 1998, p. 81). There are several other sites excavated by Beveridge that produced Norse-period artefacts from North Uist (Sollas, Eilean Maliet, Baille Risary, and Scaalan), but the stratigraphy was not recorded, and the reports are poor.

The antiquarian investigations targeted many of the visible monuments within Skye and the Western Isles, such as large cairns, wheelhouses, stone circles and settings, and brochs. One broch that was excavated during antiquarian times, Dun Beag, has turned up evidence of Norse activity through Lane’s re-assessment of pottery in the Hebrides (Lane, 1983). However, evidence of Norse activity in general of pre-Norse structures is overall scant, though this thesis will further evaluate some of the evidence.

Research during the antiquarian era revealed a great number of burials. Out of probably 20 reported burials sites in the area of study, only two sites were excavated by professional archaeologists. The quality of the information regarding the burials from the antiquarian era (circa 17th-early 20th centuries) range from professional excavations with detailed plans to small articles of discovery in local newspapers.

Besides the above-mentioned burial reported by Martin Martin, the Viking burial site of Kildonan on the isle of Eigg represents the earliest antiquarian investigations of Viking burials. A mound was ploughed “around” 1830 and revealed a high-status, silver plated Viking Petersen type D sword hilt and subsequent other grave goods, and two additional Viking burial cairns were excavated, yielding similarly high-status burials (Grieg et al., 1940, pp. 64-66; MacPherson, 1878), one of which was likely a secondary burial in a Neolithic chamber cairn (Canmore ID: **22182**). The significance of these graves and their location has been analysed by Sarah Elizabeth Thomas who argued that they show the presence of two separate communities, Norse and Pictish, on the island (2004). Additional, detailed burial excavations were undertaken at Borve, Barra by Commander Edge (Graham-Campbell & Batey, 1998, p. 83; McLeod, 2015a), and at Tote House, Skye, by Thomas Charles Lethbridge in 1920 (Lethbridge, 1920). Erskine Beveridge recorded two boat burials at Otternish, and an

additional burial at Vallay, all of which he attributed to the Norse period (Beveridge, 1911, p. 267). Though the above-mentioned antiquarian excavations were products of their time, their recorded placement in the landscape is of much use for a landscape study.

3.1.3 Modern excavations & Surveys

The site at Drimore, South Uist, is a single longhouse, excavated by Maclaren published in 1974 (Armit, 1996, pp. 190-191; Maclaren, 1974). The excavation ran for two weeks and there is an overall lack of context since there are surrounding buildings that have not been excavated. Armit has noted that at the time of his publication in 1996, Drimore was the only fully published excavation of a Norse settlement in the Hebrides (Armit, 1996, p. 188). The dating, though not entirely secure, suggests a late 10th century date on the basis of a composite antler comb (Parker Pearson, 2018, p. 9) but the earliest date potential date is the 9th century.

Discussions about the nature of Norse settlement and the consequences for the pre-Norse population began with the first publications of Ian Crawford after excavating the Viking and Norse settlement sites at the multi-period site of the Udal on North Uist (summarized in Graham-Campbell & Batey, 1998). The Udal site, currently unpublished as of 2023 besides the Neolithic and Bronze Age levels, is a multi-period settlement site complex with dates that range from early prehistory to the 17th century. Its earliest Viking phase directly overlies a pre-Norse, cellular, Pictish figure-8 houses, without windblown sand between the two settlement phases, leading Barbara

Crawford, among other placename scholars such as Smith, to argue that this is evidence of a hostile takeover of the Vikings (Crawford, 1987, p. 140).

The Udal, though it remains unpublished, is an extremely important site for our understanding of the Norse period of the Western Isles. Though the dating is uncertain, the first structure built by the Norse at the site was a 7m wide rampart, which enclosed a later longhouse. This rampart has been noted by Ben Raffield to be similar to other British Isle Viking Age defensive structures (Raffield, 2013). The wall seems to have quickly eroded and was used as a cabbage patch during later periods. Moreover, Graham-Campbell & Batey have noted that the name of the site comes from *Odel*, or *Odelsett*, referencing a system of land ownership

and inheritance laws (Graham-Campbell & Batey, 1998, p. 61). They have thus interpreted the Udal based on both archaeological and placename evidence as being a residence of an elite.

Excavations on Hirta, St. Kilda between 1986-1990 revealed a Norse midden, as well as diagnostic Norse artifacts in the form of steatite and Hebridean pottery vessels and the midden radiocarbon dated to the 10th century AD (Emery, 1996, p. 179). Though the data recovered is limited, the artifacts revealed a near even amount of both Hebridean pottery sherds and steatite sherds, which has been used by Judith Jesch to posit that St. Kilda represented a meeting point between Vikings from Northern Scotland, who used mainly steatite, and Vikings from the Hebrides, which had a style of ceramics in Hebridean pottery (Jesch, 2015, pp. 60-61). Though the excavations of Norse settlement on Hirta have been limited, as have been most of the Norse data from the island, it shows that given a proper landscape context, it is possible to deduce arguments with limited information.

In 1978, a female skeleton with Norse grave goods was discovered eroding out of a sand hill at Cnip, Lewis, and was subsequently excavated (Dunwell et al., 1995; Welander et al., 1987). Further excavations revealed a Viking cemetery of 7 individuals, situated near a Bronze Age cairn and Bronze Age cemetery. The Cnip cemetery has been the most well studied and understood burial site of the Norse period, and represents one of two Norse burial sites in my area of study excavated in modern times. A series of four excavations had occurred one in 1979, another in 1991, and two more in 1992 and 1994 (Armit, 1996, pp. 197-201). At Valtos, roughly 1km to the southwest, another burial was discovered in 1915, and was identified as a female Viking-period burial on the basis of artefacts recovered (MacLeod, 1916).

Armit has noted that the cemetery is in close vicinity to Late Iron Age monuments and "directly overlies" a Bronze Age cemetery site (Armit, 1996, p. 17). Armit has suggested that the Viking-period graves had intentionally been placed adjacent to an existing Bronze Age cemetery. Moreover, isotopic analysis done on one female burial revealed that she had grown up in the Southern Hebrides or Ireland (Montgomery et al., 2003). All seven individuals did not arrive from Scandinavia. Another burial was excavated at Nisabost, Harris in 1994 by Karl Knott, and was identified as a male Viking burial due to the knife present in the grave (Canmore ID: **335605**). No other grave goods were recovered, but this represents the only other Viking burial site excavated in modern times in the area of study. The burials and their implications for both the ethnic and religious landscape will be discussed further in this thesis.

Bornais is located on the west coast of South Uist, roughly central on the island, in the relatively flat machair sand dune system. It is composed of three mounds: mound 1, 2, and 3, along with two subsidiary mounds: mound 2A and 2B (Sharples, 2005, p. 11). Settlement activity at Bornais spans over 1000 years of permanent settlement activity, beginning in the 5th century or earlier and ending in the 15th century (Sharples, 2019, p. 29).

The Bornais complex was first surveyed by the SEARCH project, and excavated between 1994 and 2004 (Sharples, 2019, p. 9). The site lies ca. 1.6 kilometres from Dun Vulcan Iron Age broch, also excavated, though not entirely (Sharples, 2019, p. 2). The site consists of 5 mounds and secondary structures located at the edge of the mounds. Another mound, some 600m to the southwest of the Bornais complex is unexcavated, called *South Bornais* (Parker Pearson 2012, p. 42), and may date to the Norse period.

The excavations and results of Bornais have been published across three volumes. Mound 3 was published in 2005, uncovering a secondary a Late Norse house and ancillary buildings (Sharples, 2005). Mounds 2 and 2A were published in two volumes, in 2019 which focused on the stratigraphy and structures, and 2020, which focused on the economy and artefactual assemblage. The excavated material was furthermore summarized in Sharples & Smith 2016, where the authors argued that the agricultural and marine evidence excavated at the Bornais complex displays a rich though likely isolated high-status settlement site, compared to the assertion that the Hebrides appear poor and marginal (2016, p. 124). Bornais is further described in detail in **6.6**.

Cille Pheadair

Cille Pheadair is a Viking Age and Norse settlement site from South Uist on the western machair plain, excavated by Mike Parker Pearson et al between 1996 and 1998 (Parker Pearson, 2018). The settlement had no pre-Viking Age settlement site, though a Pictish cairn, dated to the 7th-8th centuries, was excavated about 20m to the south. The sequence of houses at Cille Pheadair has been dated from around 940 AD to 1245 AD. It is entirely possible that no pre-Norse settlement was found because they have since been destroyed by coastal erosion. The Cille Pheadair site is coastal, and has now been destroyed by erosion. The placement of the longhouse at Cille Pheadair in the vicinity of a Late Iron Age Pictish square

cairn has been noted by Parker Pearson as perhaps intentional (2018). Cille Pheadair is further detailed in 6.6.

Bosta

Bosta, occupying a north-facing beach on the island of Great Bernera, possesses a complex, multi-period settlement site. The site, revealed by a storm in the early 1990s, revealed a Norse settlement site overlaying a pre-Norse, Iron Age site. The Norse site, heavily damaged by the storm, had been partially built from the pre-Norse, Pictish figure-8 site. The Iron Age site was excavated, and has produced radiocarbon dates from 812-900 AD (Neighbour & Burgess, 1997, pp. 113-114). The beach also possesses a midden that has produced both Iron Age and Norse finds, particularly pottery and steatite. Though the Norse site had been nearly obliterated by the flood, it has provided some potentially telling evidence for the relationship between the Picts and the Norse. The placename itself is of interest, Bostadh from *bólstadör*, and has been previously identified as an area of Norse settlement by Olson (1983).

Barvas machair

The Barvas machair has revealed another multi-period settlement and burial site (Cowie & Rivett, 2015). The site ranges from the Bronze Age to the post Medieval period. The site is located at the Barvas Sands headland, on the machair on the coast, with an inland loch located within 1km of the site. The beaches in the area appear suitable for landing vessels.

The Viking to Late Norse site ranges from the late 10th, early 11th century to the 13th century (Cowie & Rivett, 2015). Mary Macleod Rivett has drawn comparisons to Cille Pheadair, being that both sites are greenfield sites, moderate farmsteads, beginning in the late 10th-early 11th century with no Iron Age predecessor, and ending around the 13th century. The Barvas site has been dated on the basis of pottery, and was radiocarbon dated to the late 10th, early 11th centuries.

Shielings

Two shieling sites have been identified to have Norse components to their archaeological records, due to the presence of steatite spindle whorls (Parker Pearson, 2018, p. 9). One site is located in a mountainous area on the South of Barra but near the coast, while the other is on the east side of Barra, nearly 2km inland in a mountainous area. These sites, though also unable to be dated more precisely than the Norse period, continue to show that there is

evidence of usage of the “outfield” or pastoral lands. Parker Pearson has interpreted these sites as summer pastures (Parker Pearson, 2018, p. 11).

An Duran

An Duran, originally a Neolithic to Iron Age Crannog site, was occupied in the Late Norse Period (Nesbitt et al., 2011), probably as a storage structure. This is perhaps a part of the so-called *Gaelic Renaissance* proposed by Raven and MacLeod Rivett, as discussed further below.

Other machair surveys

Ian Armit through Edinburgh University surveyed two regions in the area of study, North Uist and Uig, Lewis (Armit, 1994). In regard to the Norse-period, on the basis of settlement mounds on the Cnip peninsula, Armit concluded that foci of settlement moved from inland to the coast, signifying a change in ethnicity and centres of power (Armit, 1994). John Hunter surveyed the machair plain of western Harris (Hunter, 2005) Hunter & Colls surveyed in particular the Nisabost peninsula where a multiperiod settlement site was excavated, revealing a Norse-period level, though no structural remains were uncovered (Colls & Hunter, 2015). The island of Barra was surveyed extensively with hundreds of sites recorded, including two sites that were interpreted by the surveyors as Norse (Brannigan, 2000). Many areas of Lewis underwent survey with structures being recorded, including some believed to be Norse, but these are unexcavated (Burgess, 2003). The Ness parish of Lewis was surveyed, though only one Norse site was identified, through Norse pottery sherds (Barrowman, 2015). In recent years, Lewis has received some attention to its chapel sites with many being recorded and catalogued (Barrowman, 2020).

Coastal erosion surveys

Due to coastal erosion, many archaeological sites around the coasts of the Hebrides are routinely monitored (ShoreUPDATE). Many of the most vulnerable or damaged sites undergo archaeological investigation, including walk-over surveys to collect artefacts, or depending on the severity of the damage, excavation. A number of these sites have produced Norse-period artefacts, such as at Swainbost, Lewis, which produced a 9th-10th century antler comb (MacLeod Rivett pers. comm. 2020). One site explored is an eroding multi-period site, found on the edge of the coast at South Galson, Lewis (Canmore ID: 4357 from ShoreUPDATE

2014). The site, which has been added to the registry of vulnerable sites due to coastal erosion, has produced multi-period finds, from the early Iron Age to the Medieval Era, including Iron Age cist burials. The site has been dated and its dated structures are associated with finds, including a 10th century penny (ShoreUPDATE 2014).

Due to the presence of Norse-pottery in the region, ceramic sherds that can be identified typologically have been instrumental in dating many settlement sites to the Norse-period that would have been otherwise undatable. The following subsection will describe the Norse-period pottery.

3.1.4 Hebridean Pottery

Hand-made pottery (without a potter's wheel) has a circa 2,500 long period of production in the Hebrides, starting in the earlier Iron Age and ending as late as the early 20th century in some parts of the Hebrides (Lane, 2007, p. 2). For his Ph.D. thesis (1983), Lane examined the pottery from the Udal, particularly from the Iron Age of 500 to 800 AD (called *Dark Age* in his thesis) to the Viking Age (800-1100 AD in his thesis). Layers X and IXC of the Udal produced a substantial amount of pottery sherds (Lane, 2007, p. 9). Using the excavated material as a basis for dating pottery sherds, Lane was able to identify 29 sites as containing Norse-period artefacts.

The identification of Norse pottery was used to date sites to the Norse period by the SEARCH project on South Uist (Sharples & Parker Pearson, 1999, p. 46; Parker Pearson, 2012). Large quantities of Norse pottery sherds have been recovered in excavations of Norse settlement sites in the region, such as at Cille Pheadair, which has an assemblage totalling 9,395 sherds (Parker Pearson, 2018, p. 251) and approx. 14,416 sherds from Mounds 2 and 2A at Bornais (Sharples, 2019, p. 541), with a lesser quantity from Barvas and Bostadh (Lane, 2007, p. 12). Pottery was only recovered in a small quantity at Drimore and no sherds were diagnostic (Lane, 2007, p. 9).

The pottery

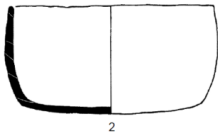


Figure 26: Norse-period vessel, after Lane, 2007, p. 10, fig.8.



nearly complete platter, from Lane, 2007, p. 10, plate 1).

Norse pottery is handmade and can be diagnosed as Norse through base, rim, and platter-sherds (Lane, 1983; 2007), and can be classified as convex bowl, cup, steep-sided bowl, and platter forms (Lane, 1983, p. 77). The pottery was made from local clay, but the shapes of the vessels and techniques changed dramatically from the pottery style that preceded it (Lane, 1983; 2007; 2012). The technique used would be coiling the clay and pressing together to create the vessel, and much of the pottery diagnosed as Norse is grass-tempered (Lane, 1983, p. 79). Some of the pottery vessels appear as skeuomorphs of stone vessels from Scandinavia, particularly from Norway (Lane, 2007, p. 14). Norse pottery was thus created using local technology and material to suit a Norse diet (Lane, 2012, p. 215).

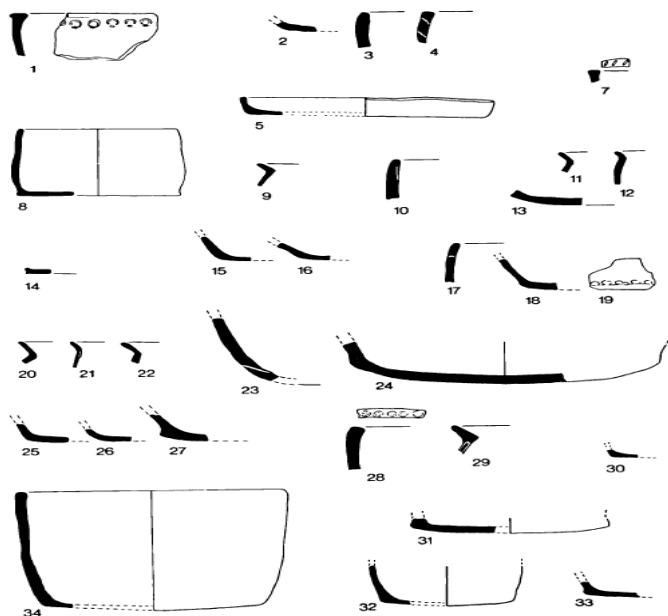


Figure 28: Sample of Norse-period pottery reconstruction from the Hebrides (after Lane, 1983, p. 633)

Lane argued that the pottery sherds were among the earliest layer (X) in the Udal, though composed of less than 1% of the total pottery assemblage from the site (Lane, 1983, p. 11). Platter sherds, from platter-type vessels with analogies to steatite platters in Norway and elsewhere, were in use at Cille Pheadair until the abandonment of the site in the early 13th century (Lane, 2007, p. 12). Forster has suggested that baking plates in Shetland pre-date those in Norway (Forster, 2004, pp. 182-198), and if the early dates of the Udal platter sherds are correct, ceramic platters pre-date steatite platters by possibly several centuries and represent the earliest finds of platters thus far (Lane, 2007, pp. 12-13). Platter sherds are not the earliest identifiable Norse pottery vessels, with sherds from other vessels appearing to be earlier than the earliest dateable platter sherds from Bornais and Bostadh (Lane, 2007, p. 13). Lane has however argued that platter sherds from the 13th and 14th centuries at Bornais push the use of this type of vessel past the Norse period and thus cannot be used to date sites strictly to the Norse period on the basis of pottery sherds alone (Lane, 2007, p. 13), but this is likely due to disturbance in later levels at Bornais and the distinctive platter ware at the site seems to end at around 1250 AD (Sharples, 2020).

The identification of the potters is a matter of debate. Ceramic traditions end sometime in the early Viking Age or even as early as the Migration period (400-600 AD) in Norway (Rødsrud, 2016), with much of Norway being aceramic, as soapstone was the dominant material used for vessels. Non-native potters have been identified at Kaupang, where Frisian, Frankish, and Slavic potters seem to have operated, even bringing their own clay with them (Skre, 2011). The identification of potters in the Hebrides has been the subject of debate, with some scholars arguing there are similarities between Norse pottery and Irish souterrain ware, suggesting the potters were Irish (Jennings & Kruse, 2005). Lane has stated that the similarities between Irish souterrain ware and Norse pottery are superficial but need to be researched thoroughly before reaching that conclusion (Lane, 2007, p. 15). Sharples has argued that the simplest explanation is that they were locals (Sharples, 2020, p. 463). Nevertheless, the continuation of a pottery tradition in the Hebrides is evidence of non-Norse potters, but given that some of the vessels are skeuomorphs of steatite vessels, it is likely that this shows a Norse-dominated elite that brought over Scandinavian-style feasting and dietary habits to the islands.

The distribution map of Norse pottery as of 2007 provided by Lane is useful in showing that Norse pottery was in use throughout the area of study in this thesis (*fig. 29*). The identification of a Norse-style type of pottery that can be dated from 800-1250 AD is useful in identifying



Figure 29: Map of Norse sites identified by Lane through diagnostic Norse-period pottery in the west coast of Scotland (Lane, 1983, p. 636).

sites as Norse-period for the purposes of this thesis.

Besides Norse pottery, soapstone spindle whorls can be used as ethnic identifiers for Norse activity at these wheelhouse sites. Soapstone quarries were not known in the Hebrides before the 20th century (Ritchie, 1984). Soapstone, quarried from Shetland, is known in the British Isles since at least the Bronze Age, particularly in the form of high-status armrings during the Early-Middle Iron Age, but soapstone spindle

whorls do not appear until the Norse period (McKenzie, 2005, p. 14). For the Norse era of the Hebrides, it

seems soapstone was originated equally from Shetland and Norway (Schou, 2017). While it is possible that soapstone spindle whorls can be post-Norse, soapstone imports become rarer throughout the Norse period, as the sphere of influence of the Hebrides shifts from the Norse world to mainland Scotland and the Irish Sea (Sharples, 2020, p. 459). Typology has been used to identify the spindle-whorls from the Grimsay wheelhouse, which Whyte identified as dating from the 10th-12th centuries AD, and Foster identified the spindle whorls at Alt Christeal as Norse, but the author unfortunately did not have the opportunity to investigate the spindle whorl finds from the other wheelhouses. Besides spindle whorls, worked soapstone appears at one of the sites (Garry Iochdrach), signifying that soapstone was imported and then worked into vessels in the Hebrides. As far as the author knows, there are no other cases of soapstone blocks being worked at any other sites, including Bornais, which excavations has shown that there was artifact production (antler-working for example). This suggests to the author that soapstone vessels, tools, and other objects may have been produced off the main settlement areas, in the secondary or shieling farmsteads, similar to Norway (Mahler, 2007).

Viking Age pottery is the most common find at these sites, with Baille Risary, Geirisnis and Alt Christal lacking Norse pottery sherds. As mentioned elsewhere in this thesis, the author agrees with Lane that the presence of Norse pottery is evidence of Norse-period domestic activity. However, without stratigraphy, this pottery cannot give a precise dating other than Norse period (800-1250 AD). The copper-alloy ringed-pin from Garry Iochdrach can date the site to the 9th-10th centuries, but that does not mean activity could not have continued later.

Norse-period (square headed) rivets have been found at Baille Risary. Iron rivets would have been utilized primarily for boats and ships. Beveridge reported several other finds of rivets throughout North Uist, from what was later to be known as the settlement site of the Udal, to the Viking boat or ship burials at Otternish, among others (Beveridge, 1911, pp. 266-267). One possible explanation on why rivets would appear so far from the coast (over 2km) is that these were smithed on site, as smithing in the Viking Age took place off the main farm, usually in rock shelters or at shielings in Norway. Bornais for example lacks evidence of iron production despite the presence of many boat rivets, suggesting to Sharples that iron production took place outside the main hall or somewhere else other than Bornais entirely (Sharples, 2020, pp. 446-447). No slag was recorded by Beveridge, but neither were soapstone spindle whorls which were included in the artifact assemblage from the excavation. Unfortunately, Baille Risary was not recorded well enough to further interpret. Similarly, the find of a Viking age ringed-pin at Garry Iochdrach is useful for giving a date to the site (9th-

10th century), but just one find, and a lack of crucibles, and a lack of slag, makes it difficult to assess whether this is just a loss find or there was the production of alloy objects at this site.

The steatite lamp at Geirnisnis is the only Norse-period artifact that can be identified as Norse from the assemblage. Steatite lamps are known throughout the Norse world, and a similar object was found at a wheelhouse near the broch of Scatness (Dockrill & Bond, 2014). The infill of the Scatness wheelhouse is suggestive of a Norse midden, and the excavators argue that the wheelhouse was used as a rubbish dump (Dockrill & Bond, 2014). While it is tempting to suggest something similar for Geirnisnis, the archaeological remains at Geirnisnis are much less well understood, and an analogy is difficult.

3.1.5 Ethnicity: Norse, Picts, Gaels

A Late Iron Age, Celtic speaking people, for simplicities sake will be referred to as Picts, were present on the island when the Norse arrived, but scholars have disputed the impact Norse migration and colonization had on the Picts. Historically, the impact of Norse settlement on the native Picts has generally focused on placenames, because there are very few pre-Norse placenames that have survived and the oldest placenames in the area are mostly Old Norse (i.e. Smith, 2001). The debate on the Norse colonization and the consequences it had for the Picts has been placename focused until recent years, with the debate renewed after more archaeological evidence had been uncovered in South Uist and elsewhere.

Historically, there has been a division, the peace school, which argued that the Picts had been assimilated gradually into Old Norse culture, assimilated and essentially *turned* into ethnic Norse, and the war school, who argues that the Norse people killed and/or driven off the isles entirely (see Smith, 2001 for a fuller history of the two schools).

For the peace school, Anna Ritchie (1993) has interpreted the archaeological evidence as suggestion of peaceful continuity, and Sharples and Parker Pearson, and Sharples and Rachel Smith have also argued for some degree of continuity (1999; 2009). James

H. Barrett, discussing the situation of Viking Scotland in general, concluded that the Picts were encouraged to assimilate due to the elite status of the Norse (Barrett, 2003, p. 99).

Moreover, there is some evidence to suggest a mixed identity on the islands. The *Treaty of*

Perth in 1266, when the Scottish crown regained the Hebrides, gave the option to the islanders to stay or leave, suggesting a mixed identity on the islands at the time of the treaty (Macleod Rivett, 2016, p. 152).

Scholars arguing for the war school primarily used placename and historical evidence (Smith, 2001). Smith argues that the solution to the Pictish and Norse dilemma is mired in ethnic and regional empathy, with Scottish or Scandinavian scholars not wishing to believe their ancestors were capable of genocide, or that their islands were scenes of mass violence (Smith, 2001, p. 19). Though he admits that he is not using archaeological evidence, he justifies his exclusion of archaeological evidence by saying the archaeological record is silent and the absence of evidence is not evidence (Smith, 2001, p. 22).

There are a few issues with the arguments of Smith. First, the archaeological record is not necessarily silent on the issue. As noted above, scholars have argued for some deal of continuity based on Norse and pre-Norse Iron Age sites showing a continuity in placement of the landscape (i.e., Sharples & Smith, 2009), and the presence of a single-skinned, subterranean style of longhouse found in the Hebrides which suggests some kind of mixed identity.

Some scholars have used archaeological evidence to argue in favour of the war school, such as Ian Crawford, after his extensive work on Udal, had argued that the takeover of the settlement had been violent due to a Viking structure overlain over a Pictish structure, with no blown sand indicating a pause, and his interpretation has been accepted by others such as Barbara Crawford (Crawford, 1987, p. 140). However, as Sharples and Parker Pearson have argued, relying on one site is too simplistic to make inferences about the nature of the impact of the Norse settlement on the islands as a whole (Sharples & Parker Pearson, 1999).

Andrew Jennings and Arne Kruse (2005) have also made a case against the peace school, taking an interdisciplinary approach that combines archaeology, genetics and historical documents. They generated a model for what occurred in the isles, arguing that the Norse had made life “untenable” for the native Picts, who were either killed or fled to the mainland where there are more suitable hiding spaces (Jennings & Kruse, 2005, p. 260). The Norse then built their own structures using their own building techniques, and finally, since the Picts had fled and they required labour, they imported slaves from probably Ireland, who came with their own pottery techniques (Jennings & Kruse, 2005, p. 260). Lane has also argued contra to

Jennings and Kruse, utilizing his pottery data, which suggests a continuity of a local Late Iron Age population and not evidence of Irish slaves (Lane, 2012, p. 215).

Macleod Rivett (2016, p. 157) and Raven (2005, p. 137) have argued that the Norse had intentionally ignored structures already present in the isles and inhabited by the Picts. These structures are Iron Age brochs and duns that had been constructed before/during the Roman Iron Age, inhabited until the Viking Age, and then inhabited again from the Early medieval period and into Modern times. Duns, brochs, promontory forts, etc., have a complicated history in the Hebrides, and while it is not my intention to delve into this area of research in this section, it is noteworthy that these structures have not been uniformly inhabited: some a single broch may have been inhabited and abandoned multiple times for nearly two millennia before finally being pilfered of its drystone in the 19th century, while another broch may have been constructed around the 1st century AD and subsequently abandoned and never inhabited again.

Raven posits that the post-Norse Gaels reoccupied these structures after the transfer of power from the Norse to the Scots in a so-called *Gaelic Renaissance* (2005, p. 137). Though a (potential) disuse of brochs, duns, and other “fortification” structures does not necessarily signify a hostile takeover, it does signify the social status of the native Picts and the attitude toward them from the Viking colonizers. As mentioned earlier, both Sharples and Parker Pearson (1999), and Ian Armit (1996) have posited that the Pictish elite was displaced, and this may be reflected in the disuse of brochs. On the contrary, there is some evidence of Vikings using brochs, particularly Dun Beag (Graham-Campbell & Batey 1998, p. 78). This further complicates the issue of monument reuse in the Norse landscape. Though the archaeological evidence is scant, a reevaluation of the landscape of the Norse period could potentially provide insight on the views and usages of broch and dun sites in the Norse period.

The unpublished M.Phil. thesis of Sarah Thomas (2004) looked at conversion and ethnicity in the Hebrides, and argued for a continuation of Christian Picts at Kildonnan on Eigg on the basis of identifiable Pictish Christian architecture dating to the 10th-11th

centuries, and placenames. On the basis of Pictish Christian sculpture found at a probable monastic site at Kildonnan, Thomas argues that there was a Pictish population that survived and were identifiably Pictish during the Norse era, into the 10th century or beyond (Thomas,

2004). Thomas suggests that the Norse impact on Skye and the Western Isles may be more complex than a peace or war dichotomy.

It is likely that the question of the “fate” of the Picts is more complex and nuanced than just a “survive” or “died” dichotomy. Lane has further argued that while scholars that argue for an extinction of the Picts may be right, more publication and excavation of the archaeological evidence is needed to boost arguments on either side (Lane, 2012, 15). Though studies of the Norse period of Hebrides intend to include Skye and the Western Isles one region, it is possible that the attitude toward the Picts and the relationships between the two groups had differed in the islands. It may be possible that in some areas, the interaction was violent, while in others, it was peaceful, and there does not necessarily need to be one answer.

A landscape analysis of the Norse period of Skye and the Western Isles can be utilized to ask and answer questions of Norse settlement. An archaeological analysis that incorporates placename data will be able to ask and answer questions of settlement patterns and ethnicity, as well as answering Griffiths and Harrison (2011), to explore a landscape of power, colonization, and ancestry.

3.1.6 Genetics and isotopes

There has been some use of genetics to attempt to answer the question of the fate of the Picts (Helgason *et al.* 2001; Goodacre *et al.* 2005). In a sample from Orkney, genetics have revealed a strong pool of Norwegian lineages, suggesting genetic and cultural dominance (Helgason *et al.*, 2001). In another study, it has been shown that the Norse in the Northern Isles were about 50% male and 50% female, suggesting colonization by families, while over 85% of Norse lineages in the Western Isles were male (Goodacre *et al.* 2005). In lieu of this evidence, it seems improbable for a total annihilation of all peoples in the Western Isles by the Norse, or at least, females would have had to have been alive in order to intermarry with the incoming Norse males.

In addition, more recent DNA evidence has also been put forward to explain settlement in Norse Scotland. Two bodies tested from a pagan Norse burial ground from Rousay, Orkney, showed Pictish or indigenous descent markers, but were buried in a Norse style of dress and equipment (Margaryan *et al.*, 2020). This is heavily indicative that in Norse Scotland, locals

may have switched identity or allegiance to Norse. This is in lieu of Price, Collard, and Raffield in what could be termed as “becoming Vikings” (2015). Similar and comparable data for Viking-period burials in the Hebrides is lacking, however. Present-day people from the Hebrides have ca. 7% West-Norwegian DNA, compared to ca. 23% for modern present-day people from Orkney (Gilbert et al., 2019).

Movement of peoples throughout the region has been argued to be exemplified in other studies. Isotopic analysis of the one of the female skeletons found at Cnip, Lewis, revealed that the person spent most of their life in Ireland or the Southern Hebrides (Montgomery et al., 2003). Interestingly, the body was buried with some Irish and Irish-sea originated objects, as was the female skeleton found at Bhaltois ca. 2km away (Macleod, 1916). Though this point shall be expanded on later in the thesis, it shows that there was a complicated movement of people during the Norse period, and perhaps we are seeing some elements of a Hiberno-Norse ethnicity, as proposed by Jesch (2015, pp. 60-61). However, genetics and isotopic analysis is beyond the scope of this thesis and will only be drawn upon in regards to previous research in the area of study.

3.1.7 Gender

Gender research of the Norse period of the isles have been neglected due to a lack of burials; however, a few female burials found, such as on Barra and Lewis, were rich in grave goods and could potentially offer much insight to women in the Viking Age women. Lesley Abrams (2007, p.189) has also argued that the female Christian burial from Barra, represented by a runestone, was a person of importance, either religiously or secularly.

Frida Norstein (Norstein, 2014) has studied gender and burial in the Northern Isles, where she argued that the Pagan burials represent identity within the Norse colonial world, and changes in burial practices had been used to establish a colonial identity. I think that an exploration of burials in their colonial landscape context could potentially help explore both gender and burial aspects of the Norse landscape. I also feel that a comparison of gender in the rest of the North Atlantic and Norse world could provide insights on the treatment of female burials within Skye and the Western Isles. However, this is beyond the scope of this thesis.

3.1.8 Agricultural settlement and history of research

The landscape of Skye and the Western Isles has been one of the more studied aspects of the archaeological record of the islands (Dodgshon, 2015). The presence of above-ground monuments, such as megaliths or cairns from the Neolithic/Bronze Age to the hillforts, brochs, and wheelhouses of the Iron Age has allowed the region to be analysed in numerous landscape contexts (Parker Pearson, 2012, pp. 4-5). Pertinent to this study, Scandinavian settlers introduced new crops, or had a larger focus on crops different than the pre-Scandinavian Iron Age (Sharples, 2020, p. 462). This shows that the Scandinavian settlers imported their own agricultural system into the Hebrides, also called the Scandinavian farming package seen elsewhere in the North Atlantic, such as the Faroes (Edwards, 2005, p. 63), instead of adopting local agricultural practices.

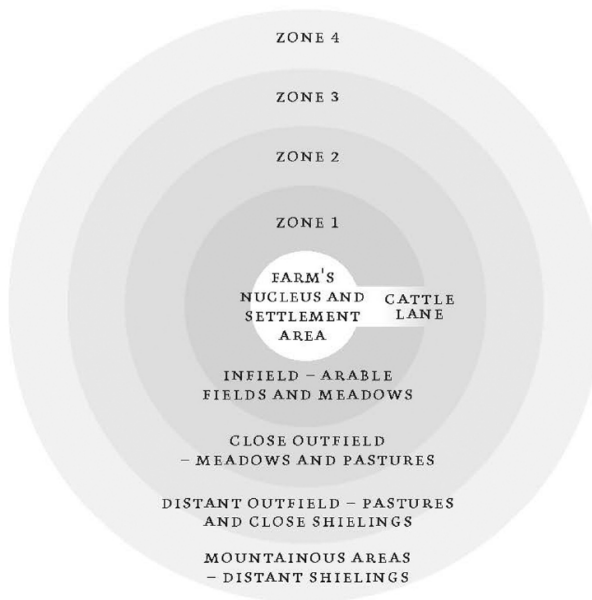


Figure 30: the Iron Age and Medieval farming system. After Øye, 2013, fig. 4).

Much has been written about Scandinavian farming (Berglund, 2003; Dommasnes et al., 2016; Iversen, 2008; Iversen et al., 2016; Kaland, 1987; Olson, 1983; Øye, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2009, 2013). The agricultural system in the Scandinavian Iron Age to the Industrial Revolution can be defined an enclosed system (infield) where crops and fodder for animals

were grown, and the outfield, where animals were grazed and other resources were harvested, such as lumber. Outfield production was often tied to livestock, with meadows serving as collection grounds for manure to fertilize the crops in the infield (Eriksson et al., 2021, p. 817). The Scandinavian agricultural system was based on this infield-outfield system, called the *utmark* and *innmark* (Diinhoff et al., 2005; Øye, 2013) was likely imported by the Norse to Britain and Ireland (Pearsall, 1961; Whyte, 1985), though it does not appear Shetland has ever had a transhumance system, i.e. (Turner et al., 2013, p. 11), with clear evidence of this system at Quoygre, Orkney, in the form of Scandinavian-style manuring for example (Simpson, 1997). In general, the settlement pattern in the Viking Age was a dispersion of single farmsteads spread out in a rural landscape (Eriksen, 2019, p. 136; Øye, 2002), such as in Iceland (Vésteinsson, 2007), though this is an oversimplification

when viewed at a regional level, with collective farmsteads or villages existed during Iron Age Rogaland (Bjørdal, 2016, p. 260; Iversen, 2017, p. 274), while double farms existed in Viking-period Greenland (Madsen, 2014, p. 18), and proto-urban towns both in Scandinavia and in areas of Scandinavian influence are known to have existed (Hadley & Harkel, 2013), demonstrating that the settlement situation can be diverse and complicated through place and period. In medieval period Scandinavia, after the 11th century AD, nucleated farmsteads and villages became more common (Øye, 2002; Skre, 1997). In terms of rural settlement, in both the Iron and Medieval ages in Norway, the construction of the infield (stone-built) dyke was considered the basis of landownership (Øye, 2003). Underlying this system is the Norse or Germanic concept of landownership, called *odelsrett*, based on inheritance where elites or magnates owned and controlled individual tracts of land which seems to have its origin around the Roman Iron Age and lasted well into the 13th century in Norway (Myhre, 1980, 1987; Skre, 1997; Zachrisson, 1994). Status of land can symbolize and portray the status of an elite, suggesting a centre-periphery concept already built into Norse law and administration, with an elite controlling a central place with a varying degree of lesser elites or landowners who own smaller or less rich plots of land, with landless tenants at the bottom of the hierarchy. The settlement pattern in Viking and Medieval Norway can thus be said to be based on a centre-peripheral concept and will be explored in greater detail in this thesis.

Skye and the Western Isles on the other hand did not have nucleated settlements, villages, or urbanization into well into the 18th, 19th centuries, and the settlement pattern largely consisted of single-farmstead with dispersed settlement throughout the islands from at least the Iron Age to modern times, in the case of South Uist (Parker Pearson, 2012, p. 171). It has been

argued by Parker Pearson that the landscape of the Hebrides did not change significantly until the late medieval period (Parker Pearson, 2012, p. 38), though this has been challenged by Dodgshon (2015, p. 184).

3.1.9 Centre-periphery models

Centre-periphery studies has long been utilized in archaeological studies of settlement, politics, and power (Champion, 1989). It is often employed on a large scale, such as continental Europe (Dietler, 1989). Critics of the centre-periphery model point toward the periphery always being “barbaric” “marginal” or depicted as lower in status than the centre uncritically (Dietler, 1989, p. 129), though this view is applicable to a much larger scale than the area of study, such as comparing southern to northern Europe.

In studies of the Viking Age, the centre-periphery model has been utilized to explain centres of power controlled by elites through management of land, resources, and people (Skre, 2008). In an agricultural society, a centre would be a permanent place of residence such as a house, where most daily activity takes place, such as the *farm’s nucleus and settlement area* along with the *cattle land* (fig.30). The nucleus of the farm would include a family and extra-familial unit, animals for breeding, and along with the abovementioned infield system, staple crops such as wheat, barley, oats, and rye. In Scandinavia, particularly in the Late Iron Age, *the centre* was where high-status estates that possessed monumental halls, burial mounds, and churches, could be observed as power centres of elite individuals or families, such as at Hove in Norway (Dommasnes & Hommedal, 2016, p. 132).

This view has been criticized in recent years as not taking into consideration the supposed stateless nature of Scandinavian society (Borake, 2019). Others have criticized that the *centre* part of centre-periphery in Scandinavia could not exist without the periphery – namely the outfield and its resources (Holm, 2002), or indirectly, that the so-called periphery is in-fact upward of 97% of land in Norway, not including waterscapes (Øye, 2013), or that the «periphery» was always important as a means of communication nodes for rural markets from the Iron Age into the 21st century in Norway (Loftsgarden, 2020). Moreover, shieling sites, which can be defined by being in the outfield or periphery, cannot be separated from the main

farm since shielings often provided crucial winter fodder for animals, and were residences themselves seasonally.

Archaeologically, status in Scandinavian societies can be seen as higher-status individuals being landed and occupying more favourable areas of habitation, such as agriculturally productive areas, nodes of transport in the seascape, and controlling access to resources and wealth. Lower-status peoples would either be indebted or enslaved to the higher-status landowners and aristocrats, and can be seen archaeologically through, for example, houses of lesser stature, or evidence of tasks that can be seen as lower status, such as ceramic manufacturing.

While keeping these concerns in mind, particularly that centre-periphery may present a dichotomy that did not necessarily exist, a centre-periphery model can be employed at a smaller scale in order to grasp settlement organization of Norse society in Skye and the Western Isles. One justification is that the Norse themselves understood a system such as this, the infield-outfield system (Foster, 2021), though as mentioned previously, this is also not without complications.

A similar concept was discussed by Parker Pearson (2012) and Sharples and Parker Pearson (1999), who emphasized the elite Norse farm and hall of Bornais as the centre of Norse settlement on Bornais. The settlement complex of Bornais is unusually large compared to other settlements in the Hebrides, Shetland, and Orkney (Sharples, 2019, p. 596). Antler comb production and imported objects of high value such as green porphyry recovered are indicators of the site being a focus of elite activity (Sharples, 2019, p. 606). Its placement in the landscape is additionally an indicator of its status, in relation to a sheltered bay at Ardvule, some 1.6m away from the complex. Physically, Bornais was found central on the isle of South Uist, and was the undoubtedly the highest status settlement site on the island. Placed at regular intervals north and south of Bornais were several sites, forming an organized landscape with Bornais at its centre (Parker Pearson, 2012, p. 39). Sharples has further suggested that Bornais may have been the administrative centre of the entire Hebrides (Sharples, 2005, p. 252), suggesting that Bornais was a central place of great importance for the region. An elite settlement site such as Bornais could serve the Norse communities by acting as a locus for trade and resource gathering, and the production of trade goods. Bornais could furthermore have been the site of an elite that represented the Hebrides at the Thing assembly in Tynwald, one of 8 from the Hebrides (Sharples, 2019, p. 596). An elite, central

site like Bornais could have thus connected the communities of South Uist with the greater Norse-speaking world. The centre-periphery model has thus been used in past scholarship and applied to one island and settlement zone in the area of study.

The periphery in Skye and the Western Isles has not been explored in depth, except by Foster in a series of recent articles (Foster, 2017, 2021, 2023). Investigations into the Norse use of the outfield, particularly shieling sites, was attempted by survey by Raven but the results were inconclusive (Raven, 2005), though several shieling sites have been dated to the Norse period on the basis of archaeological investigations in the area (Armit, 1996, p. 152; Brannigan, 2000; Parker Pearson, 2018, p. 9; Wildgoose, 2011a, 2011b, 2011c, 2016; Wildgoose et al., 1993).

3.1.10 Agricultural sites and the infield and outfield system

Agriculture was central to Norse society (Øye, 2002). Scandinavians practiced a mixed farming economy with a heavy focus on animals, for both sustenance and manure for crops, that gradually changed to a higher emphasis on crops over animals gradually by the later medieval era (Poulsen & Sindbæk, 2011, p. 67). In the Scandinavian homeland, the settlement pattern was generally ordered on the basis of land-ownership, primarily of farmsteads, with rich magnates controlling subsidiary farms (Myhre, 1980; 1985; Poulsen & Sindbæk, 2011; Dommasnes & Hommedal 2016, p. 145), bearing in mind regional differences and developments (Gjerpe, 2017). Elites likely controlled large farmsteads, particularly areas of high agricultural potential, though the quality of the soil was not the only deciding factor in the siting of a magnate hall, with position in the landscape, access to landing-places, and outfield resources also a consideration (Poulsen & Sindbæk, 2011). *Odal* farmers, landowners who could be described as rich or elite farmers, also formed a subset of elite, independent farmers (Zachrisson, 1994). The need for agricultural land, often lacking in the Scandinavian homeland such as Western Norway, has been proposed historically as a reason for the expansion of Norse-speaking people from Scandinavia during the Viking Age (summarized in Barrett, 2000).

Norse migrants likely sought agricultural land abroad (Macniven, 2013, p. 14). Crawford too has highlighted the need for agricultural potential, going as far as to say that “even St. Kilda”

being settled by the Norse shows of the need or even desperation for agricultural land (Crawford, 1987, p. 167).

The archaeology of the outfield during the Norse period of Skye and the Western Isles has produced some results, though the record is scant in comparison to the in-field, or coastal, areas of Norse settlement, and will be discussed in the section **12.8**.

3.2 Placename research

3.2.1 Introduction

Old Norse placenames are important for any study of landscape in Skye and the Western Isles, however, there are many limitations. For one, it has been argued that dating Old Norse placenames beyond a broad range of 9th-13th century is not possible. For example, the placename *bólstaðr* cannot be dated beyond this broad Norse period (Gammeltoft, 2001, p. 163). Moreover, Fellows-Jensen (1984, p. 154) has argued that the placenames cannot be fully deployed due to places being named Old Norse words that occurred well after the ON words lost meaning. There is, however, some use in placenames, even if some evidence is contradictory, and ON placenames do seem to correlate sometimes with dense areas of Norse activity, such as at Bostadh and Galson on Lewis, where Olson identified areas of Norse settlement also corroborated by archaeological evidence (Olson, 1983).

This section will introduce past scholarship of placename research in my area of study, as well as explore the uses and potential of the placename data.

The toponyms of the Skye and the Western isles has been the subject of discussion and debate throughout the last four decades. This is due to two reasons:

1. The Old Norse language (Norrøn) is the oldest stratum of placenames in Skye and the Western Isles, largely replacing most of the pre-Norse placenames.
2. The majority of Gaelic placenames are due to post-Norse settlement (Macniven, 2015, p. 126).

The lack of survival of pre-Norse, Celtic placenames is highly unusual. Placename studies have been central to research on Norse settlement and activity within Northern Scotland and

Great Britain as a whole, with a special reference to the Hebrides. As mentioned before (section 2), placenames have been used to explore aspects of ethnicity within Northern Scotland, in regard to Pictish-Norse contacts. Placenames can aid the often silent archaeological record (Brink & Price, 2008, p. 57).

Up until the identification of 24 Norse settlement mounds on South Uist, settlement patterns in Skye and the Western Isles were largely based to the study of placenames (Parker Pearson, 2018, p. 11). For example, the Isle of Skye has been known to have no Norse settlement data expressed archaeologically, but an abundance of placenames designating settlement (Fellows-Jensen 1984, p. 151). Norse settlement placenames have been the subject of research in recent years. For instance, monograph by Peder Gammeltoft, *The placename element bolstadr in the North Atlantic area* (Gammeltoft, 2001), covered the *bólstaðr* names found within Skye and the Western Isles. Work on placenames in my area of study in the last 20 years and their relationship to Norse settlement has further been conducted by Anke Beate Stahl (2000), Alison Elizabeth Grant (2003), and Sofie Evalm (2018).

This section will give an overview of placename research and its relationship to archaeology, and will explore methods to utilize placename research in my area of study and integrate it within an archaeological study.

3.2.2 Island names

Some pre-Norse placenames survived in the form of island names. Island names such as Uist and Skye designate not only pre-Norse placenames, but pre-Celtic placenames (Jennings & Kruse, 2005, p. 155). Kruse and Jennings argued that these names suggest some degree of cultural transfusion between the pre-Norse settlers and the Norse settlers, likely transmitted to the first Norse-speakers who arrived in the isles. Crawford has noted that many of these island names, such as Skye or Uist, lay along *the Minch*, the main artery of travel between Northern Scotland and the South Hebrides, Mann and Ireland (Crawford, 1987, 110).

3.2.3 Names for the Hebrides and the Norse in the Irish Annals

Another name for the Hebrides were the *Innse Gall*, or “islands of the foreigners” in Irish Gaelic, attested to in the Irish Annals (Macniven, 2015, 123). The implication is that the Irish recognized that these islands were under the authority of those not Gaelic. Similarly, the presence of “Mixed Gaels”, presumably people of mixed Norse

Gaelic heritage, are mentioned in the Irish Annals and inhabiting the Hebrides (Macleod Rivett, 2016).

3.2.4 Topographical placenames

Topographical placenames of Old Norse origin are abundant in Skye and the Western Isles, such as *ffall* (mountain), *vik* (bay), and *vann* (water). Barbara Crawford has argued that the first aspects of the landscape to be named would have been prominent natural landmarks used by incoming sailors, making the topographical features bearing Norse names in Scotland to be the first places named by the Norse (Crawford, 1987, 104).

However, there are often pre-Norse, Gaelic names that have survived that designate hills, valleys, and elsewhere off areas of agricultural activity, in the out-field (Crawford, 1987, 74). Crawford has interpreted this to mean that some Picts survived as manual labour or slaves, kept off the Norse dominated agricultural lands and in areas of pasture (Crawford, 1987, 74).

Topographical placenames did not just designate natural areas, but also settlement names named after topographical features. Arne Kruse has argued that names like *dalr* and *vik* were used to designate settlement sites, and this points to a coastal settlement pattern for the Norse on the West coast of Scotland (Kruse, 2004, p. 104). Moreover, Kruse argues that the topographical names would have been used as prestigious farm names, a practice adapted from the Norwegian homeland, and indicate a “short-lived” period of Norse activity (Kruse, 2004, pp. 108-109). This short-lived period would be a period of Norse colonization between a Pictish (or Picto-Gaelic) and Gaelic speaking periods. Sofie Evalm has reiterated the argument by Kruse, stating that the topographical placenames on the isle of Lewis would have

been areas of important settlements, particularly if the topographical name had a personal name or theonym attached to it (Evalm, 2018).

3.2.5 Placenames and settlement

The study of settlement names has had a long history of usage in Skye and the Western Isles to designate and explore areas of Norse settlement. Erskine Beveridge dedicated a chapter to the placenames of North Uist, detailing many of the Old Norse placenames and even tying the presence of the placename Otternish to a Norse man he speculated was named *Ottar*, and possibly the occupier of a Norse boat burial found at Otternish (Beveridge, 1911, p. 267). A.W Brøgger examined the process of *setr* and other placenames among the Norse diaspora in the Hebrides (Brøgger, 1929, pp. 77-80). Placenames designating usage for land use or animal pastoralism has been noted elsewhere, such as in the Faroe Islands for the presence of pig, where the placenames were able to be used to determine that pigs were moved along “well determined trackways” (Brewington et al., 2015).

Gillian Fellows-Jensen suggested that the Norse settlement in the Western Isles (and Northern Isles) must have been dense due to the abundance of Norse settlement placenames, and that by the 9th century, the islands were overpopulated, which corroborates with the later Icelandic written sources (Fellows-Jensen, 1984, p. 165).

Placenames, as mentioned above, remained the most prominent method of exploring Norse settlement in Skye and the Western Hebrides due to the historical lack of archaeological settlement evidence. Even with renewed archaeological evidence, Crawford argued that placename studies were more important to understand Norse settlement because archaeology leaves gaps on a distribution map while placename studies provide fuller overviews (Crawford, 1987, p. 63). However, besides the fuller picture of the archaeological settlement record in places such as South Uist, Old Norse placename studies in the Hebrides are often problematic as well. This has been highlighted by the work done on the placenames of Barra by Stahl (2000). Stahl found that while Old Norse placenames are prominent on ordnance survey maps, local informants often spoke of names not found on these maps, the majority of them Gaelic (Stahl, 2000). Moreover, placename studies have been shown to not be evenly distributed. Lewis has a very high percentage of Old Norse placenames compared to South

Uist. South Uist, however, has over 24 settlement mounds found, while Lewis has around 7 known settlement sites. This discrepancy can be attributed to much more extensive surveys undertaken on South Uist than on Lewis; nevertheless, an archaeologist must be cautioned when utilizing placename data as evidence for settlement sites.

Disagreeing that the Norse settlement was violent in nature, Grant suggested that due to the presence of dense placenames around estuaries, Scandinavian settlement in

Scotland was a result of locals inviting settlers to guard the waterways, and would account for the high presence of early Norse placenames (Grant 2003, p. 298). However, the placename evidence may suggest an ethnic situation more complex, discussed further by Kruse & Jennings (2005; 2009) and Sharples et al (2016).

Evalm explored the significance of Norse names in the isle of Lewis, arguing for clear individual choices in naming, as well as concepts of gender and Norse ritual present in the landscape (Evalm, 2018, p. 271). She further argues that her research could be expanded on further, and I feel that including her research in an archaeological context would be beneficial, particularly regarding comparing the placenames of Lewis to the current archaeological record.

Parker Pearson juxtaposed the distribution of Viking Age and Late Norse sites with Norse placenames on South Uist (Parker Pearson, 2018, 8). He showed a direct correlation between the Norse placenames and Norse settlement mounds, though not every settlement mound had a Norse placename associated with them, and certainly not every Norse placename had a settlement mound.

3.2.6 Bolstadr

Gammeltoft argued that the placename bolstadr name is a secondary settlement, and shares common topography across the Western Norwegian world (Gammeltoft, 2001, p. 271). He further argued that it is evidence of Western Norwegian settlement. In my area of study, there appears to be at least 42 cases of bolstadr placenames (Gammeltoft, 2001, p. 81).

One bolstadr site has been linked with archaeological Norse settlement activity, where the remains of an undated Norse longhouse overlay a Late Iron Age settlement site at Bostadh, on

the island of Great Bernera off the west coast of Lewis. Olsen argued that the Bostadh site had been, based on topographical, toponymical, and historic land worth, been a “secondary settlement” site (Olsen, 1983). Norse settlement mounds have also been found at other areas of Norse settlement activity, for example, at Frobost on South Uist (Parker Pearson, 2018). These sites along with the significance of the placename Bolstadr will be subjected to further analysis in this thesis.

3.2.7 The Udal

The Udal is the site of an extensive, elite Viking and Late Norse settlement site. The Udal has been noted to come from Odelsrett by Graham-Campbell & Batey (Graham-Campbell & Batey, 1998, p. 25). Odelsrett is a system of legal inheritance and law found in Old Norse society (Zachrisson, 1994). The Udal, Graham-Campbell & Batey argue, in combination with the settlement site found there, designate the presence of an *Odalsmann*, a local elite who enforced his authority over the area (1998, p. 25). It is worth noting that a concept of Udal was found in Orkney and Shetland, a legal term used to designate land division and ownership (Ryder, 1989, p. 1). The Udal can perhaps be taken as evidence (along with the presence of Thing sites) that Norse law was imported to Scotland by the Norse. This may have implications for the interpretation of Norse burial mounds, cairns, and the re-use of funerary structures by the Norse for pagan burials, to be explored further in this thesis.

3.2.8 Theonyms

Theonyms have been proposed by Evalm on the isle of Lewis, particularly in regard to the Norse gods Thor and Ullr (Evalm, 2018). A methodology to distinguish the personal name Thor from the God Thor is through the genitive –s (Nordeide, 2006, p. 221). For example, a *Thor’s* bay would have been for the name of the God, while a *Thor* bay would have originally been a personal name. Evalm has identified the presence of a probable seven Thor theonyms and five Ullr theonyms within the isle of Lewis. I have observed the name Thor elsewhere, for example, two *Torsvaig* at Sleat on the isle of Skye. However, since I am not a placename scholar, I will not be amassing a new corpus of data, and I am instead reliant on the research

of placename scholars. The theonyms Thor and Ullr compiled by Evalm will be placed in their landscape context along with archaeological activity. In a preliminary observation, one Torsvaig (*Thor's bay*) has been observed near the Viking Age settlement site of Galson at Lewis. Torsvaig at Lewis has been noted by Evalm to be similar to Torsvaig

on Iceland, where in *The Saga of Icelanders*, the bay was named for Thor (Evalm, 2018), and this will be further analysed in this thesis.

3.2.9 Islay

The Vikings in Islay (2015) by Alan Macniven surveys each parish of the island of Islay in terms of placename, along with economic and cultural contexts, for example, how much the rental values were worth in historical times. Due to a lack of archaeological evidence for Norse settlement, Macniven focuses on the farm names to explore Norse settlement history on the island. He argues that the Norse would not have neglected areas of high economic potential, and could have easily expelled natives and imported more willing workers from elsewhere (Macniven, 2015, pp. 112-113). An interesting argument put forth by Macniven is that the Old Norse placename borg- may relate to administrative districts, possibly seven districts organized by the presence of the placename borg- which would designate a pre-Norse, drystone fortification (Macniven 2015, pp. 100-101). This has a direct parallel to Skye and the Western Isles (and the western Scottish seaboard as a whole) due to some correlation between borg placenames and Norse settlement sites, including Bornais (site 64), a very high-status site that has been suggested to signify an administrative centre on the island of South Uist. Administrative district divisions based on the spread of pre-Norse Iron Age fortifications would suggest a continuity from the Iron Age to the Norse period, similar to arguments posited by Sharples and Parker Pearson, who argued that clusters of Norse settlement focus on Iron Age predecessors on South Uist (Sharples & Parker Pearson, 1999). Macniven has argued that the reasons for Norse settlement in the Inner Hebrides would have been driven by elites wishing to preserve their way of life, and this led to type of cultural imperialism that would explain the presence of Norse longhouses and furnished burials in the region, as opposed to continuing building and burial traditions of the previous peoples (Macniven, 2015, p. 117). The author finds these arguments interesting, but whether or not they have parallels in the area of study should be the focus of future research and comparisons.

In a previous article, Macniven states that the Norse colonized the island through violence and the evidence lies in that the most viable farms seem to have been taken over by the Norse (Macniven, 2013, p. 11). The publications of Macniven of the Norse settlement history of Islay are particularly useful in its organization, making it suitable for comparisons for the Norse settlement landscape of Skye and the Western Isles.

3.2.10 Papar placenames and Pabbay/Papar Isles

Barbara Crawford has explored the landscape and history of the Papar Isles (Crawford, 2005) with the *Papar Project*. The name Papar, usually in the form of Pabbay, comes from the Old Norse word for pap or priest (Crawford, 2005). These islands are believed by some scholars to have been the home of monastic communities when the Norse arrived in the Hebrides, but archaeological, linguistic, and historical evidence is often lacking to support these claims.

There are 11 Papar Isles in my area of study. Crawford details the historic, economical, topographical and archaeological evidence of each island (2005). Crawford argues that these isles were centres of economic surplus due to the agricultural potential of all but one of the isles (2005). These islands were likely exploited by Norse settlers, particularly due to the presence of topographical Norse placenames designating a settlement near the Pabbay islands, for example, one such Norse settlement name is found across a short distance from Pabbay on Skye (2005). Some archaeological evidence for Norse settlement has come up in areas of Pabbay activity, for example, at Bhaltos, where both a Viking Age cemetery and evidence of settlement activity has been located. Crawford has suggested that this Viking Age cemetery, located across the loch from a Pabbay isle, may have been placed there deliberately due to the presence of the Pabbay island (2005).

The research of the Papar Project proves valuable to this thesis, putting each of the islands into their agricultural, historical and geographical contexts. However, there is also a lack of archaeological survey and excavations on these islands. For instance, Crawford mentions that none of these islands have Norse activity, and this may mean the Norse respected the Papar communities (2005). Unfortunately, with the absence of archaeological investigations, it is not possible to say for sure whether these islands have evidence of Norse activity or not.

There are many unexcavated and undated cairns and settlement mounds found on many of the Pabbay isles which could easily

be Norse. Furthermore, we do not know to what extent the Pabbay islands were settled throughout the Norse period. In Iceland, it has been argued that the arrival of Norse caused the Irish monastic communities to leave (Crawford, 2005). To what extent the Norse and monastic communities interacted, and the nature of this interaction, is not currently knowable.

Nevertheless, placing the Pabbay islands in their overall Norse context may reveal interesting results.

3.2.11 Early ecclesiastical sites

Early Christian sites in Skye and the Western Isles are known to us primarily through placename evidence. Besides the above mentioned Pabbay isles, there are many early ecclesiastical sites identified through placename evidence. For example, through primarily placename information, Mike Parker Pearson has identified six ecclesiastical sites on South Uist (2018).

As far as the knowledge of the author goes, there has not been any early churches identified through archaeological excavation in my area of study to the Norse period. However, some of these early church sites do have archaeological evidence in the form of early Christian sculpture, such as crosses, that are either pre-Norse or contemporary with Norse activity, such as at Kildonan, Eigg. Other sites of early Christian artwork include Taransay at Harris and at Village Bay St. Kilda (Fisher, 2002). For this thesis, I will take this evidence of early Christian activity, including early church sites, into the greater Norse landscape and attempt to see if the data can answer questions on Norse power and religion.

2.2.12 *Thing Assembly sites*

Alexandra Sanmark, using a model for Thing assembly sites based on landscape, placenames, and comparable features to Thing sites identified in Scandinavia and elsewhere, identified

three Thing sites within Skye and the Western Isles (Sanmark, 2017). Moreover, on the basis of placename evidence of the word *Gruline*, as well as landscape characteristics, Alasdair Whyte has argued for the presence of a Thing site on the isle of Eigg (Whyte, 2014). Though these Thing place sites are difficult to interpret and date, putting them in their greater Norse landscape, a context can be developed utilizing this data.

3.2.13 Placenames and later Norse and Gaelic Power (John Raven)

John Raven incorporates the use of placenames in his study on the Late Norse and Early Medieval landscape of South Uist. For example, he argues that many of the duns of the Uists contain placenames designating names from local folklore, characters believed to be Norse origin, and he suggests that this hints at a memory of Norse occupation at the duns (2005, pp. 200-201). He furthermore utilizes placenames to identify centres of early church activity on South Uist.

3.2.14 Pre-Norse Celtic survivals

Peder Gammeltoft has stated that linguistic situation in the pre-Norse, Iron Age Skye and the Western Isles is not simple, and it is difficult to say whether or not the people living on the isles were Picts, Gaels, or a mix of both (Gammeltoft, 2004). Regardless of the identity of the people in Skye and the Western Isles before the Norse arrive, some scholars have noted some survivals of pre-Norse languages. Cox identified a substratum of Gaelic within Norse placenames, and as mentioned below, argues for a survival of the Picts within Norse Scotland (1987). Crawford, as previously mentioned, has argued for a survival of the Picts in the out-field, due to the prevalence of Gaelic placenames designating hills, burns, and pastures. However, Alexander MacBain, while recording similar data on Skye, said that the Gaelic names for these topographical features can be post-Norse (MacBain, 1922 p. 33) and in general, it may be impossible to decipher if a Gaelic name is pre-Norse or post-Norse due to the majority of placenames being recorded during the 19th century (Macniven, 2015, p. 121).

3.2.15 Use of placenames: evaluating claims of early Norse settlement

Cox researched the Norse-Gaelic interface in depth at Carloway, Lewis, utilizing modern registries of placenames. One of his key arguments was that the placenames show early Norse settlement along with a surviving substratum of Gaelic (Cox, 1987, p. 248). He argued that based on Old Norse placenames in Lewis, the isle of Lewis underwent three separate migrations of Norse settlers. The first was in the early to mid-8th century, the second in the early 9th century, and the third in the late 9th, early 10th century (Cox, 1987, pp. 245-248). For an archaeologist, the claim to early settlement, pre-790, is controversial. However, this theory may be supported by a few factors:

One is the Myhre theory (Myhre, 1993; summarized by Barrett, 2008), that the Northern and Western Isles were settled by Norse-speakers before the Viking-period (before AD 800), and Norse identity manifested in the archaeological record after the Norse expansion post AD 800. The idea of early migration to the British Isles has been proposed by others in the last century, such as Brøgger (1929). Though Bjørn Myhre argued that insular finds in Scandinavia, as well as 8th century Scandinavian artifacts in the Hebrides and Ireland supports this hypothesis (Myhre, 1993, p. 197), the archaeological evidence is scant (Barrett 2008: 420). Ana Margethe Heen-Pettersen argued convincingly that there must have been pre-9th century contact between modern Britain and Ireland and west Norway, because events such as Viking attacks on monasteries must have had a precursor of exploration due to the difficulties of maritime navigation around the North Atlantic (Heen-Pettersen, 2019). Assessments of Irish ecclesiastical artefacts found in western Norwegian graves points to an early date of contact, and as mentioned, this date must have been pre-late 8th century. There is however a lack of evidence for the area of study. As far as the author knows, there is only one artefact that points toward 9th century Ireland found in a Viking-period grave in Skye and the Western Isles, a copper-alloy bucket mount (site 117). There is an overall lack of early Viking-period dates for the area of study, with the most secure dates found in the 10th century. The author therefore finds it difficult to assess pre-Viking-period activity in the area of the study.

Another factor is possibly the Late Iron Age – Norse site at Bosta. The Late Iron Age phase of Bosta ends around the early 8th century AD and is followed by a squatter phase (Neighbour & Burgess, 1997). Afterwards, a longhouse is built in the Norse period that includes a short phase. The dates are not secure here, and even the Norse phase is not dated. There is no evidence of Norse settlement before the early-mid 10th century (with the possible exception of the Udal), and no Late Iron Age sites seem to be dated after the 8th century either, besides the site at Bostadh.

One potential 8th century AD Scandinavian artefact in the area of study is a Vendel-period belt mount from Lewis, manufactured in Sweden (site 23). This is dated on typology since it was found out of context. The mount can be dated to the 7th or 8th centuries (Walaker Nordeide pers. commen. 2018). The exact date of its deposition, and the circumstances of its find, are uncertain, but likely represent a stray find of an eroding site of unknown nature (Murphy pers. commen. 2018). A mount that early in date could easily be an “heirloom”, or even an early trade object. Loch Seaforth can be considered a proper “fjord”, has with fertile, waterfront terraces, sheltered harbours, and access to what was likely the artery of Norse movement through the Hebrides, the Minch. Loch Seaforth is therefore a likely place of Norse settlement (Murphy pers. comm 2018.). No known settlement sites have been discovered⁵, but the area has not undergone much survey (Murphy pers. commen. 2018). It could easily be an “heirloom”, similar to early Swedish brooches found in a female grave at Cnip (Dunwell et al, 1995), brought over by later Norse settlers who may have curated the object. It could also be a result of early trade. It can also, speculatively, be the result of early Norse settlement to Lewis as proposed by Myhre (1993) and Cox (1987). Unfortunately, currently, this is all speculative.

As an archaeologist, it is difficult to engage with an argument based off of linguistic data. My questions would thus be: would Norse speakers and settlers adopt Pictish architecture, Christianity, and assimilate until the 9th century, when Norse identity would have become important to express through material culture? Moreover, I feel that the archaeological record is too ambiguous in the 8th century to argue for (or against) pre-9th century Norse migration. Barbara Crawford has proposed, on the basis of early-mid 9th century graves in the Hebrides, that the first Norse colonies in the Hebrides occurred on the smaller islands along the main routes of transportation, such as at Eigg (Crawford, 2018). According to Crawford, the Norse

⁵ Ard Nan Sithaig along Loch Seaforth has a probable Norse longhouse of unknown date, registered by Chris Burgess

preferred locations along the sea routes until Norse settlement became denser and the need for more

agricultural land became apparent, and that would be when the Norse moved onto the west coast of the Outer Hebrides (Crawford, 2018, p. 582). This would account for the relatively late date of the Norse settlement observed at Bornish and Cille Pheadair of the mid-10th century (Crawford, 2018, p. 584). The Viking Age settlement site at the Udal was claimed by Ian Crawford to be very early 9th century, perhaps as early as 800 AD, and Drimore is perhaps late 9th century, but this is uncertain. Nevertheless, it is then perhaps that the earlier Norse settlement sites, on the east coast of the Hebrides and around Skye and the small isles, have not been located archaeologically yet, and may prove to be very early. Again, this is unfortunately speculative.

If the argument by Cox for a mid-8th century date for Norse settlement is taken into consideration, then the early Norse settlement must have had two characteristics:

1. It was significant enough to replace the existing Pictish language, i.e. it would have needed to be as dense as the 9th-11th century settlements suggested by the archaeological record.
2. The Norse must have adopted some degree of native culture. They would have had to have been Pictish in culture, but still Norse in language. If Norse language could be tied to identity, and if we consider Myhre's model of Norse culture essentially lying dormant until Norse identity becomes important in the late 8th, early 9th century with the onset of the Viking Age (Myhre 1993), then this would fit into Cox's model for early settlement. The model by Cox, based on the linguistic evidence of Lewis, argued also for a degree of bilingualism which could be explained by a plural society, of Norse and Picts (Cox, 1987, p. 248). It should be acknowledged that all of the evidence for activity in 8th century comes from Lewis: Late Iron Age and squatter activity from Bostadh, the Iron Age settlement site that seems to have a terminus date of the early 9th century at Beirgh, and the Vendel mount. Perhaps, if there was a mid-8th century date for Norse settlement, Western Lewis or Lewis in general were places of settlement.

While at this point, the archaeological evidence is too ambiguous to argue for (or against) early Norse migration, the work of Cox remains important for this thesis, particularly in the area around Carloway, Lewis.

3.2.16 Discussion: integrating placename data and archaeological research

With all the above in consideration, it is beneficial for this thesis to integrate placename data. I will incorporate placenames into my methodology, comparing each individual placename associated with a Norse site. Furthermore, some Norse sites or other sites of interest are known solely through placenames, such as Thing sites. I intend to utilize this placename research in conjunction with archaeological evidence to give a fuller picture of Skye and the Western Isles.

Chapter 4 Theoretical Framework

4.1.1 The definition of landscape

The study area of this work includes a large geographical area, incorporating many islands with varying topography, spanning five centuries of Norse activity. A landscape approach is crucial to understanding this vast geographical and temporal study area.

This study will explore the landscape of the Norse in the Viking and Late Norse periods of Skye and the Western Isles, and thus aims to incorporate landscape archaeological theory in order to interpret the data.

The historiography of the origins of landscape studies has been explained in detail in by Matthew Johnson (2007) and Richard Muir (1999) and does not need reiteration. This section will summarize and comment on the last 20 years of landscape studies within archaeology, though firstly, a proper definition of landscape is required.

I find the definitions below both satisfactory and germane for this study. Muir, in *Approaches in Landscape* (1999, p. 50), defines landscape as:

Landscape may be regarded as being composed of surfaces or spaces which are defined, linked or fragmented by networks. This would describe the patterns of a fieldscape in which the field-spaces were bordered by hedgerows and crisscrossed by lanes and trackways quite well, while farmstead and churches may be incorporated as nodes - facet like villages, but regarded with both surface and node characteristics - less easy to integrate in reductionist approach.

Similarly, Johnson in *Ideas of Landscape* (2007, pp. 1-2), invokes two similar but different definitions of landscape:

1. The land itself however defined, the humanly created features that exist objectively across space, and their natural context. Landscape archaeology in this sense is a very simple term to define: it is about what lies beyond the site, or the edge of the excavation.

2. How the land is viewed - how we, and the people in the past, came to apprehend and understand the landscape, and what those systems of apprehension and understanding are, the cognitive system and process of perception.

In addition, it is beneficial to add Richard Bradley's definition of an archaeological natural place. In his *Archaeology of Natural Places*, he emphasizes the natural within human landscape:

Natural places have an archaeology because they acquired a significance in the minds of people in the past. (2000) (2000, p. 35)

Since the potential definitions are endless, a choice must be made when incorporating landscape theory into research. Without delving into philosophical discussions of the terms and concept of landscape, I choose to use the definition of an archaeological landscape proposed by the European Language Convention, Article I (European Landscape Convention 2010, Chapter 1, Article 1) that seems to be in agreement with and summarizes the above definitions:

'An area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors.

My own definition of landscape theory is a natural area experienced by past peoples as having borders and enclosing a unit of society. Landscape theory thus represents the idea that an archaeological site can be placed in a greater context combining topography, geography, natural resources, and other archaeological sites, both contemporary and pre-dating the period being researched.

4.2.1 Landscape studies

Landscape studies can be used to solve a myriad of different archaeological questions. A study of the landscape of burials, for example, can reveal a preference for distinctive topographies, while a detailed and interpretive analysis of the landscape of settlements can reveal power structures relation to previous monuments, and preference for natural resources. Since there is a plethora of literature on landscape, this section will focus on studies of the landscape of the Viking Age and other relevant literature.

The primary focus of landscape is *area*, as defined by European Landscape Convention. Space, for example, has been explored from an ideological perspective by Martin Hansson (2006). He argues that space reflects organized power structures in the Middle Ages (2006, p. 38). According to Hansson, space was organized by aristocrats who, in control of history and memory, asserted dominion over society through the landscape (Hansson, 2006, p. 197). In particular regards to the Viking Age, Hansson has pointed out that the possession of land was extremely important, manifested in the Norse *Odal law* (2006, pp. 88-89). Space thus has multi-layered implications.

The landscape of Viking Age burials has been studied extensively, especially in regard to placement in the landscape and relation to natural features. Shane McLeod, in his case study on the re-use of prehistoric monuments in Scandinavian Orkney, has shown that there is an association with Viking Age burials and earlier monuments, along with an association to maritime features such as landing-places for boats and ships (2015b, p. 7). In addition, Dirk Steinforth, in his analysis of the Viking Age graves of the Island of Man, has shown that almost all Viking Age graves are situated by the sea, prefer a natural rise in the topography,

and overlook the coastline and fertile planes (2015, p. 77). Stephen Harrison has noted that, in contrast to popular assumptions,

Viking graves tend to favour association with sheltered inlets rather than a dramatic landscape, such as the “foaming maelstrom” (2007, p. 179). A similar approach to the Viking graves of Skye and the Western Isles is then justified, though one must always keep an open mind that the results could differ.

Monument re-use has also been a subject of much research. As the Vikings were colonizers, they interacted with indigenous populations and their settlements and monuments. The relation between Viking and indigenous occupant has been explored thoroughly in the last two decades, for example, in the Orkney Islands (Hillerdal, 2020; Leonard, 2011; McGuire, 2010; McLeod, 2015b). The Viking-Indigenous landscape interface had ramifications for the placement of settlements and monuments and their reflections on the power structure of the islands. Harrison has noted the debate has been “heated”, with one side arguing that the placement of burials at indigenous sites reflects assimilation, while others argue it reflects dominion (Harrison, 2007, p. 177). Harrison posits that both arguments could be valid (Harrison, 2008, p. 179), a position that I am in agreement with. In the study area of the Norse period, it encompasses multiple centuries of interaction over the span of a large topographical area, and includes the conversion to Christianity. It is best to take each case of potential re-use on its own basis and not make assumptions about assimilation or domination.

Reasons for re-use can be charged with symbolism, as landscapes have no meaning unless humans give them meaning (Muir, 1999, p. 294). Harrison also argues that the re-use of monuments, particularly burial sites, represents a will to display one’s community in the landscape (2007, p. 180). Sarah Semple, in regards to the landscape of the Anglo-Saxons, argues that funerary landscapes establish identity (2013, p. 59). Moreover, the reuse of monuments is manifested in a variety of reasons: legitimization, belief in ancestors, identity, elite residences, kingly theatres and more (Semple, 2013, p. 82). The author agrees with the abovementioned scholars that there was a deliberate re-use of pre-Norse structures for both settlement and burial sites, though reasons behind these placements is difficult to assess.

Though these studies have all raised important and convincing arguments about the reuse of monuments, reuse and legitimization may be difficult to prove. For instance, there is a lack of evidence for the reuse of brochs, duns and hillforts in Skye and the Western Isles. If the Norse

incomers wished to appropriate the existing landscapes for themselves, then why ignore these prominent, presumably useful monuments? If the Norse appropriated funerary landscapes to legitimize themselves to the native people in the lands they had colonized, then why did they not also reuse their fortifications? Aside from a potentiality that there is some evidence for the reuse of these monuments and that the evidence may have been missed (see Dun Beag, site 107), there is at least one case where the Norse had utilized the landscape of certain brochs, but did not, as far as excavation could tell, significantly occupy it (see Dun Vulcan on South Uist to be discussed later). Monument use should not be assumed to have been universal, it has been observed that monuments were not reused at Skamby (Williams et al., 2010, p. 16). It must be reiterated that just because reuse was practiced in one area, at one period of time, does not mean that it could not have differed from place to place, period to period, or differed in form or intention.

It is perhaps possible that the Norse had chosen to reuse some monuments over others, as the Norse have clear preferences for the reuse of monuments in the Orkneys in burials, as demonstrated by burial mounds placed near the broch of Gurness on Mainland Orkney, with the broch likely appearing as a mound in the Viking Age MacLeod (2015b, p. 7), but negative evidence is difficult to utilize, and the potential reuse of monuments in Skye and the Western Isles requires further exploration.

4.1.2 Incorporating landscape archaeological theory

Pertinent for this study, this thesis will incorporate landscape archaeological theory by examining each site within its landscape archaeological context. Each site dated to the Norse period, such as burials, settlements, hoards, and stray finds, will have their findspots put into a context that displays their relationships to natural and anthropogenic features in the landscape. Some of these include the relationship of a settlement site to natural features such as landing-places for seacraft, freshwater, and elevation. This will be further explored and detailed in the following chapter on methodology (5).

4.2 Centre-Periphery

A focus of this thesis will thus investigate the use of the Norse infield-outfield system as a basis for a centre-periphery model, based on previously observations by Parker

Pearson and Sharples (1999) and Parker Pearson (2012). This will be done by identifying likely central places in the Norse landscape. The established criteria are:

1. Elite or otherwise high-status settlement site
2. Physical placement in the landscape
3. Old Norse placename(s) suggesting high-status or importance

The criteria are not necessarily equal in importance, and some sites may only meet 1 of the 3 criteria. Mounds on the machair are formed by centuries or millennia of build-up of both anthropogenic and natural materials, as well as sand accretion by the wind (Barber, 2003 p. 173). A large mound can be a display of wealth, and high-status structures with elite style architecture such as what can be described as halls, can be placed on a large mound, such as at the Bornais complex (Sharples, 2019, p. 596) and Orkney (Harrison, 2013c). However, a large mound does not necessarily mean the structure, such as the house, itself was large, and the lack of excavated mounds in the area of study makes this difficult to assess further. An elite or high-status site can be determined by size of mound as an estimate for size of the structure, with larger farmsteads usually associated with higher status (Parker Pearson, 2018, p. 15; Steinberg et al., 2016, p. 389), as well as artefact assemblage and placement in the landscape, including topography such as the placename *vik* or its post-Norse, Gaelicized equivalent, *Uig* (Fraser, 1995a). Large houses require more building material, a higher degree of maintenance, and can be dominating and imposing in the landscape, and can be seen as an indicator of elite status.

Physical placement in the landscape includes its relation to resources, such as physically and socially to tracts of fertile land, harbours, and centrality (Olson, 1983).

Placename evidence placenames that can be dated to the Norse-period, that is, they are fully or derivative from *Norrøn*.

A combination of the above-mentioned criteria can potentially help mend discrepancies in excavation and artefactual recovery, i.e., a Norse site can still be judged to be elite even

though the site itself has not been excavated, and exact dimensions are not known, if it meets other criteria such as placement in the landscape.

A centre-periphery model can be established using a combination of the evidence and landscape of the high-status settlement site of Bornais (Sharple, 2005; 2019; 2020; 2023), the proposed settlement hierarchy of South Uist (Sharple & Parker Pearson, 1999; Parker Pearson, 2012), and a topographical and toponymical model proposed by Fraser (1996a).

The centre-periphery model will be used as a tool to organize patterns of settlement in order to further analyse Norse settlement sites.

A centre-periphery model is then constructed as the following, to be implanted through the methodology:

- A higher status farm complex central on an island or otherwise in a landscape. Includes topographical features such as harbours or landing-places for seacraft, access to agricultural soil, and placenames that may designate status.
- Sites of lesser status, defined by size of structure, mound, site function, and centrality in intervals away from the central site.
- Sites of low status, such as temporary summer pasture sites (shielings).

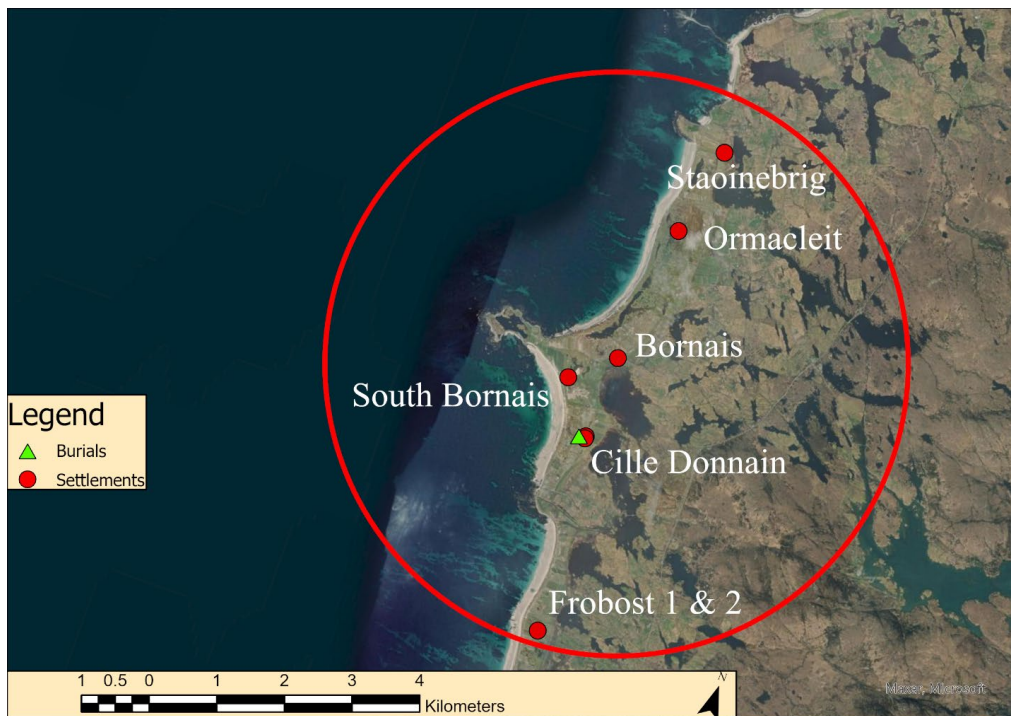


Figure 31: Bornais as a central site in a 4km radius, with other Norse settlement sites shown. According to mound size and placenames, these sites are likely of lesser status than Bornais.

Once a central site is established, a radius of peripheral sites can be connected to it, in hopes of being able to see a pattern of hierarchy. This hierarchy can further be interpreted by incorporating the concept of the infield and outfield, where the infield is a centre of permanent residence and cereal cultivation, whereas the outfield serves to supply the infield with particular resources. A theory of landscape analysis will be used to implement the centre-periphery model, as discussed in the following sub-section.

5 Methodology

5.1.1 Defining Norse sites, artefacts, and spatial affinity

This sub-section will identify all Norse sites discussed in the thesis, including settlements, burials, hoards, stray finds, and other sites. The goal of this section is to introduce and describe the data for analysis in subsequent chapters. By plotting sites into their spatial

context, this thesis intends to understand Norse settlement patterns, and reasons for siting Norse settlement sites.

All archaeological material dated to the Norse period is included in the analysis, particularly Norse-period pottery, as well as anthropogenic evidence dating to the 9th-13th centuries, such as radiocarbon dated charred grain.

This thesis compiled all available data to the author that could be dated to the Norse-period (800-1250 AD), including from excavation reports, entries by archaeologists and others into the canmore.co.uk database, unpublished doctoral theses, grey literature reports, antiquarian excavation and collections, museum collections, and personal communication with local and regional archaeologists. Sites that were unable to be determined as Norse, but still are possible Norse, are included in the appendix but will not undergo analysis.

A site was determined to be a Norse archaeological site if archaeological material found could be dated to the Norse period (800-1250 AD). Each findspot was given a radius of 200m to distinguish between one or more sites. For example, the cemetery at Cnip contains 7 excavated Viking Age inhumation burials (Dunwell et al., 1995), and these were considered one site.

The sites were determined to be Norse period largely on the basis of artefact typology. This was done through identification of Norse pottery, of which Alan Lane identified a distinct style from the assemblage of the Udal excavations (1983, p. 170).

The pottery finds are interpreted as domestic and therefore areas of settlement activity (Lane, 1983). Some of the findspots are approximate if they were surface collections and could not be associated with a site, due to the likelihood of artifact scatter by ploughing. Based on the build-up of anthropogenic material that is consistent with a settlement/farm mound in the region, some of the pottery sherds could be assigned to a mound identified as a settlement/farm mound even if no excavation has taken place. Similarly, some Norse pottery sherds could be associated with middens.

The sites where Norse pottery is discovered are considered domestic. Norse-style pottery has not been found in Viking-period burials in the area of study, or in the South Hebrides where Norse pottery is also known. In addition, vessels are rare in

Viking-period burials in general in the Scandinavian world. While it is still a possibility that some of the pottery sherds may be from disturbed Norse burials, the likelihood is that they come from settlement sites due to their domestic usage and low-status association in the archaeological record (Lane, 1983).

Other artifacts can be assigned to the Norse period on the basis of typology, particularly decorated objects that display a Norse art style. This is especially true of tortoiseshell/oval brooches, which can be dated to the 9th-10th centuries AD. Weapons such as swords and spearheads, steatite or wooden vessels, ringed-pins, composite combs, tools, and other objects can be dated on the basis of typology as well. Some of these finds were stray finds, or the artifact type cannot be tied to a specific kind of site. Oval brooches are rarely found outside of burial contexts (Harrison, 2008, p. 122; Norstein, 2020). Ringed-pins for instance could be found in both burial and settlement sites. A handful of sites produced coins that could be dated through numismatics, which could be used to give a rough estimate of chronology of a site with otherwise broad or unclear chronology.

5.2.1 Methods – categories and definitions

First, a list of all known Viking and Late Norse period sites has been compiled, and the sites are divided by type and reliability. The first division is site type, and each site type was analysed in different categories. This separation is due to comparative evidence. For example, it has been established in other areas of the Viking world that Viking burial sites tend to be found near natural harbours, and on ridgelines (McLeod, 2016, p. 302; Steinforth, 2015, p. 77; Harrison, 2008, pp. 205-206; Thäte 2007, p. 277). Norse settlements, on the other hand were farm based, and most likely placed in fertile areas, near the coast for access to the sea, and in possible politically strategic areas. The placement of burials are not necessarily “politically” neutral, but can designate claims over territory, appropriation of ancestors, and ensuring an ethnic presence in a foreign landscape. For example, there is evidence in Iceland pre-Christian Norse burials were monumental and visible along routes (Fridriksson & Vésteinsson, 2011, p. 52). The placement of monuments or the deposition of material culture therefore is not necessarily functional, and each deposition should not be assumed to be either functional or ritual. The complexity of the material along with the diverse range of site types requires that a methodology must be formed that takes all of the above into consideration.

The site types are as follows: settlement, burial, hoard, stray find, and other activity.

- **Settlement:** Defined by domestic activity through excavation, identification of settlement mounds or middens, or from geophysical survey/other methods.
- **Burial:** Defined by presence of human remains and/or artifacts typical for Norse burials.
- **Hoard:** Defined as two or more metal objects deposited deliberately.
- **Stray find:** Defined as a single find discovered through chance (i.e. a metal detection survey).
- **Other activity:** Evidence of Norse activity but not fitting the above categories, such as (potential) churches, fortifications, naval structures, and others. Though this is a broad category in comparison to the others, there are often few examples and an unreliability of the material in this category.

5.2.2 Relationship of Norse sites to non-Viking Age and Late Norse sites

“Relationship” is also subjective, and a criterion must be applied. Similar studies include Harrison 2013 that argued for a continuity of pre-Norse to Norse settlements due to proximity in Orkney, and Leonard (2011) that argued that Norse burials analysis will first and foremost be used, and a criterion will be formed. Relationship will be defined as:

- **Superimposition:** superimposition can be defined as a particular site horizon directly overlying a pre-existing site horizon. Archaeological material directly imposed upon pre-Viking Age material, such as excavated stratigraphic layers superimposed upon pre-Viking period sites, or material inserted into pre-VA sites, such as burials or material culture.
- **Placement:** Distance judged to be intentional.

Superimposition will be judged through excavation or stray finds with provenance.

Superimposition can also mean burials found within pre-Norse burial sites that have been

judged to be deliberate, as well as Norse-period material culture that was likely deposited in or on top of earlier monuments.

Placement is more difficult to judge. This thesis draws upon Sharples & Parker Pearson that determined that Iron Age sites within 500m of the Norse settlement site of Cille Pheadair suggests a continuity of landscape (1999, 50), and contends Kruse & Jennings (2005, 254) who stated a distance of 500m is not close in proximity. I then utilize a methodology where I determine that a site within 50m has a definite relationship. Answering Kruse & Jennings, I argue that 200m is much better determinate for two sites to be said to be in continuation of settlement continuity. 500m is thus likely probable relation. 1000m is recorded but is considered possible, and will not be used for analytical purposes. Arbitrary measurements must be defined and then judged in terms of probability. Placement determined to be significant is as follows:

Definite relation: 50m, the two sites have a 50m distance from one another.

Likely relation: 200m, the two sites have a 200m distance from one another.

Probable relation: 500m, the two sites have a 500m distance from one another.

Possible relation: 1000m, the two sites have a 1000m distance from one another.

Placement differs from visibility in that visibility is solely based on ability to see a site from a site (intervisibility), while placement is a measurement of distance based on the above measurements. The difference is that visibility could have been favoured for certain types of sites, where visibility mattered to contemporary or pre-Norse monuments and topographical features (MacLeod 2015b, 176) whereas placement regardless of visibility could have been the case for sites in relation to pre-Norse sites that are in competition for resources, placed for strategic or political reasons.

The above criteria will serve as a guideline for judging relation by distance. There are always exceptions, however, and each site must be taken on a case-by-case basis due to variety in reliability of information, topography, and material types. There are additional variables that can arise, such as visibility of the pre-Norse monuments in the landscape, whether the site has been identified as active at the time of or leading to Norse settlement, and the types of sites and information available for both the pre-Norse and Norse sites.

5.2.3 Methodology summarized

I will thus incorporate my data into a landscape paradigm, which will put a focus on the abovementioned criteria. I will analyse each particular findspot in its landscape context, such as relation to pre-Norse sites, other Norse sites, topographical features, and placenames. I will further incorporate navigational evidence, such as harbours and sea-routes, along with soil quality data to give well-founded values to each site. From there, I will further analysis the data for patterns, using statistical analysis to answer my research questions outlined in **1.6.3**.

5.3.1 Methodology for analysing Viking-period burial sites

The methodology employed to explore the landscape of Viking Age burials in the area of study is the same as the methodology of the landscape of settlement sites (**4.1.1**). Each burial was given a latitude and longitude grid reference, some of which were approximated because no exact grid reference exists for the findspots. Radiuses of 200, 500, and 1000 meters were used to determine the proximity of the graves to other sites, both potentially Norse and non-Norse.

Each burial was placed in its landscape context, and its findspot was placed into ArcGIS and mapped. Each site was associated with the nearest possible reported placename. Available excavation reports, survey reports, and other information were evaluated to determine gender if possible, type of grave (inhumation or cremation), and grave goods.

5.3.1.1 Determining a gravesite

This thesis uses a Scandinavian methodology to determine a burial site based on certain artefacts as evidence of burials (Dommasnes, 1982) even without the presence of human remains, additional grave goods, or visible or identified grave markers (i.e.. cairns or mounds). Harrison has criticized this methodology as being too simplistic and not leaving enough room for exceptions (Harrison, 2008, p. 36). Scholars such as Moen (2019) and Price

(2020) have criticized assigning the gender aspect to this methodology, where the presence of a certain object is used to designate gender, such as weapons for a male burial and oval brooches for a female burial. However, certain objects, namely swords, spearheads, and oval brooches have largely only been shown to have been deposited in burial contexts, with some exceptions. There are two instances of oval brooches from Iceland that appear to have been in settlement contexts (Eldjárn & Friðriksson, 2016; Norstein, 2020, p. 356). Furthermore, some oval brooches have been turned up by metal detecting in England and Man, though metal detecting finds usually lack archaeological context. Weapons, particularly swords and spearheads, seem to only turn up mostly in burial contexts, but ritual contexts, such as the deliberate deposition of weapons into water, is known from (Raffield, 2014). The author is aware of the criticism of this methodology, but is convinced that certain objects likely designate a burial site.

5.4.1 Problems with the data



Figure 22: Undated settlement mound on the machair, in foreground, at Cnip, Lewis. Photo @ the author.

Dating sites in the area of study is difficult and usually dependent on artifact typology from artifacts recovered from the site through excavation or stray finds, or radiocarbon dating. Sites can rarely be dated on form of building structure because of the long duration of similarly shaped and formed structures in the area of study.

The various standing stones, stone settings, and chambered cairns which feature prominent in the modern landscape are typically dated to the Neolithic and Bronze ages. Iron Age monuments, such as hillforts, brochs, promontory forts, crannogs, and island duns are more difficult to date precisely. Some of these sites, such as promontory forts, may be later medieval or early modern fortifications, such as Dun Eistean at Ness, Lewis (Barrowman, 2015, pp. 171-172). Island duns, brochs,

crannogs, and hillforts may have been reoccupied after the Viking Age by the Gaelic elite (Raven, 2005; Macleod Rivett, 2016) though these have rarely been dated precisely to these periods.⁶

It is thus often difficult to determine if a site is pre-Norse Iron Age, and determining multiperiod activity is impossible without excavation. This hinders interpretations for either continuation or discontinuation between the Late Iron Age and Norse periods. There are numerous sites labelled Iron Age in the area of study that have not been excavated and have not been dated by artifact typology, and are perhaps not Iron Age, and could post-date Norse settlement. Sites that post-date Norse settlement are not relevant for this study.



Figure 33: Gob Eier, Uig, Lewis. Thought to be an Iron Age promontory fort, the site was dated to the Neolithic upon excavation (Nesbit et al., 2011). Photo @ author.

Iron Age activity can be more precisely understood when excavation or systematic artifact recovery has been practiced, and it is also possible to sometimes further divide the date of the Iron Age, for example, to the Late Iron Age. Pottery found at mounds and middens can often be dated to the Late Iron Age, such as at several sites on the machair of South Uist (Parker Pearson, 2012; Lane, 1983). This is due to a particular form of pottery that was stratified and excavated at the Udal. This pottery was grass-tempered, as well as had distinct shapes unknown in previous periods, such as the sagging bowl and the platter, which can be identified sometimes through diagnostic sherds recovered during surveys.

⁶ (Eilean Obhlat, North Uist, seems to date to this period, and possibly the crannog at An Dunain, Lewis).

5.6.1 Case Study: Bornais

Introduction

The site of Bornais on South Uist (site **64**) was chosen to test the theoretical and methodological approaches outlined earlier. Having long been at the centre of multiple interdisciplinary research projects such as excavation (Sharples, 2005; 2019; 2020) which have produced a large and complex body of data, it has been chosen to function as a control site for a Norse-period archaeological settlement site in the Hebrides.

5.6.1.1 Site description

Bornais is located near the modern township of Bornais on South Uist. It consists of a four mound complex on what is today cultivated land, on a relatively flat machair plain. It is circa 200m to a freshwater loch, Loch Bornais, and circa 1.4 km to the coast.

Bornais represents continuous permanent agrarian settlement on the machair from the Iron Age through the Norse period and to the Late Medieval era, though the west coast of the island has been the focus of agricultural activity since the Late Bronze Age. The Bornais site has been discussed in greater detail in this thesis (see site **64**).

5.6.1.2 Placename

The placename of Bornais (also spelled as Bornish) derives from fort headland (*borg*, and *ness*) (Taylor, 2022, p. 21). This is likely in relation to the Iron Age structure Dun Vulcan found on the southern side of the headland of Ardvule.

The placename Bornais can be considered topographical, as a headland is a natural feature. As Dun Vulcan is an Iron Age, pre-Norse structure, this can be considered topographical since it would have consisted of the natural feature of the seascape at the onset of the Viking period. The placename Bornais can therefore be said to be a natural, descriptive placename which are

likely among the oldest Norse placenames on the west seaboard of Scotland (Jennings & Kruse, 2009).

5.6.1.3 The natural landscape

Geology

The Bornais mound complex is found on the machair plain, which can be described as grass-covered sand and is discussed in greater detail in above (section 2.1.5). The underlying bedrock is banded gneiss (fig.17).

Agriculture

Bornais is found in an area of present-day agricultural activity. The site is located on the machair plain, and from the publications by Sharples (2005; 2019; 2020), the area was the focus of agricultural activity since at least the Iron Age.

Agriculturally, the Norse period of Bornais encapsulates the introduction of the “Norse farming package” (Edward et al, 2005, p. 77), along with the introduction of deep-sea fishing to the region (Sharples, 2020, p. 421).

The land capacity for agriculture by the James Hutton Institute determined that the agricultural potential of the area in a 1km distance of Bornais to be Class 4.1. Class 4.1 is explained by the James Hutton Institute as “land is capable of producing a narrow range of crops; enterprises are based primarily with short arable breaks”

(Bibby et al., 1991). This is the highest soil potential in the region, with some other small tracts of land possessing class 4.1. on Lewis and Skye, besides on Islay and Bute in the South Hebrides which have higher quality land (fig. 153). Class 4.1 continues north from Bornais to the Ormaclait area, but the majority of arable land on South Uist is improved grassland, from Class 5.1-5.3. Bornais can thus be said to have the best agricultural potential out of all townships on the western coast of South Uist, as well as some of the most suitable land for agriculture in the region.

5.6.1.3.1 Pastoralism

Mammal bone is present at Bornais in a total of 17,756 fragments from all phases and excavated mounds (Sharples, 2019, p. 561). The faunal assemblage of Bornais and its implications for Norse settlement throughout the Norse period is discussed further in chapter 6.6. In short red deer, cattle, pig, and sheep are all present in significant numbers in the bone assemblage at Bornais in the Norse period (Sharples & Smith 2009, p. 113). Pig is found in more significant numbers compared to the LIA phases (Sharples & Smith, 2009, p. 113).

Faunal data from cattle show a high number of neonatal deaths which suggests a strategy of dairy cattle (Sharples, 2005, p. 167). Foster has argued that soil of South Uist is suitable for dairy cattle, and this is also reflected in the placename of shieling sites, *ærgi-*, which also indicate that these cattle were grazed in the blacklands and moorlands (Foster, 2017, p. 286; 2018). *Ærgi-* placenames in South Uist have a concentration to the east, northeast, and southeast of Bornais (*fig. 34*) in the centre of the island. The faunal assemblage is described in greater detail in 6.6.

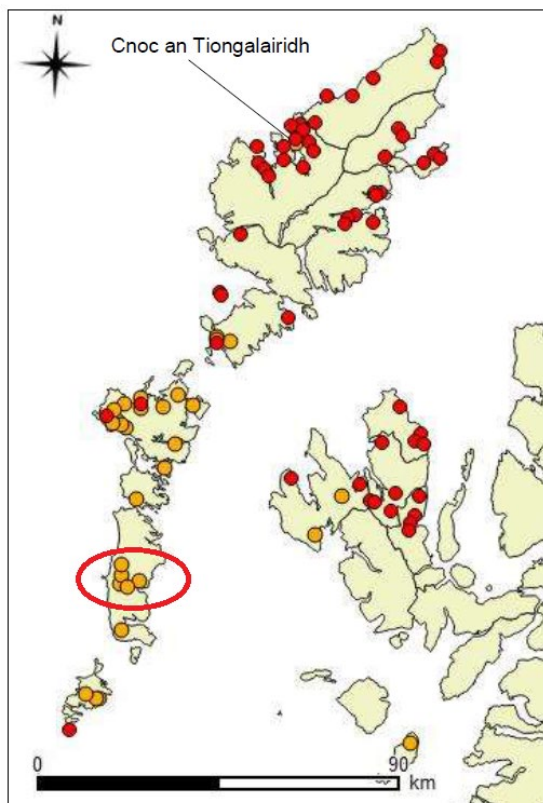


Figure 34: Ærgi- (yellow) and Sætr (red) placenames in the area of study, after Foster 2017, figure 4.1.5. Red circle my addition showing a concentration in the centre of the island.

The high number of red deer remains in the faunal assemblage at Bornais has been interpreted as evidence of a comb-making industry, in combination with evidence of comb-making inside the structures at Bornais. The herd of red deer would have likely had to have been managed (Sharples & Smith, 2009, p. 113).

5.6.1.3.2 Freshwater

Bornais is ca. 150 to Loch Bornais, a freshwater loch. This would be a source of freshwater along with possibly trout and salmon, though freshwater fish are not

represented in significant numbers in the fishbone assemblage from Bornais (i.e., Sharples, 2019, pp. 575-582).

Loch Bornais is linked to other freshwater, inland lochs in South Uist through what appear to be man-made canals and natural channels. To the north, a ca. 700m channel runs north/northeast to Loch Toronais (*fig.35*). To the south, a ca. 70m long, man-made channel connects Loch Bornais with Loch Chill Donnain across a narrow spit of land (*fig.36*). It is not known how old these channels are, but they are possibly Norse-period in origin (Angus, 2018), and Norse-period canals are known elsewhere in the Scandinavian world and settled areas, such as mainland Orkney (Bates et al., 2020).



Figure 35: channel between Loch Bornais and Loch Toronais.



Figure 36: Channel between Loch Chill Donnain and Loch Bornais, which links the two lochs.

5.6.2 Maritime landscape

Bornais is situated inland, over 800m to the nearest coast, and ca. 1500m to the nearest safe place to land seacraft, at Ardvule.

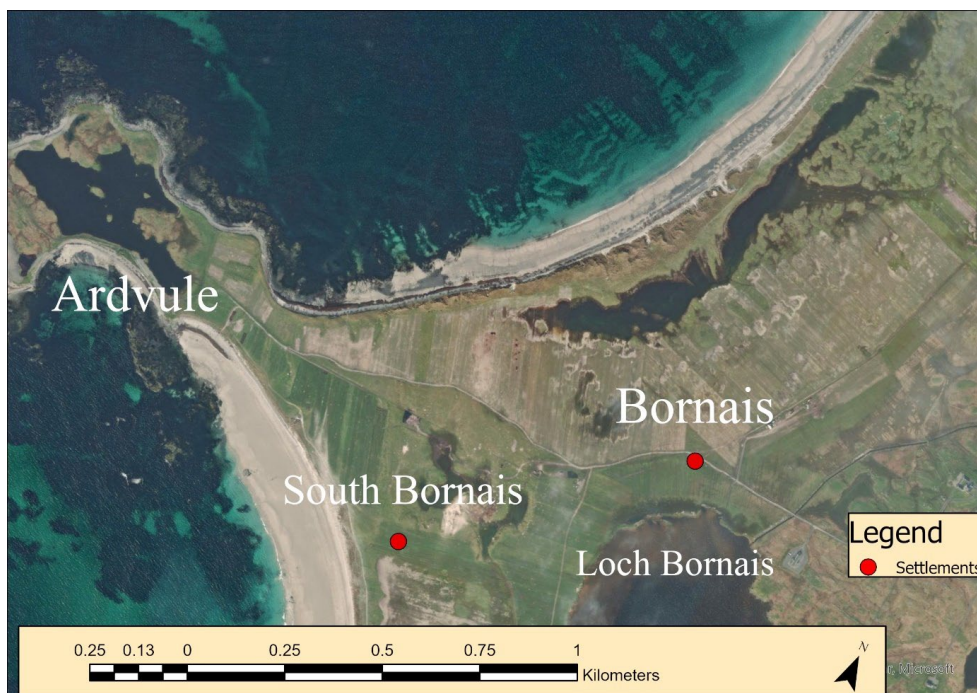


Figure 37: Bornais in relation to Ardvule and Loch Bornais.

Ardvule is a small headland with a freshwater loch, Loch Aird A’Mhuile, in its centre. On its south shore is the site of a broch, Dun Vulcan, and is today a bay for fishing vessels. Ardvule is one of two places to safely land a boat on the west coast of South Uist (Sharples, 2020, p. 421).

Bornais is thus ca. 1.4m to the nearest landing-place for seacraft (*fig. 37*). This is outside of 1000m of the established radiuses of (5.2.2). However, the fishbone assemblage at Bornais is also evidence that the site was utilized for deep-sea fishing.

Another potentiality is that Bornais is linked to the Minch in the east through a series of canals and/or overland portages (*fig. 28*). Loch Bornais is linked to Loch Uarach in the east by what looks like a man-made canal leading to a natural stream. From Loch Uarach it appears possible to reach Loch Moin Eouin by portage of over approximately 600m of relatively flat land to Loch Chlachain. From there it is possible to reach Loch Eynort (derived from an ON word for isthmus) by a 55m portage overland. Loch Eynort is a sea loch connected to the Minch, the main waterway

through the Hebrides. At the present time, it is not known if this is a viable portage in its entirety or if the canals were constructed as far back as the Norse period, or if streams linking the lochs were viable waterways for vessels. However, the placenames of *Eynort* (isthmus) and *Havn* (haven) are highly suggestive that Loch Eynort was an important point in the Norse seascape. Either way, the linkage of Loch Bornais to Loch Cille Donnain may have been significant in that small seacraft could easily travel from one loch to the other.



Figure 38: Hypothetical link of route between Loch Bornais and Loch Eynort.

5.6.3 Re-Use

Overlain

The first and subsequent Norse phases of Bornais directly overlay a pre-Norse, Iron Age settlement site. The Iron Age settlement site was abandoned sometime in the 8th century, whereas the Norse period structure can be dated securely to the early 10th century, but perhaps is earlier. It has been theorized that the pre-Norse structure, a Pictish figure-of-8 cellular structure, had its foundation walls re-used for the second structure built in the Norse period of

Bornais (Sharples, 2019, p. 615). The significance of re-used pre-Iron Age structures to build Norse-period structures is further examined in Chapter 7 of this thesis.

Proximity:

200m: n/a

500m: n/a

1000m: Another Norse settlement mound is found 600m to the southeast of Bornais, close to Ardvule, called South Bornais. It is unexcavated. An artificial island is ca. 700m from Bornais in the northern part of Loch Bornais, but it is unexcavated and therefore undated, and does not seem to have been re-used in the Norse period.

The broch site of Dun Vulcan is circa 1400m from Bornais, and thus outside of the 500m for probable consideration and out of the 1000m possible consideration.

The settlement site of Bornais can thus be said to directly overlay a pre-Norse, Iron Age settlement site, with other pre-Norse Iron Age structures in its general environs.

Theoretical framework from Bornais

Landscape, the Centre and Periphery

The centre: Bornais and its auxiliary buildings and arable land

Zone 1: Loch Bornais (freshwater), machair plain, and South Bornais (Norse settlement mound)

Zone 2: The blacklands – grazing lands and limited agricultural potential, and peat collection for fuel. Coast for resource gathering such as driftwood, shellfish, and shore fishing. Sheltered bay at Ardvule for travel, trade and station for deep-sea fishing.

Zone 3: Grazelands and close shieling sites. Inland lochs, potential for overland travel to eastern harbours.

Zone 4: Mountainous and bogland – distant pastures & shieling sites.

5.6.4 The centre

Bornais is roughly centred physically on the island of South Uist, ca. 17 km from the north coast, and 16km from the south coast. It is found on the machair plain in an area of relatively good agricultural potential for the region, as well as with access to a bay that could have acted as a stopover point for vessels travelling to and from the Hebrides. The fishbone assemblage suggests the people of Bornais exploited fish, particularly herring from off the continental shelf (Sharples, 2019, p. 573). Ardvule was a likely hub for fishing vessels as it is in the contemporary period. Physically, the mounds of Bornais are some of the largest found on South Uist, with just the mound of Aisgernis (site **73**) being larger in diameter at 100m. As Sharples & Parker Pearson 1999 and Parker Pearson 2012 point out, the complex of Bornais is central in regard to other Norse-period settlement sites on the island. It can thus be stated that the landscape situation of Bornais is reflective of a central site, both physically and culturally.

5.6.5 The periphery

At a small scale, the closest periphery of the Bornais complex are likely other structures that act as auxiliary buildings of Bornais. The Bornais complex is home to several other structures including some which are unexcavated. These are all found in Zone 1.

Besides the complex itself, 600m to the southwest is another Norse-period mound, called South Bornais (site **68**), found in zone 2. This mound is much smaller than the Bornais mound, roughly ca. 15m in diameter. It is unexcavated and thus not well understood. It is however much closer to the bay of Ardvule. Because it is unexcavated, it is not known if this mound was concurrent with the activity at Bornais, but due to the longevity of settlement at Bornais, it is likely that both mounds had some overlapping activity. The author suspects that South Bornais may have been a secondary settlement site, and possibly a fishing station, due to its proximity to the coast at Ardvule, but without excavation, this is just speculative.

Outside the periphery of Bornais is the blacklands, ca. 500m away. These are areas with very limited agricultural potential, but viable for pasturing animals. The blacklands were vital for a

mixed farming economy but can be considered the outfield, or *utmark*. This periphery zone thus can be said to be the outfield, off the arable land, where the animals were pastured, and the coast, where maritime resources could be harvested, and fishing could be conducted. Moreover, the periphery may have included canals and portages for travel through South Uist, and linking Bornais to the Minch in the east. This is exemplified in *figure 38*.

Zones 3 and 4 concern the so-called outfield (*utmark*), and can be categorized by shieling (summer pasture) activity. As the present level of archaeological knowledge, there are no shieling sites dated to the Norse-period on South Uist. Shielings dated to the Norse-period are known in the region, on Barra (Foster & Brannigan, 2000) and Skye (Wildgoose, 2016). South Uist, as noted earlier in this subchapter, possesses placename evidence of shieling activity dated to the Norse-period in the form of the *Ærgi* placename. These placenames are found mostly in the mountainous region or zone 4 of Bornais.

5.7.1 Results of case study

Bornais provides a model example for a Norse settlement site in the Hebrides.

The excavations and publications of Bornais allow it to be used as a case study and comparison for other sites in the area of study. Besides Bornais, only Cille Pheadair has the same amount of extensive excavation, research, and accessible publications for settlement sites.



Figure 39: Bornais and other Norse settlement sites on the west coast of South Uist.

Site	Placename	Resources	Freshwater	Maritime	Re-use
Bornais	Old Norse	Capable of mixed farming economy Antler production Deep-sea fishing station	Freshwater loch	Inland with potential link to sea-loch	LIA settlement mound and environs

Table 1: Bornais summarized.

The above table shows the site of Bornais possesses an Old Norse placename that can be considered topographical. The environs of Bornais is capable of supporting a mixed farming economy. One resource specialty of Bornais was likely deer antler. A deep-sea fishing station was likely nearby at Ardvule ca 1400m. The site is located in close proximity to a freshwater loch, which in addition to providing freshwater, may have also been a routeway. The site is located in relation to a sheltered bay. The Norse settlement layer was imposed over a pre-Norse, Iron Age settlement mound, perhaps re-using some building stones from the site or other nearby sites to build Norse-style structures.

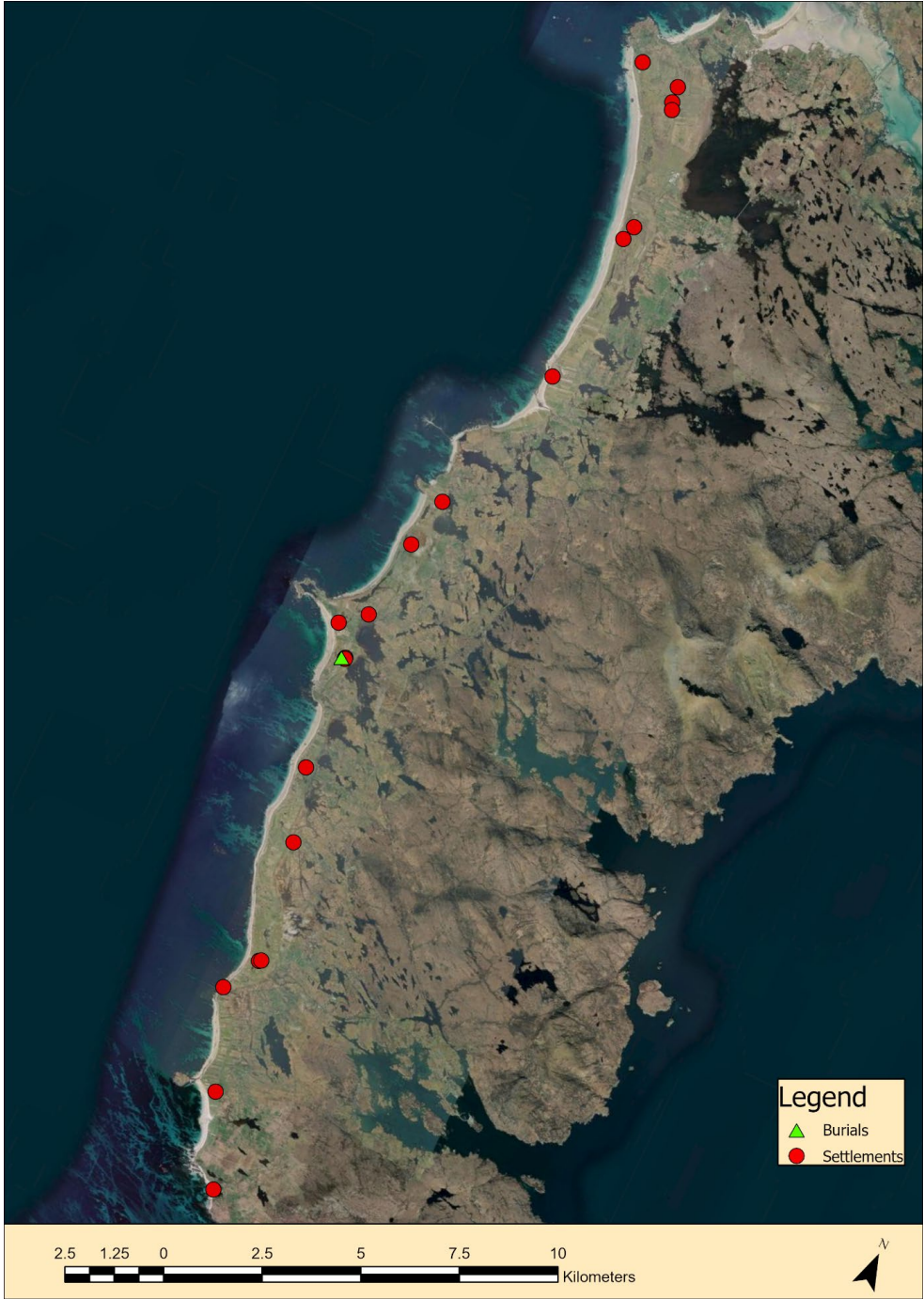


Figure 40: Norse-period sites on South Uist.

Bornais has been previously interpreted as a central site on South Uist due to the substantial size of its mound and main structures, placement in the centre of the island, artefact assemblage, and economical role (Sharples, 2019; 2020). Bornais is central on an axis of several Norse settlement sites, at nearly regular intervals (*fig. 40*). Bornais appears to be a central site in a landscape context, with re-use of an earlier site, and occupying a strategic point in the landscape. On the basis of Bornais undergoing the methodology of the author, this study supports the previous assertions that Bornais is a high-status central Norse settlement site.

The Bornais mound complex is the most securely dated site and can be seen as a site in which other Norse-period activity can be compared and measured against.

6: Data description and overview

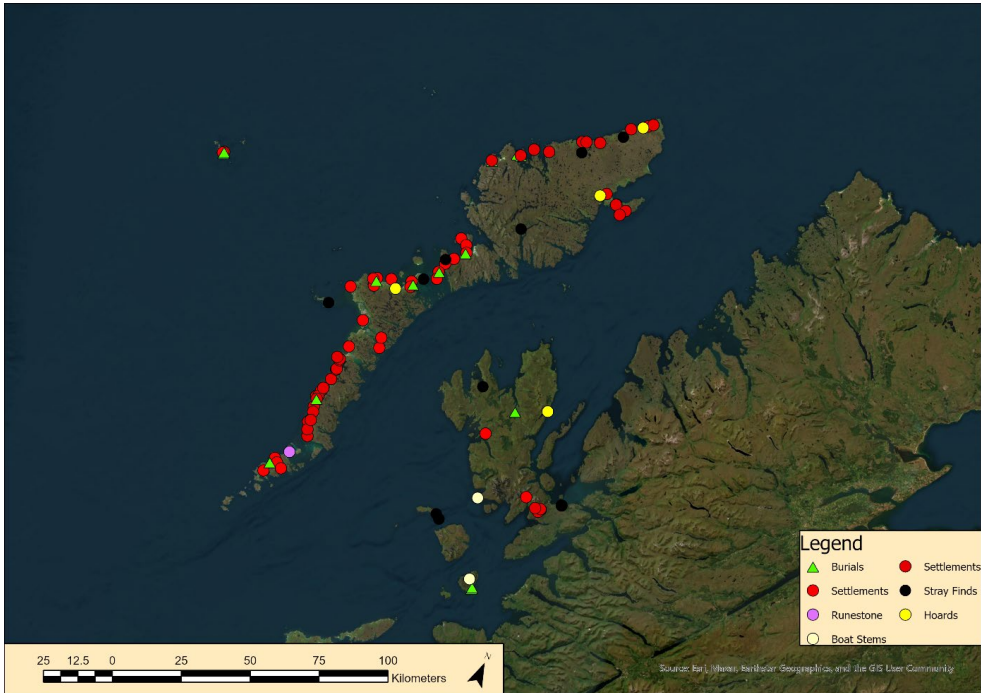


Figure 41: Overview of all Norse-period sites in the area of study.

6.1 Lewis

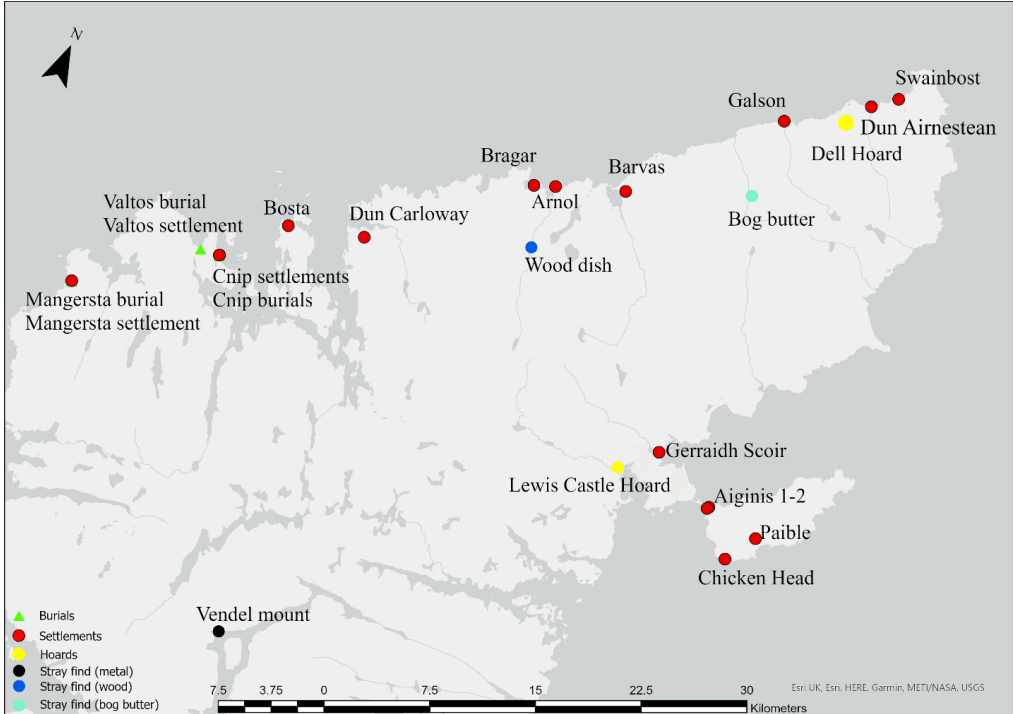


Figure 42: All Viking and Late Norse period sites on Lewis.

Lewis has a total of 24 sites in this corpus, besides probable or possible sites. 16 sites are considered settlements, 3 are burial sites, 2 are stray finds, 2 are hoards, and 2 are classified as other.

Burial sites

Site 1: Cnip

Viking-period burials were excavated at Cnip, Lewis, revealing a Viking Age cemetery (Dunwell et al., 1995). In 1979, a female skeleton (burial A in Dunwell, et al., 1995) with Norse grave goods was discovered eroding out of a sand hill at Cnip, Lewis, and was subsequently excavated (Welander et al., 1987). Further excavations revealed a Viking

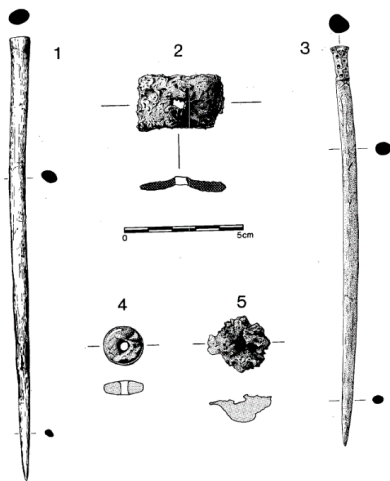


Figure 43: some artifacts from the Cnip cemetery, after Dunwell et al., 1995, p. 738.

cemetery of four adults two children, and one infant/neonate (Dunwell et al., 1995, labelled burials B-G).

The skeletal remains of Burial A, sexed as female, were found due to erosion in 1978, and contained rich grave goods, including gilt-brooches from which traces of a purple-dyed silk fabric fragment was recovered, a necklace of 42 glass beads, a copper alloy ringed-pin (late 10th century), copper alloy belt fittings, a bone needle case where a bronze needle was placed, an iron rivet (Welander et al., 1987, pp. 158-159). It was possible that this burial was covered by a low

mound or cairn, or other above-ground marker that has since eroded.

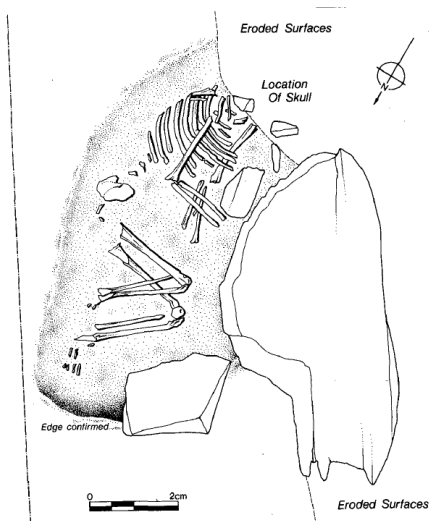


Figure 44: plan of child at Cnip. After Dunwell et al., 1995, p. 724.

Burial B is a child around 6 years of age, and was buried with a stone pendant (Dunwell et al, 1995, pp. 724; 727). This is an inhumation grave likely marked by a large stone slab.

Burial C is of an adult male, likely 35-45 years old, and was buried without identifiable grave goods. The grave was covered by a low-standing mound, with a small kerb stone (Dunwell et al., 1995, p. 730).

Burial D represents the remains of an adult male, older than 40, and was buried without grave goods, but the grave was covered with a low-standing mound, with a small kerb stone (Dunwell et al., 1995,

p. 730).

Burial E is an adult female, 35-45 years old. This burial was buried with a bone dress pin, an iron plate near the left-side of the jaw. The burial was covered in a low-standing mound with a kerb stone (Dunwell et al., 1995, p. 730).

Burial F is an infant burial, 6-9 months old (Dunwell et al., 1995, p. 734). There was an amber bead buried with the interred, and out of context artefacts, such as an

additional amber bead and a bone-pin were recovered, but there was no above-ground marker.

Burial G is an infant who died at birth or in the first few weeks after birth. There was an iron rivet recovered from the grave, but this was a flat grave with no above-ground marker (Dunwell et al., 1995., p. 735).

Site 2: Valtos burial site

This burial site was discovered by school children in 1916, where human remains were discovered eroding out of what was reported as a potato patch. The burial was excavated by D.J. MacLeod, who sent the artifacts to the National Museum of Scotland, and reburied the human remains (MacLeod, 1916). This is a Viking Age burial sexed as female (Graham-

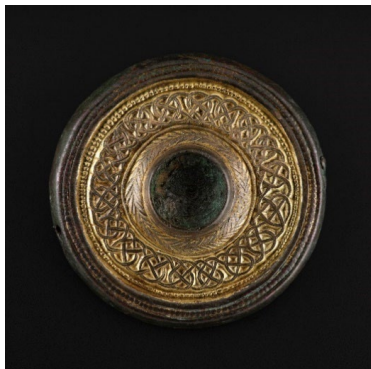


Figure 45: Irish-made copper alloy brooch from the Valtos burial. @National Museum of Scotland.

Campbell & Batey, 1998; p. 74, Harrison, 2008, p. 478; Norstein, 2020, p. 266) The artifacts include two oval copper alloy brooches, a copper alloy belt buckle, ringed-pin, and a copper alloy brooch of Irish manufacture. Other objects reported in the area after the discovery of the burial include a 7-8th century Pictish brooch (Canmore ID: **4004**), but it is not known if this is from the same context. The burial may have been in association with An Caisteal, an Iron Age structure/mound within 10m of the original findspot Canmore ID: **4025**).

Site 3: Mangersta



Figure 46: copper alloy brooch fragment dated to the 9th-10th centuries AD. After Carson, 1977, p. 373.

A mound at Mangersta produced a number of finds due to erosion in 1974-1976, including Iron Age pottery sherds (undated), an Iron Age comb fragment (bone, likely Late Iron Age), and a copper alloy fragment of an oval brooch (9th-10th century) (Carson, 1977). It is unclear whether these items came from the same context, but it is unlikely. The brooch fragment, along with its discovery in a mound near a sheltered harbour has led the author to interpret this burial of a Norse-cultured woman.

Settlement sites

Site 4: Barvas

The Norse settlement site at Barvas sands was excavated in 1978 by Cowie, and fully published by Macleod Rivett (Cowie & Macleod Rivett, 2010; Macleod Rivett, 2016). The site dates from the late 10th century to the 13th century AD on the basis of pottery (Cowie & Macleod Rivett, 2010). There were two separate structures identified as Norse longhouses with a midden between the two structures. One structure, which was interpreted by the excavators as the main house, had 3 trial trenches put in it. The other structure was just exposed and not excavated, and interpreted by the excavators as a byre. The site produced Norse pottery, soapstone fragments, and faunal remains from the excavated midden (Cowie & Macleod Rivett, 2010).



Figure 47: Plan showing excavated structures at Barvas. After Macleod Rivett, 2016, p. 155

Site 5: Bosta

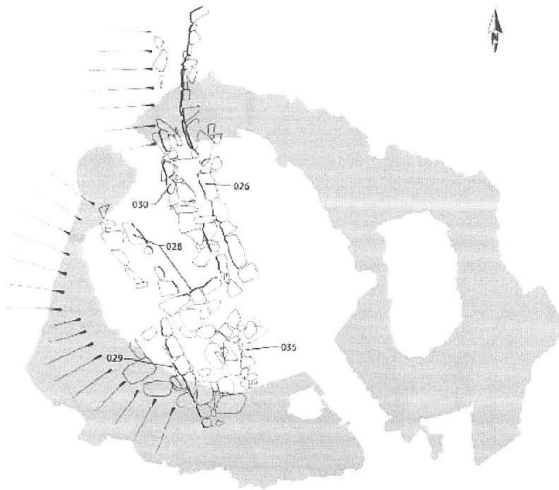


Figure 48: plan showing excavated structures at Bosta, Norse structure labeled 029. After Church, 2002.

The site at Bosta is represented by a fragmentary corner of a longhouse, associated with a midden that produced Norse period artifacts, including pottery, steatite, and faunal remains. The Norse level at *Bosta* is not fully published, (Neighbour & Burgess, 1997, p. 113), but dating may range between the 9th-10th centuries.

Site 6: Dun Carloway



Figure 48: Dun Carloway in the 21st century, photo @the author.

Dun Carloway is an Iron Age broch site (1st AD). The broch itself likely dates to the 1st century AD, but activity can be traced in the broch to the modern era. It is one of the largest standing brochs in Scotland, with the walls originally reaching 9.8m. The interior “courtyard” of the broch is 7.4m in diameter. A wall in the chamber in the broch was excavated by Tabraham

in the 1972, the excavation was “small-scale”, and it appeared to have uncovered an unstratified deposit (Lane. 1983, p. 265). Included in the assemblage was a Norse-period sherd deposited under a layer of Iron Age pottery, leading Lane to interpret the site as heavily disturbed (Lane, 1983, p. 265).

Site 7: An Dunain

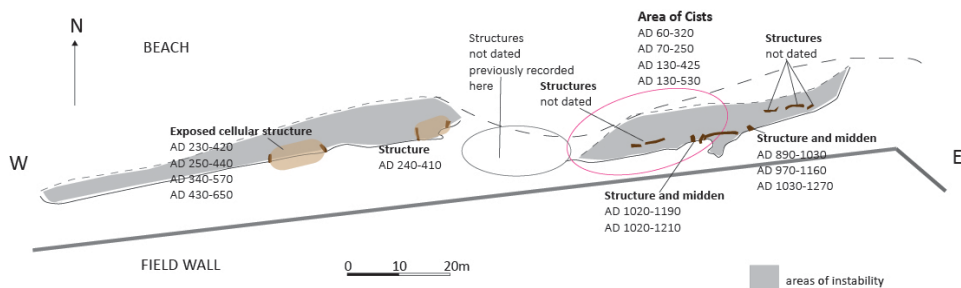
An Dunain is a crannog in a salt marsh likely dating to the Iron Age. Radiocarbon dating on seeds of grain found at post-Iron Age layers of the site revealed a Late Norse (12th century AD) date (Church et al., 2014). No artifacts were found that date to the Norse period.



Figure 49: An Dunain, photo after Church et al., 2014, p. 211.

Site 8: Galson

Galson is a multi-period, eroding settlement site. Viking-period artifacts as well as radiocarbon dating placing the occupation in the 10th-12th centuries AD (ShoreUPDATE). Structures were revealed by erosion and documented by geophysical survey, but it appears that the form of the structures, or if any structures could be associated with Norse-period artifacts, is unknown. An enamelled Viking-period (9th-10th) mount, probably for a horse harness, was discovered at the site in the 1970s (Graham-Campbell, 1986, pp. 281-284).



Schematic plan of Galson section based on Neighbour, 2000 and Ponting 1989 showing location of recorded structures and dates where available

Figure 50: structures at Galson, plan showing the results of geophysical survey and keyhole excavation survey.

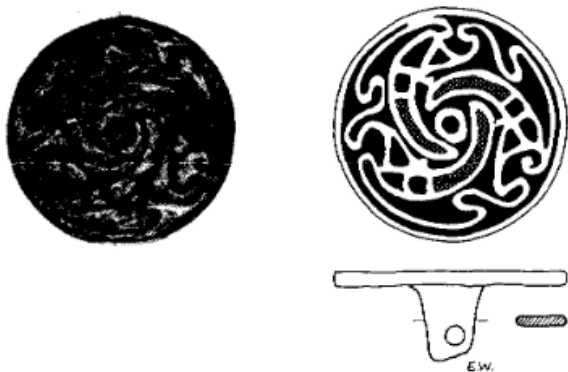


Figure 51: 9th-10th century copper alloy stud, probably for a horse-harness. After Graham-Campbell, 1986. p. 282)

Site 9: Swainbost

Swainbost (Canmore ID: **4430**) is a Norse settlement mound overlain by a 19th century copper alloy smithy. There is no available description of the mound at present, but “12m of stone walling” is reported, and “up to 10m shell and ash midden on the west side of the site”, suggests that the mound is circa 20m in diameter. A 9th century antler comb of Viking typology (no photograph) was recovered at the site, along with a large quantity (no exact number known, no photographs or drawings available) of Norse pottery sherds. Iron working debris, including slag and fire-cracked rock, was recovered from the site but could not be associated with any known layer. The 19th century smithy was excavated, but the excavators only revealed the Norse layer and did not excavate further (MacLeod Rivett pers. commun 2020). Overall, and despite the lack of documentation, the information made available suggests presences of an extensive Norse settlement mound.

Site 10: Dun Airnestean

A Norse rim-sherd was discovered in ploughed soil at Traigh Dail, Airnestean, identified by Alan Lane (Barrowman, 2015, p. 41). There is no photograph, known dimensions, or drawing of the find available to the author. The findspot is approximate.

Site 11: Arnol

A multi-period, “substantial” settlement mound, dating from the Neolithic to the 19th century, including a Norse phase represented by pottery (Canmore ID: 4255). There are no photographs or descriptions of the pottery. Also recovered were a copper-alloy brooch and an antler comb, but it is not clear from the record if this is Norse, non-Norse period, or if the objects have not been dated. The exact dimensions of the mound are not known to the author.

12. Valtos settlement

Two sherds from a midden at Valtos were exposed through erosion (Lane ,1983). No dimensions or further information of the midden are known. The two sherds are 1 body sherd of a vessel, and 1 platter sherd of a baking plate (Lane, 1983, p. 561).

13. Bragar



A Norse pottery rim sherd (.9cm long) was recovered from a multi-period settlement mound at Bragar, discovered through erosion (Lane, 1983, p. 635). The mound appears some 20 x 10m and is found under a modern church structure and modern burial ground.

Figure 52: sherd from Bragar, after Lane 1983: 633, fig.27

14. Carinish



Norse pottery sherds were found in association with a midden at Carinish (Lane, 1983, p. 635). The midden does not have any dimensions or other information available. One body sherd was illustrated by Lane (1983).

Figure 53: Body sherd from Carinish, after Lane, 1983, p. 633, fig.27.

15. Paibel, Eye

This represents a find of a rectangular soapstone vessel with a hole bored through it, found in ploughed soil (**Canmore ID: 335616**). No other information, including dimensions or photographs, is currently available.

16. Cnip Headland



Finds of 6 Norse pottery sherds were recovered as surface collection multiple times around the area of the Cnip headland burials. Lane lists 1 sherd, 1 platter sherd, 3 base sherds, and 1 platter rim (Lane, 1983, pp. 557-558).

Figure 54: rim sherd from Cnip, after Lane, 1983, p. 634, fig.28.

17. Chicken Head

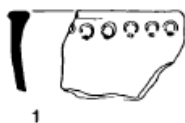


Figure 55: Decorated body sherd from Chicken Head, after Lane, 1983, p. 633, fig.27.

A body sherd, impressed with a ringed-pin decoration, was discovered by erosion of the soil at the site of the ecclesiastical site. The sherd, on the basis of being decorated using an impression by a ringed-pin, can be dated to the 10th-11th centuries (Lane, 1983, p. 633).

18. Aiginis 1

Aiginis 1 is a multi-period settlement mound undergoing severe erosion. The site dates from the Bronze-Age to the early modern era, and has a distinctive Norse-period layer that has produced Norse pottery (**Canmore ID: 335616**; Kevin Murphy pers. comm. 2018). No further information is currently available to the author.

19. Aiginis 2

Aiginis 2 is an eroding settlement mound that has produced Norse pottery, steatite fragments, and a penannular brooch dated to the 9th-10th centuries AD (Lane, 1983). No further information, including dimensions or drawings, are known to the author.

20. *Gerraidh Scoir*

Gerraidh Scoir is a settlement mound, disturbed by ploughing and other activity (Canmore ID: **334212**). There is midden circa 3m in diameter. Among the finds revealed by erosion are Norse pottery and a possible Norwegian garnet schist whetstone, but no photographs or drawings are available to the author. The original footprint of the building may be visible, some 10-15m in length.

Hoard

21. *Dell Hoard*

The Dell Hoard is a silver hoard found after draining a peat bog in Moss, the northeast of Lewis, in 1938, and sent to the NMAS in 1939 (Edwards, 1939). The hoard consists of three silver penannular rings and a small silver ring. The date of deposit of the hoard is ca. mid-10th century, based on the typology of the silver ring, can be considered ring-money (Graham-Campbell & National Museums of, 1995, p. 146).



Figure 56: 3 silver armrings and 2 silver rings from the Dell hoard. Photo @ NMAS.

22. *Stornoway Hoard*

The Lews Castle hoard is a large silver hoard dated from the late 10th to mid-11th century and consists of both coins and silver bullion. It is a metal detector find, and was found wrapped in linen and deposited in a cow horn. The silver hoard weighs 283g, and the find includes coins that could be dated to 1030 AD (Graham-Campbell, 1995, p. 148)



Figure 57: silver objects from the Stornoway hoard. Photos @ NMAS.

Stray finds

23. Vendel mount



Figure 58: Vendel mount, 7th-8th century AD. Photo @ the National Museum of Scotland (NMAS).

A mount circa. 4.5cm by 2cm was discovered in the vicinity of the Hunting Lodge at Alt Linne, on the shore of Loch Seaforth. This is a metal detecting find (Murphy pers. commun 2018). The mount, labelled as Viking or “Vendel” in documentation, is likely 7-8th century AD in manufacture date, and the closest parallels appear to be belt-mounts from the graves at Vastegårde, Sweden. The description of the mount in the NMAS states it was repurposed as a brooch, since a rivet was punched through the plate sometime after manufacture.

24. Wooden dish

A wooden (alder) dish found in a peat bog, and dates between 910-977 AD on the basis of radiocarbon dating. The dish is 57 cm in length and 27.8cm in diameter (Earwood, 1993, p. 288).

25. *Bog butter*

Two “spheres” of bog butter were discovered in a peat bog at High Borve. The finds were radiocarbon dated to 1020-1158 AD (MacRae et al., 1983, p. 40).

26. *Uig Lewis Chessmen hoard*



Figure 59: some of the Lewis chessmen pieces. @wikipedia.

This is the findspot of the Lewis chessmen and associated objects, dated most likely to the 12th century, and likely manufactured around Trøndelag, Norway.

This findspot represents 94 separate objects, all made of walrus ivory. These include 14 ivory disks, and an ivory belt buckle. There is much dispute on where exactly they were found, but the likely place of deposition is at Mealista, Lewis (Caldwell, 2015). The hoard was

allegedly found in a small square cist, but this has never been located.

6.2 Harris & Harris Sound

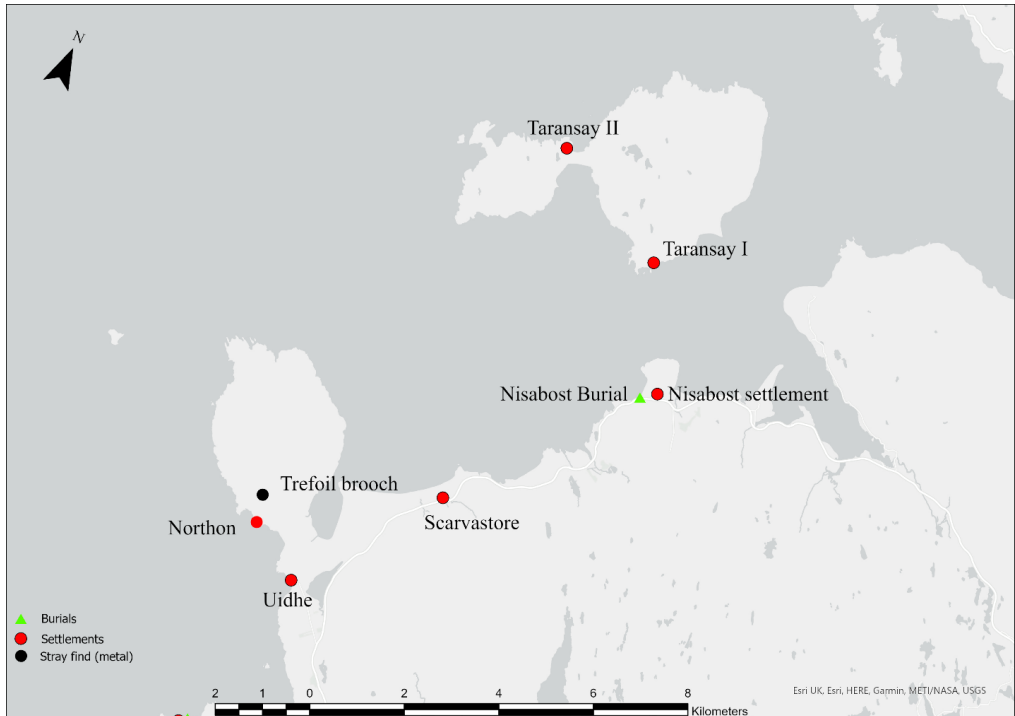


Figure 60: All Viking and Late Norse period finds on Harris (with Taransay).

On Harris, 8 sites can be determined to be Norse period. Of the 7 sites, 6 are settlements sites, 1 is a burial site, and 1 site is a stray find.

Burials

27. Nisabost burial

This is a male inhumation burial of an adult aged 35-40 based on osteological analysis (Canmore ID: **335605**). The skeleton appears to have been placed under a small cairn of stones in a pit-cut burial of sand, but was exposed due to coastal erosion. An iron knife-blade and a whetstone (unknown material) were discovered with the skeletal remains and have been identified as Norse objects. This is not a securely dated burial and there have been no additional analyses done on the skeleton or artefacts as far as the author knows. No images

appear to exist of either the skeletal remains or the artefacts, and the author does not have access to a plan or photographs of the excavation. Two meters to the northeast was another skeleton found due to erosion, but no grave goods were recovered that could be associated with the body, and its date is unknown (Canmore ID: **305970**).

28. Manish burial

This is a Viking Age burial site, first reported by Martin Martin in the late 17th century, including human remains. The objects were in the National Museum of Scotland as of the late 19th century, but were lost, and the whereabouts of the human remains are unknown (Harrison, 2008; Graham-Campbell & Batey, 1998, 80). There are no photographs or drawings of the objects, but they included two copper-alloy scales and a copper alloy hammer of Thor pendant. These objects tend to be more common in female than male graves in Scandinavia, but since the skeleton was not sexed, this burial cannot be associated to either male or female.

29. Ensay burial II

This is a second Viking Age burial site from Ensay, originally identified as coming from the island of “Langay” in the Harris Sound which does not exist, but identified as Ensay by Harrison (2008). The finds include a (presumably lost) human skeleton with a pair of copper-alloy oval brooches and a copper alloy needle case, now lost, and neither photographs nor descriptions of the artifacts exist. This however, is considered a certain Viking-period female burial, with exact provenance unknown.

Settlements

30. Nisabost settlement

The Norse settlement site at Nisabost represents a layer in a multiperiod settlement mound (Colls & Hunter, 2012, p. 9). The site overlays a Pictish figure-8 structure, but contained no structural remains that could be associated with the layer (Colls & Hunter, 2012, p. 9). The

layer was dated to the Norse period on the basis of Norse pottery. The amount of pottery sherds found, or images or drawings of the finds are not available to the author.

31. Norton

A multiperiod settlement mound and midden at Norton was excavated, including finds from the Mesolithic, Neolithic and Iron Age (Burleigh et al., 1973). The midden contains a layer dated to the Norse period based on a diagnostic piece of pottery (Lane, 1983, p. 330). This layer contained no structural remains. Lane suggested that the Norse period of the site was more stable than the prehistoric remains and as a result, not excavated extensively (Lane, 1983, p. 330).

32. Taransay I

Taransay I is a multiperiod settlement mound (Canmore ID: **35585**). There are no known dimensions listed in its Canmore entry. The mound contains a midden which produced Norse pottery finds through erosion in 2002, with a layer of blown sand underneath, and an earlier layer interpreted as a Bronze Age beaker cultural layer due to finds of beaker sherds. There are no photos or information about the Norse pottery finds available to the author.

33. Taransay II

Taransay II is an Iron Age and Norse settlement mound, circa 20m in diameter (Canmore ID: **179571**). The mound was identified as containing Iron Age and Norse phases through pottery typology. Neither the Iron Age nor the Norse finds have more information available, and the dimension of the mound is approximate and based on aerial photography, made by the author.

34. Uidhe

The site on Uidhe, the isthmus of Uidhe, Harris, is a Norse-period midden site (Canmore ID: **10503**). There are reports of “a number of shell heaps” that produced Norse pottery and

undated animal bones, all exposed by wind erosion. This site is interpreted by the author as a Norse midden site. The exact dimensions or extent of the site is unknown, as is the number, also any information on dimensions or photographs of the recovered pottery sherds.

35. Scarastavore

Norse-period artifacts were recovered from a site that included rectangular stone-built foundations by T.C. Lethbridge in 1953 (Canmore ID: **10551**). Included in the assemblage were boat rivets, shears, a bone pin, among other finds not listed specifically. Nothing else is known about this site, except that it occupies a “marshy” area as of 1953, and there was stone walling visible at the time. No photographs or drawings exist of the objects uncovered, and the objects are considered lost.

Harris Sound

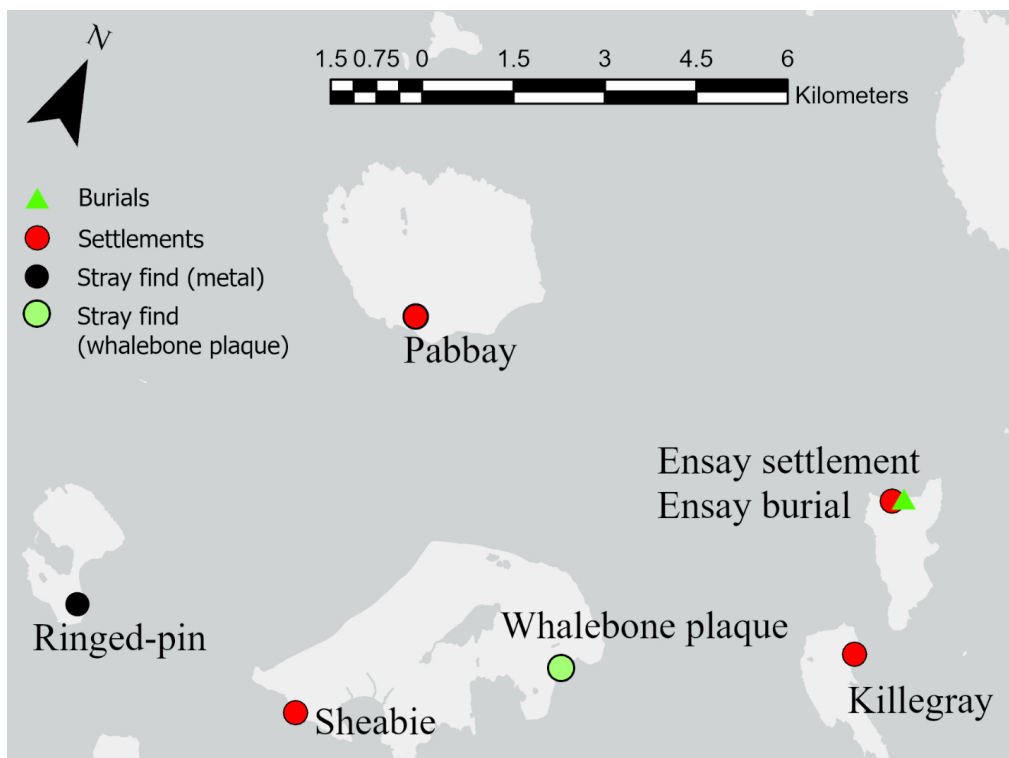


Figure 61: All Viking and Late Norse sites in the Harris Sound (Pabbay, Killegray, Ensay, Berneray, and Boreray).

There are a total of nine sites in total in the Harris Sound. Of the nine, four are settlement sites, two are burials, two are stray finds, and one is classified as other.

Settlement sites

36. Killegray

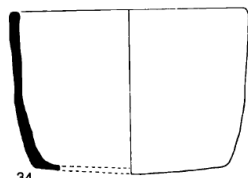


Figure 62: body sherd from the Killegray mound, after Lane, 1983, p. 633, fig. 24.

This is a mound and midden. The midden produced Norse pottery sherds, undated slag, shell and bone. Lane identified 4 platter

sherds, 2 rim sherds, 1 body sherd, and 1 base sherd, along with 4 probable sherds from the collection (Lane, 1983, p. 161).

37. *Ensay settlement*



Figure 63: platter rim sherd from Ensay, after Lane, 1983, p.633, fig. 27.

Ensay is an eroding settlement mound located under a modern stone wall that produced Norse pottery sherds. There are 3 sherds, 2 platter and 1 platter rim sherd recorded in the assemblage. (Lane. 1983, p. 313).

38. *Pabbay*

Radiocarbon dating of burnt seeds discovered in a test-pit that unveiled an agricultural layer showed a date of the 9th century for the layer (Crawford, 2005). Further test-pitting and excavations did not reveal more about the site or its chronology, and no artifacts were uncovered.

39. *Boreray (An Corran)*

A ringed-pin was found in an eroding settlement mound at An Corran, Boreray. Beveridge reported Viking-type iron rivets (Beveridge, 1911, 239). No further documentation is known



for this site. The ringed-pin appears to be 10th century, and the NMAS lists the material as being bronze. There are no dimensions of this object, but a photograph is in the NMAS database (*fig. 64*).

Figure 64: bronze 10th century ringed-pin from Boreray. Photo @ the National Museum of Scotland.

40. Sheabie

Sheabie is the site of an eroding settlement complex and midden on Berneray, which produced Norse pottery sherds (MacDonald pers. commun. 2018). The author surveyed the site, which appears to be a deflated settlement mound, with an eroding shell-midden. There were two structures present in the face of a cliffside as of 2018. One structure appeared sub-rectangular in shape, with a corner facing S-SE. The other structure was fragmentary. There is no indication that the pottery



Figure 65: Corner of an undated drystone building at Sheabie. Photo @the author.

sherds could be associated with the structures.



Figure 66: shell-midden that produced Norse-period pottery sherds at Sheabie. Photo @ the author.

Stray finds

41. Trefoil brooch fragment



*Figure 67: copper-alloy trefoil brooch from Chaipavel, Harris.
Photo @ National Museum of Scotland.*

This is a copper-alloy trefoil brooch fragment dated to the 9th-10th centuries AD, identified as Rygh nos. 652 or 654 (Graham-Campbell, 1977, p. 213). The reverse has an imprint of herringbone fabric created by

corrosion. It was discovered by a landowner, and appears to have been shot with a 22-calibre rifle due to a bullet-hole perforation near the centre (Graham-Campbell, 1977, p. 215).

42. Berneray whalebone plaque

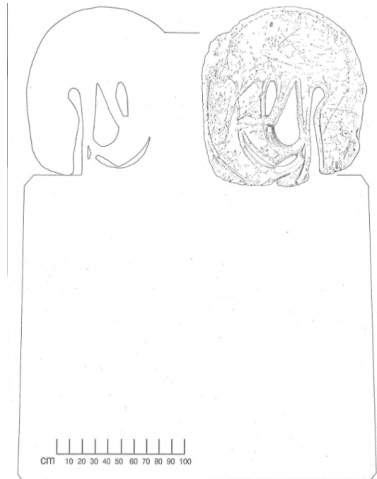


Figure 68: fragment of the plaque in the upper-right corner, rest of plaque reconstructed. Drawing @ Batey, 1994, p. 110.

A whalebone plaque fragment was discovered on a beach at Rushigarry, Berneray (Batey, 1994). The fragment is ca. 128mm by 124mm, and roughly 16-18cm thick. These objects are mostly known from burials, but some fragments are known from settlement sites in Northern Norway (Isaksen, 2012, p. 117), and Birsay, Orkney (Graham-Campbell, 1994, p. 216). This object is classified as a stray find. The fragment appears to have come out of the side of a sandy cliffside, centred in the middle of the harbour. No other artefacts or structural remains were recorded at the time of discovery after a survey (Batey, 1994, p. 104), and no other Norse artefacts have been reported from the area since then.

6.3 North Uist & Heisker

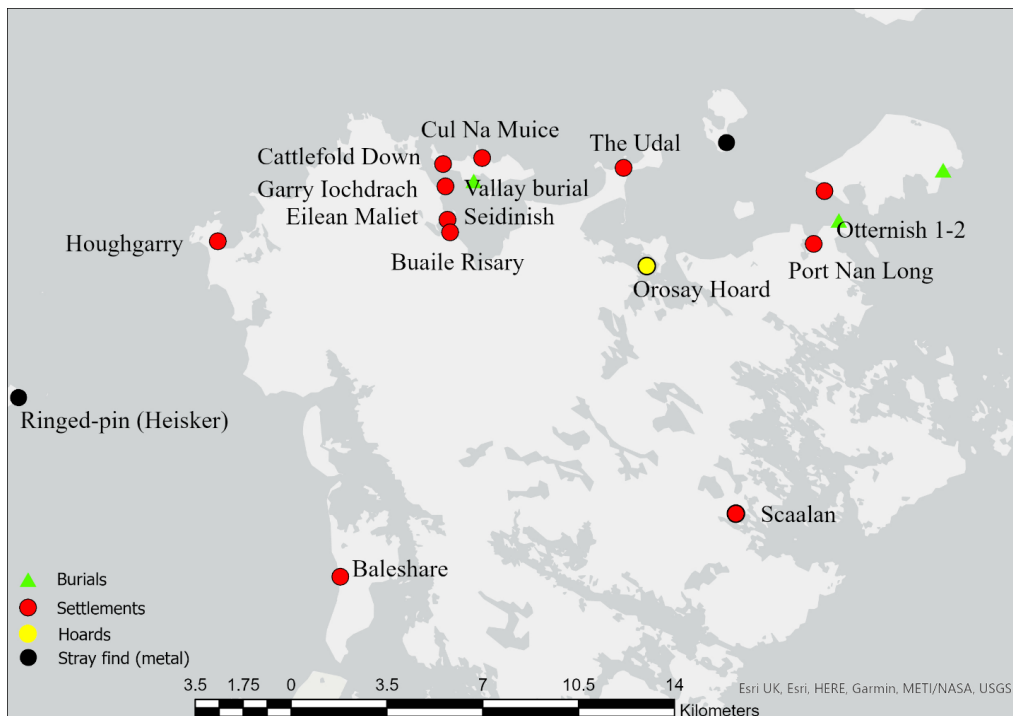


Figure 69: Viking and Late Norse period sites on North Uist & Heisker.

There are 16 sites on North Uist that can be dated to the Norse period. 11 sites are settlement sites, 3 sites are burial sites, 1 is a hoard site, and 1 a stray-find.

Burials

43. Otternish I

This is a cairn investigated excavated by Beveridge sometime before 1911 (Beveridge, 1911; Harrison, 2008, p. 486). There were 9 iron rivets, an unknown number of glass beads, and a comb of unknown style or material found in association with human remains (Harrison, 2008, p. 486). This is a likely boat burial of unknown gender, perhaps already disturbed before Beveridge's excavation. 9 iron Viking-type rivets from Otternish are in the NMAS collections, but it is unclear which sites they originate from.

44. Otternish II

A cist was excavated in 1870, that included a human skeleton as well as an iron rivet (Harrison, 2008, p. 486). This was 45m south of Otternish I. 9 iron Viking-type rivets from Otternish are in the NMAS collections, but it is unclear which sites they originate from.

45. Vallay burial

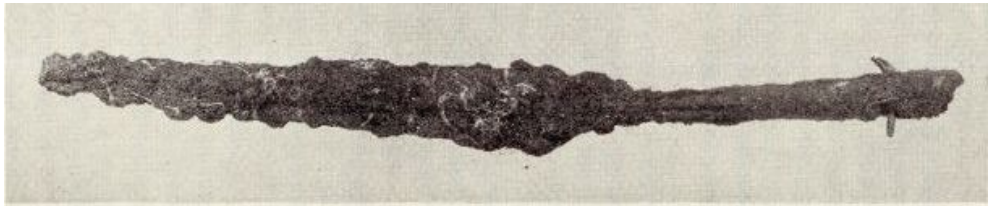
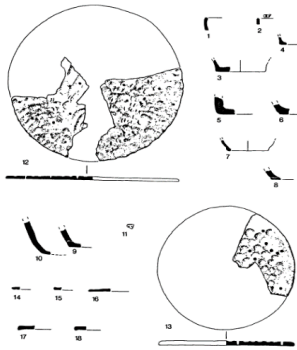


Figure 70: Viking-period spearhead from Vallay, likely from a burial excavated by Beveridge. After Grieg 1940, p. 79.

This site is either one or two Viking Age burials excavated by Beveridge sometime in the early 20th century. Beveridge is said to have excavated two burials, both boat burials, with swords, spears, and other finds (1911, p. 83). The records of this are extremely poor, but at least one inhumation grave can be certified in *The Viking Antiquities in Scotland* (Grieg et al., 1940). The location or details of the human remains are unknown. One spearhead (Petersen Type K, with two copper alloy rivets present, fig. 70) is from the site is recorded in the collections of the NMAS.

46. The Udal



The Udal is a multi-period, complicated site located on the Aird a'Mhorain peninsula on the northern coast of North Uist, stretching out into the Sound of Harris. The site was excavated by Ian Crawford between 1963 and 1993. Two major sites can be identified, each originally forming two sandhills: the Udal, Udal North, the main site, and Udal South, roughly 90m to the south of Udal North. The Udal site as a whole is unpublished. The Udal South Neolithic and Bronze Age occupational levels on the peninsula were excavated by Crawford have been published by Beverley Ballin Smith (2018), but as of 2022, later periods are still unpublished. Knowledge of the unpublished levels of Udal South as well as Udal North is restrained to interim reports after each field season (Lane, 1983, p. 29), as well as some notes and articles by Crawford (Crawford & Switsur, 1977; Crawford, 1981; Selkirk, 1996), as well in the doctoral thesis by Lane which examined Late Iron Age and Viking Age pottery (1983), and the monograph of Dale Serjeantson that examined a sample of the animal bones from 500-1700 AD (Serjeantson, 2013). Photographs, drawings, and descriptions of the finds are minimal, and the author was not able to arrange a visit to the archive where the material is located.

Figure 71: some Viking Age pottery from level IX of the Udal (after Lane, 1983, p. 626, fig.21).

The main Udal complex (Udal North) is a complicated site that ranges from 500-1700 AD. The first structures built on the site were Late Iron Age figure-8 houses (Serjeantson, 2013, p. 3). Two layers were identified as Viking Age, phase X and phase IXC (Crawford & Switsur, 1977, p. 131). The first structure of phase X was a turf-built enclosure, identified as a Viking-period fortification by Crawford (1981), and included in a database of D-shaped Viking-period forts in Britain by Ben Raffield (2013). After the enclosure had been built, six rectangular structures were built within the enclosure along with a corn-drying structure, dating from perhaps the 9th century (Serjeantson, 2013, p. 4). A large, double-walled longhouse was built in the mid-11th century. The complex was interpreted by Crawford as the residence of a magnate (Crawford, 1981). Between the 12th-13th centuries, a large, double-walled rectangular hall with multiple internal compartments was built, again interpreted as the residence of a powerful elite by Crawford.

The chronology of the Udal has long been used as evidence of an early Norse date for the site, with implications for the ethnic situation in the islands. Crawford argued that due to no wind-blown sand between the Late Iron Age and Norse layers, the Late Iron Age structures had been dismantled and used to build a Norse longhouse complex (1981). He argued that the enclosure was evidence of turmoil at the start of the Viking Age, interpreting it as a fortification. Overall, Crawford argued that the change from the Late Iron Age to the Viking Age was one of violent disruption (Crawford & Switsur, 1977, p. 131).

The radiocarbon date of whalebone belonging to the earliest level of the Udal revealed an 800 AD date (Crawford & Switsur, 1977, p. 131), but due to the marine reservoir effect, this early date on the basis of whalebone for the Viking level of the Udal is now considered unreliable, along with other dates from the Viking and Norse period (Lane, 2007, p. 11). While coins from the 10th to 13th centuries may help in dating these layers, discussing the chronology of the Udal is hindered without a full publication. However, the bronze objects from the Udal appear to be decoratively more zoomorphic than comparable objects to Bornais, suggesting an earlier date for the Udal than Bornais (Sharples pers. comm. 2020). Graham-Campbell examined a Borre-style strap-end from phase X of the Udal which likely dates to the 9th-10th centuries, though it appears to have come from a scrap-metal pile to be re-purposed (Graham-Campbell, 1974).

Animal bones

Dale Serjeantson examined a sample of the animal bones recovered from the Udal north between 500-1700 AD, roughly 20% of the animal bones from each layer were studied (2013). Serjeantson argued that the abundance of arable land compared to Norway and Iceland attracted Norse settlers to North Uist (2013, p. 98). She argues that on the basis of animal bones, society drastically changed at the Udal between the Iron Age and Viking Age, from sustenance farming to large-scale exploitation of fish, particularly cod and other gadoids, likely for drying and export, while wool was also likely produced in surplus amounts for either trade or taxation by overlords (Serjeantson, 2013, p. 99-100).

47. Cul Na Muice

Five sherds of Norse date, and one possible sherd of platter associated with a midden site of unknown dimensions (Lane, 1983, pp. 308-309).

48. Cattlefold Down

Norse-period rivets were found from an eroding settlement mound by Beveridge (1911). No other information is known, but multiple undated finds from the site are in the NMAS.

49. Seidinish

Coin of Edgar (10th century) and undated midden debris were recovered from an eroding settlement mound (Canmore ID: **124635**). Dimensions of the mound are not currently known to the author.

50. Skellor

Finds collected by Beveridge, including Norse-period rivets, as well as a platter sherd later identified as Norse by Lane (1983, p. 333). Beveridge reported midden deposits in the area of the original finds (1911, p. 234).

51. Lochmaddy

This is a mound/structure excavated at Scaalan, irregular in shape, estimated 15x9 meters, excavated by Beveridge that produced a Norse-period rivet (Beveridge, 1911). Poorly recorded, and the author does not have access to photographs or plans of the structure or artifact.

52. Garry Iochdrach

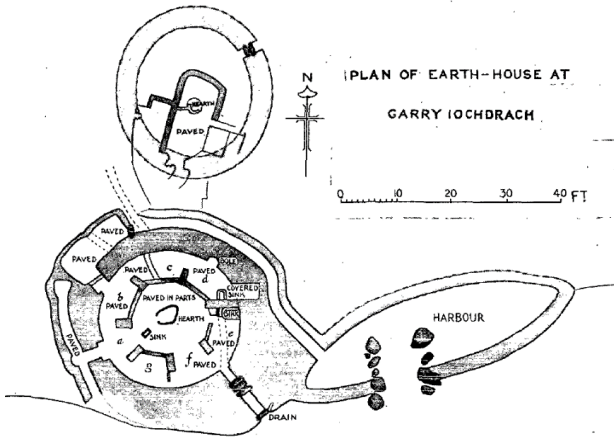


Figure 72: plan of Garry Iochdrach by Erskine Beveridge. After Graham-Campbell & Batey, 1998, p. 176.

The wheelhouse site at Garry Iochdrach, Vallay strand, North Uist, was excavated by Beveridge in the early 20th century (Beveridge, 1911; Lane 1983; Graham-Campbell & Batey, 1998). The site, according to the original excavators, dates to the 1st century AD, and is located near undated but likely modern structures.



Figure 73: Norse-period copper alloy ringed-pin found at Garry Iochdrach, on the left. Photo @ the National Museum of Scotland.

The site produced early-middle Iron Age pottery sherds among other IA finds. There are the remains of an undated stone-lined harbour site ca. 5m to the southeast.

Ca. 9m to the north is a second structure excavated by Beveridge that lay under a modern sheepfold. The site is a sub-rectangular, stone-built structure that Beveridge dubbed a “working area”, and argued was contemporary with the wheelhouse. Alan Lane has identified pottery from the site as Norse-era pottery, while Graham-Campbell & Batey have argued that it is a Norse longhouse, on the basis of Norse pottery, as well as a worked steatite block that must be Norse period, and a Viking Age (9th-10th) copper-alloy ring-pin all recovered from inside the house (1998).

53. Eilean Maliet

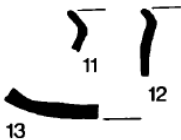


Figure 74: Norse pottery sherds recovered from Eilean Maliet, after Lane, 1983, p. 633.

Eilean Maliet is a multi-period, complicated site on an islet that consists of a series of structures, one of which may be an aisled wheelhouse. The structure was originally excavated by Beveridge (1911), and re-excavated by Armit (1998). The original finds were not sorted properly, and no stratigraphy was recorded during the excavation of Beveridge (Armit, 1998, p.

255). As reported by Beveridge, who originally excavated it, the site was 7.3 meters in diameter, with walls approximately 3.8 thick. The assemblage from Beveridge included Viking Age pottery sherds identified by Lane in an otherwise early-middle Iron Age context (Lane, 1983, pp. 313-314). The excavation by Armit in 1995 revealed a complicated site, with a wheelhouse overlaying ambiguous structures, and the presence of undated structures above and around the wheelhouse, all not reported originally by Beveridge (Armit, 1998). The second excavation did not reveal anything else about the Norse presence at the site, but the original excavation had likely destroyed much of the site without recording it (Armit, 1998).

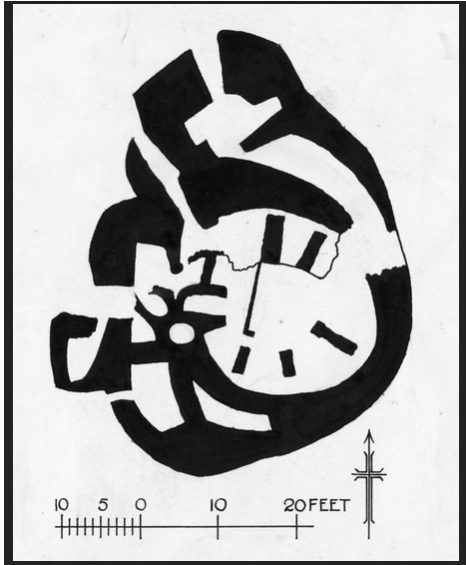


Figure 75: The complicated site at Eilean Mhàire, probably representing partially a wheelhouse. After Beveridge, 1911.

54. Bailee Risary

Baille Risary is a likely Iron Age wheelhouse site excavated by Beveridge (1911). Beveridge appears to have excavated a “green mound” to reveal a ca. 10mx3m long structure that was



Figure 76: Baille Risary as it stood in the mid-20th century. @canmore.

excavated, which may have been an “annex” of a wheelhouse, but this is not clear from the descriptions of Beveridge. The site is overlain with later structures, including what appears to be early modern shielings (Canmore ID: **10078**). The record is poor, the finds were not sorted, and no stratigraphy was recorded. While not considered a wheelhouse proper by Armit (1998), MacKenzie has argued that it is a wheelhouse (2005, p. 14).

The finds were not dated, but upon re-evaluation by (MacKie, 2007), the assemblage includes soapstone spindle whorls and Norse period iron rivets, the exact number or nature of the artefacts is not known to the author.

55. Hougharry

Hougharry is an eroding midden site, without structural remains found, likely multi-period, that produced one diagnostic sherd of platter pottery (Lane, 1983, p. 320). The site was surveyed in the 1970s, and contained “five levels of flooring”, but no association between the structures and the Norse sherd could be established. As of 2012, there is some 400m in length of midden erosion spread at the site recorded (Canmore ID: **9762**).

56. Baleshare



Figure 77: Eroding settlement mound and midden at Baleshare. @canmore.co.uk.

Archaeological activity at Baleshare is characterized by a multi-period settlement mound, which includes Norse pottery, and stray finds of Norse brooches and ringed-pins (Canmore ID: **10009**); Kevin Murphy pers. Comm. 2018). Site excavation revealed an extensive Iron Age settlement wheelhouse site. It does not appear that the Norse layers of the site were excavated. No more information is known about the Norse

period finds.

57. Port Nan Long

An Iron Age settlement site was uncovered, in which the north end of it seemed to be overlain by a Norse settlement, but was not excavated further because it was not in danger of being disturbed by planned construction work (MacDonald pers. comm 2018). Norse nails and rivets were recovered, but the site was not excavated outside of a trial trench.

58. Orosay Gold Hoard

This was a hoard of gold ingots and rings found on the south-eastern side of the island of Orosay by shepherds digging (Graham-Campbell, 1995). The exact number of objects is unknown, but in the NMAS are 7 gold rings, 1 plain and 6 plaited (Graham-Campbell, 1995). This gold hoard was discovered by two shepherds sometime between 1865 and 1870 (Canmore ID: **10308**). While the hoard and its findspot are documented, Andersen makes references to gold ingots and an indeterminate number of rings that do not appear to have made it to the NMAS along with the 7 rings, 1 ring portion, and 1 gold ingot documented in the museum (Anderson, 1883, p. 107). The discovery, subsequent sale by the discoverers, and recovery by the National Museum of Scotland have a complicated history detailed by Graham-Campbell, 1995.

Stray finds

59. Heisker



This is a polyhedral-headed copper alloy ringed pin found in the churchyard at Cladh Na Bleide, dated to the 11-13th century AD (Maldonado, 2021, p. 204). This site has been regarded as a burial site by Graham-Campbell & Batey (1998, p. 172) and as a probable burial site by Harrison (2008, p. 489); however, since no other artifacts, or human remains mentioned, this could equally likely come from a settlement or other context, and is classified as a stray find in this thesis.

Figure 78: copper-alloy ringed-pin from Heisker. Photo @ the National Museum of Scotland.

6.5 Benbecula

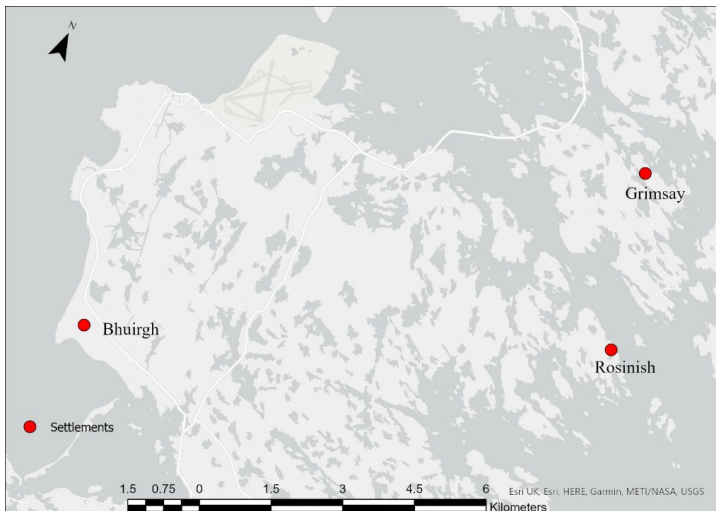


Figure 79: Viking and Late Norse period sites on Benbecula, including Grimsay.

There are 3 sites from Benbecula. All 3 are settlement sites.

60. Teampull Bhuirgh

A sherd of Norse-period pottery was discovered due to erosion from a farm/settlement mound at Bhuirgh (Borve), from a settlement/farm mound underneath the ruins of a model chapel. Late Iron Age finds are also noted in its Canmore entry (Canmore ID: **9963**). The mound is substantial, ca. 40m in diameter.

61. Rosinish



Figure 80:
Norse-period
rim sherd
from Rosinish,
Benbecula.
After Lane,
1983, p. 633,
fig. 27.

A multi-period settlement mound was excavated at Rosinish, and Norse-period sherds were uncovered. They include: 3 platter sherds, 8 probable platter sherds, 5 platter rims, 2 possible sherds, 1 base sherd, 1 rim sherd (*fig. 80*), and 1 body sherd (Lane, 1983, p. 559-560).

62. Grimsay

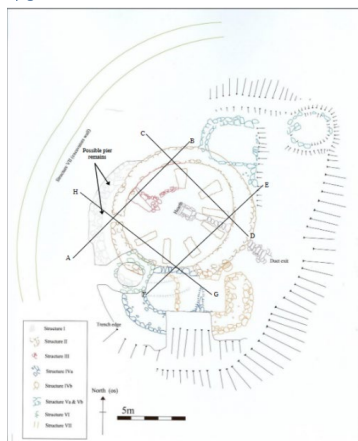


Figure 81: Grimsay wheelhouse plan, after McKenzie, 2005, p. 5)

The wheelhouse at Badh Nam Feadhag on Grimsay is an Atlantic wheelhouse of likely Middle Iron Age date, excavated by a retiree who was not trained as an archaeologist, from 1993-1997 (McKenzie, 2005, p. 4). The finds of the wheelhouse were poorly recorded, but A.L MacKenzie sorted and analysed the artefacts, as well as put the wheelhouse in its context for his PhD thesis (2005). McKenzie shows that the assemblage contains artifacts of Norse origin: Norse pottery, soapstone spindle whorls (dated 10th-12th century on the basis of typology by MacKenzie), and a whetstone most comparable in form to those found at Scandinavian York (McKenzie, 2005, p.

113).

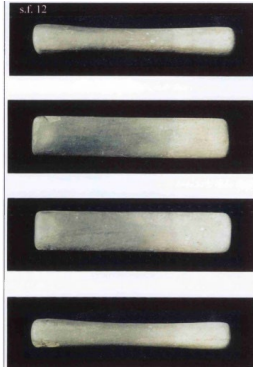


Figure 82: Norse-period whetstone among the assemblage at Grimsay. After McKenzie, 2005, p. 113.

The wheelhouse site contains a sub-rectangular structure built on the northwest side, incorporating its south-eastern wall as part of the wheelhouse structure (labelled structure III by McKenzie).

Neither the main structure of the wheelhouse nor the sub-rectangular structure have been accurately dated due to the unprofessionalism of the excavation, but it was determined that Structure III was later than the rest of the structure (McKenzie, 2005). The assemblage was not sorted, and finds were often not allocated to specific structures of the site. It is unknown if these

artifacts came from the wheelhouse structure, the sub-rectangular structure or elsewhere, but they are suspected to have come from the structure III, which is the sub-rectangular structure (McKenzie,

2005, p. 113). The author agrees and believes that the Norse assemblage likely came from structure III and not the actual wheelhouse. The author has also noted that the structure is similar to the sub-rectangular, later structures built along the wheelhouse structures at Allasdale (*site 90*) and Alt Christeal (*site 92*).

6.6 South Uist



Figure 83: Viking and Late Norse period sites on South Uist.

There are 28 sites on South Uist that can be dated to the Norse period. 27 are settlement sites, and 1 is a burial/stray find site.

63. Sligachean/Kildonan machair brooch fragment



Figure 84: the oval brooch fragment from the Sligachean/Kildonan machair, after Graham-Campbell, 1977, p. 213.

The 1 burial/stray find represents a surface collection of a tortoise-shell brooch fragment. This artifact is likely from a disturbed burial site, or potentially a settlement, but it is unknown whether the site is in the area or was redeposited due to ploughing or manuring (Graham-Campbell, 1977, p. 213). The brooch appears to be type Rygh 652 or 654, with general analogies to finds from Norway, dated to the 9th-10th centuries AD (Graham-Campbell, 1977, p. 213).

64. Bornais 1

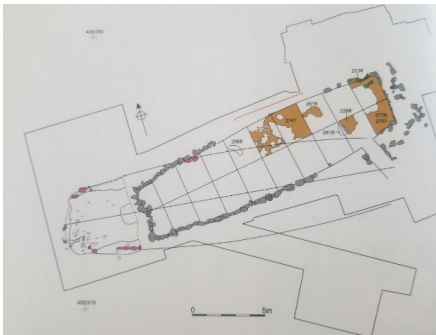


Figure 85: Plan of the Bornais houses from Sharples, 2019.

Bornais mound 1

Bornais mound 1 is a substantial partially excavated mound. Its earliest dates to the 5th to the 6th centuries AD in the Iron Age, but the focus of settlement shifted to mound 2 in the 7th and 8th centuries (Sharples, 2005, p. 8).

The Norse period of settlement activity at mound I is not as well understood, with investigations comprised of partial excavation, artefact recovery, and geophysical survey. Artefact recovery and radiocarbon dating have placed Norse settlement to earliest activity at Bornais post-Iron Age; Norse settlement on mound I may be contemporary with the raiding or so-called Viking period of the 9th century (Sharples, 2019, p. 594).

The geophysical survey revealed a complex of four longhouses (Sharples, 2019, p. 594). These houses have not been excavated and are not dated. The size of the mound and the potential radial orientation of its longhouses, in combination with the importance of Bornais

in the Hebrides, may suggest that the mound was the focus of a Thing Assembly site (Sharples, 2019, pp. 599-600), but without further excavation, this interpretation is speculative.

Bornais Mound 2

The occupation of Mound 2 began in the 7th and 8th centuries AD (Sharples, 2020, p. 8). Mound 2A appears to have had no Iron Age sequence (Sharples, 2019, p. 29). In contrast, mound 2 and 2A are both occupied roughly the same amount of time throughout the Norse period (Sharples, 2020, p. 8), whereas Norse activity at mound 3 ends almost a century after Norse activity ends on mounds 2 and 2A (Sharples, 2020, p. 8).

Sharples argues for a long duration of settlement at Bornais from at least the middle Iron Age to the 15th century, with a 9th-century hiatus in between, though Norse settlement in the 9th century is possible (Sharples, 2020, P. 466). The overall chronology of Norse settlement at Bornais can be stated with certainty to begin in the early 10th century (2020, p. 461), and the last structures on mounds 2 and 2a were abandoned by the 14th century and mound 3 by the 15th (Sharples 2020, p. 466).

Mound 2 revealed a series of three high-status longhouses (Sharples 2019: 9). There are a series of three structures on mound divided into 8 chronological units (Sharples 2019: 24).

The Late Iron Age period & House 1

Evidence of Late Iron Age activity at Mound 2 is limited, but has been dated due to a combination of artefact typology (pottery, hipped pins and composite combs) as well as radiocarbon dating (Sharples, 2019, p. 57). Structural remains were slight, consisting of two rows of cobbles (Sharples, 2019, p. 43).

House 1

There is a considerable gap between the Late Iron Age and the earliest dateable traces of Norse activity of between 15-230 years, with little activity in the 9th century AD, possibly representing a period before widespread Norse colonisation of the Hebrides (Sharples, 2019, p. 94). The house was occupied with certainty by the early 10th century and abandoned sometime in the mid-11th century where it was replaced by House 2 (Sharples, 2019, p. 94).

The foundation of House I involved a substantial amount of timber, present in the stratigraphy of Mound 2 as a series of post holes (Sharples, 2019, p. 60). The structure was an over 23m long bow-shaped hall and due to the size of the structure, likely an elite residence (Sharples, 2019, p. 95). The shape of the structure was completely different than LIA architecture that preceded it on the isles, characterized by the Atlantic roundhouse. Besides radiocarbon dates, other indicators of activity dated to the Norse period include large soapstone vessel fragments (Sharples, 2019, p. 77), and ceramic fragments similar to later Norse vessels, and a large assemblage of iron slag typically associated with Norse sites in Scotland (Sharples, 2019, p. 83). The faunal assemblage suggests the herring industry started in the early Viking Age at Bornais, and the overall assemblage marks the early Norse phase as different economically than its predecessor (Sharples, 2019, p. 96). However, the artefact assemblage overall does not add to the interpretation that House I was an elite site, with the possible exception of a lead cross (Sharples, 2019, p. 95).

House 2

House 2 is dated to the Middle Norse period (11th-12th century AD), and was built from partially rebuilding House 1 (Sharples 2019, p. 137). Like House I, House 2 was a bow-walled rectangular structure, but not as long, approx. 19m in length, and unlike House I, had stone-based walls, including large building stones larger than subsequent structures (Sharples, 2019, p. 145). The structure was built with sophisticated masonry, likely cannibalized from other, earlier structures, Norse or pre-Norse (Sharples, 2019, pp. 233-235). The artefact assemblage include antler combs suggestive of an antler comb industry (Sharples, 2019, p. 232). The house was short-lived, contemporary, and similar to House 500 at Cille Pheadair (Sharples, 2019, p. 274). House 2 was abandoned and re-occupied in the 12th century in a transition period that is difficult to interpret where smaller structures were built (Sharples, 2019, p. 271). Sharples interprets this sequence as being comparable to Phase VI at Cille Pheadair, where a longhouse was abandoned and replaced by smaller structures around the 12th century (Sharples, 2019, p. 274). This may be due to the raids of Magnus Barelegs in the early 12th century (Sharples, 2019, p. 538).

House 3

After a period of confusion and instability, House 3 represents settlement in a structure that is comparable in size, structure and function to Houses 1 and 2 (Sharples, 2019, p. 383). The artefact assemblage contains evidence of bone and antler working, similar to previous phases, as well as martial equipment such as a crossbow bolt (Sharples, 2019, pp. 366-368). This suggests that the site retained its elite status in the Later Norse period, with House 3 dates from the 12th to 13th or very early 14th centuries (Sharples, 2019, p. 303). The structure itself was rebuilt from cannibalizing the east end of House 2, and the orientation of the structure was changed from east-west to north-south, which also occurred at Cille Pheadair (Sharples, 2019, p. 384). A continuation in architectural features, however, is the presence of foundation pits which appears to be a pre-Norse survival (Sharples, 2019, p. 384).

Mound 2A

Activity at Mound 2A begins contemporary with House 1 (Sharples, 2019, p. 134). Mound 2A however is different to House 1 in that it is a cultivation level with less substantial structures, and may represent production such as crop-processing (Sharples, 2019, p. 136). Activity on Mound 2A is contemporaneous with House 3 on Mound 2 and lasts until the 13th century AD (Sharples, 2019, p. 383). An ancillary building interpreted as a comb-makers structure is also present in this period (Sharples, 2019, p. 538).

Bornais Mound 3

Bornais mound 3 was partially excavated to reveal the entirety of a Norse longhouse along with two structures interpreted by the excavators as a kiln and barn. The house appears to date to the 11th century, with 1.7m thick walls, and is comparable to the structure built at Cille Pheadair (Sharples, 2005, p. 182). The house is much smaller and shorter-lived than the structures on mounds 1, 2, and 2A. The house may represent a residence of lower-status individuals at the Bornais complex (Sharples, 2005, p. 179).

Animal bone assemblage

Pig is an important part of the early Norse diet, but loses importance, a trend seen at the Udal. The importance of cattle declines and the importance of sheep rises throughout the history of

the site (Sharples, 2019, p. 589). Foster argues that the soils of South Uist are more suitable for dairy farming than beef farming and therefore, beef cattle cannot be supported as well as in other parts of the region, such as Lewis (Foster, 2018).

65. Cille Pheadair

Cille Pheadair (also spelled *Kilpheder*) is located on the western coast of South Uist on the machair plain. A Norse-period site was excavated by Mike Parker Pearson between 1996 and 1998. The Norse-period settlement was occupied between the early 10th and mid-13th centuries AD (Parker Pearson, 2018, p. 6), and does not appear to have a predecessor. No Late Iron Age settlements have been discovered in the area, though a Pictish square burial cairn was discovered and excavated circa 50m south of the Norse farmstead (Parker Pearson 2018: 21).

The farmstead of Cille Pheadair can be separated into nine phases of structures. Phase I represents undated plough scars, and a possible post-built, ephemeral structure (Parker Pearson, 2018, pp. 43-44), that is composed of a sandbank enclosure with pits dug inside of it. The pits were backfilled quickly, and some artefacts such as ceramics, animal bone and a lump of clay were found in the pits, leading to a potential interpretation that these pits represent foundation deposits (Parker Pearson, 2018, p. 63). A similar series of pits were also constructed at Bornais, and this appears to be a local tradition that dates back to at least the Iron Age (Sharples, 2019, p. 96). Sharples has argued that the first phase likely represents a structure, disagreeing with the interpretation of Phase I by Parker Pearson (Sharples, 2019, p. 18).

Phase II represents an occupation layer where worked antler as well as ceramics, bone, and coprolites have been determined, and the remains of two large ceramic vessels and a possible bone point deposit in a post-hole have led to the interpretation that this was the remains of a feasting ritual, possibly to accompany the construction of the house (Parker Pearson, 2018, p. 74). and this layer has been dated to roughly 945-1020 AD.

Phase III represents the first identifiable stone structure at Cille Pheadair, a longhouse, which appears to have been constructed from 1030-1095 AD. The longhouse, called house 700, featured one wall heavily damaged by the construction of a subsequent house on the site, house 500 (Parker Pearson, 2018, p. 75). The house was oriented north-south and was unusual

for Hebridean house orientation (Sharples, 2020). Midden build-up that contained artefacts and ecofacts such as ceramic and animal bone occurred outside its east-facing door (Parker Pearson, 2018, p. 96). Two artefacts, a 10th-century coin and a comb, pre-date the longhouse and are likely heirlooms (Parker Pearson, 2018, p. 97).

Phase IV represents the period from approximately 1060-1100 and is characterized by a second stone longhouse, called house 500, that partially demolished the previous house, house 700 (Parker Pearson, 2018, p. 98). House 500 was roughly 12m in length and 5m wide, with a 3x3 compartment on its north end, called structure 353, which possessed a smaller hearth. The house was the largest built at Cille Pheadair and cooking and crafting could be observed at different parts of the house.

Phase V was not a different construction, but a modification of house 500, occupied from roughly 1070-1125 AD (Parker Pearson, 2018, p. 143). A wall was built in the northern end of the main hall, shortening the structure. The house was abandoned in the early 12th century and replaced with two sheds (Parker Pearson, 2018, p. 166). Before abandonment, human remains were deposited in the midden from two individuals, a fragment of a human skull, and a pelvis fragment. In combination with abandonment of the farmstead at the end of this phase, Parker Pearson has speculated that there had been violence at the site in this period, coinciding perhaps with the raids of Magnus Barelegs (Parker Pearson, 2018, p. 165).

Phase VI represents two sheds were built on top of house 500, with sunken floors and roughly dated to 1100-1155 AD. One was entirely demolished by a third shed built on top. Parker Pearson has interpreted these structures as evidence that the farmstead had been abandoned and only used sporadically in this period (2018, p. 180). Their exact usage was not able to be determined, but there were some finds of iron and whalebone tools (Parker Pearson, 2018, p. 180).

Phase VII represents a new stone-built longhouse constructed at the site sometime between 1105-1160, called house 312, which replaced the sheds. The house was oriented east-west, unlike the original two longhouses (Parker Pearson, 2018, p. 185), and a smaller structure, interpreted as a contemporary outhouse. This represents a short phase of occupation, no more than one decade (Parker Pearson, 2018, p. 211).

Phase VIII was the final longhouse constructed at the farmstead, and comprised house 007, occupied from around 1150-1250 AD. This house was oriented north-south and constructed partially from the eastern half of house 312 (Parker Pearson, 2018, p. 212).

The final phase, phase IX, consisted of two huts constructed inside house 007 between 1160-1245 (Parker Pearson, 2018, p. 234), and occupied until site abandonment after 1245 AD. Interestingly, a post-Norse medieval sherd was found in the windblown sand, interpreted as the cultural end of Norse occupation (Parker Pearson, 2018, p. 250).

Cille Pheadair occupies a “less than ideal” part of the South Uist landscape, where a sea loch would have in this period separated the settlement site from the blacklands (Parker Pearson, 2018, p. 588). The area appears landlocked, but the rocky coast may feature a man-made cut that acted as a boat naust (Parker Pearson, 2018, p. 588). Its location on the machair and the faunal remains from its settlement phases (3, 4, 5, 7, and 8) suggests that the occupants practised a mixed farming economy. Cille Pheadair represents an important site for analysis of Hebridean settlement, particularly a short-lived, lower-status site compared to Bornais on South Uist.

66. Geirinis wheelhouse

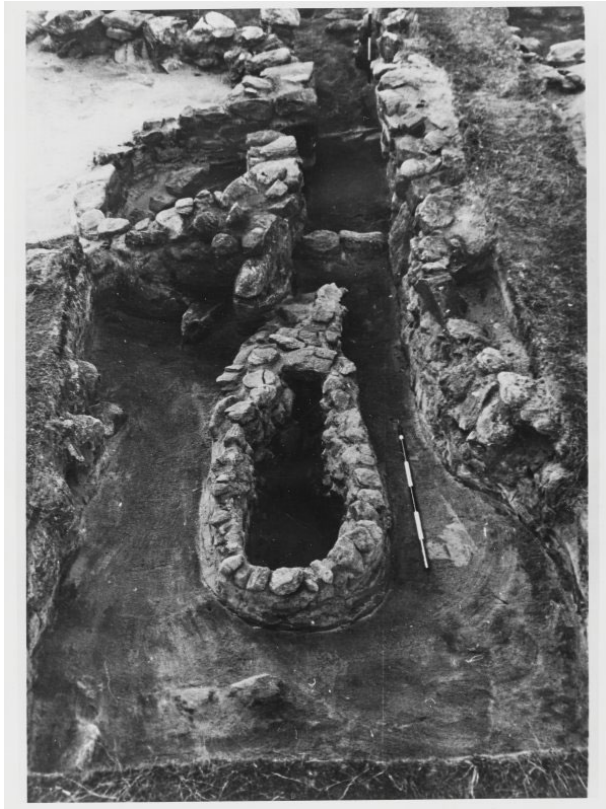


Figure 86: structure at Geirisnis wheelhouse. photo @canmore.co.uk.

The wheelhouse was excavated in the 1950s ahead of the construction of the rocket range of the Royal Airforce. The wheelhouse seems to date in origin to the 1st century AD, but was occupied into the 7-8th centuries (Young & Richardson, 1962). After the 7th-8th

centuries, there was subsequent occupation, including a piece of a Norse soapstone lamp fragment, along with knives, whetstones, whalebone tools, and nondiagnostic pottery sherds (Richardson & Young, 1962).

This was in association with later, undated structures that were built on top of the wheelhouse after a period of abandonment, as shown by a sterile layer of windblown sand (Richardson & Young, 1962). These structures have been referred to as “enigmatic” by Parker Pearson, and implies they may be Norse in origin (Parker Pearson, 2018, p. 14). They appear to have been robbed in later periods though some straight courses of walls can be observed, and cannot be interpreted further. The site was also occupied in the Late Medieval and Early Modern periods, and may explain why these possible Norse structures appear fragmented.

67. Drimore

Drimore is an excavated longhouse site. The house at Drimore is poorly understood due to

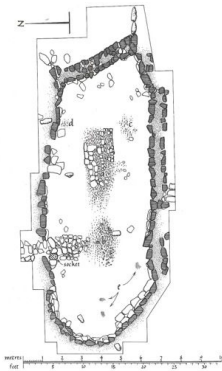


Figure 87: Plan of the longhouse by Maclaren, 1974.

excavation being abandoned due to flooding (Maclaren, 1974). The finds of the house, including steatite, suggest a late 9th-11th century span of dates (Maclaren, 1974). Unlike the other excavated sites, there appears to have been no diagnostic Norse pottery identified at the site (Lane, 1983, p. 296).

68. South Bornais

South Bornais is a settlement mound, ca. 15m in diameter, with a depth of deposits of ca. 70cm. The site produced Viking age platter sherds along with undated finds of shell and bone (Parker Pearson, 2012, p. 42).

69. Ormacleit

Ormacleit is a settlement mound ca. 30m, that produced a Viking age rim sherd, along with undated shell and bones (Parker Pearson, 2012, p. 42).

70. Staoniebrig I

The site at Staoniebrig is a settlement mound ca. 25m in diameter that produced Viking period sherds, along with undated finds of shell. The site was in addition to being surveyed, trench tested by John Raven (Parker Pearson, 2012, p. 44-45).

71. Frobost I

This is a settlement mound, 20m in diameter, with finds of a Viking-period ceramic sherd, along with a Viking-period bone pin, and undated shell and bone (Parker Pearson, 2012, p. 47).

72. Frobost II

Frobost II is a settlement mound, ca. 40m in diameter, with a 3m depth of deposits. This site was test trenched, with two “shallow” test trenches, and a smaller test pit (Parker Pearson, 2012, p. 60). Viking-period sherds were found in trench 2, which dug as a 1m square, 40cm deep (Parker Pearson 2012, p. 69).

73. Aisgernis

Aisgernis is a ca. 100m x 70m settlement mound, with deposits ca. 1m deep (Parker Pearson, 2012, p. 47). Norse ceramic sherds were recovered by survey. This site was trial trenched, and revealed a Late Medieval or early layer due to a find of a rotary quern stone. The mound was further excavated by John Raven with a 1m trench that revealed the foot of a turf-walled structure, which produced a 12th-14th century copper alloy pin at the base, and geophysical survey revealed a rectangular building ca. 1m deeper than the excavated layer (Parker Pearson, 2012, p. 60).

74. Dalabrog

Dalabrog is a settlement mound ca. 6m in diameter that produced a Viking-period sherd, with a depth of deposits ca. 1m, and also produced undated finds of shell and bone. A further, earlier find is a bronze ring-headed pin found that was discovered in the first half of the 20th century (Parker Pearson, 2012, p. 49).

75. Dalabrog II

This is a settlement mound ca. 30m in diameter, with a deposit depth of ca. 1.5m, that produced sherds of Viking Age platter ware (Parker Pearson, 2012, p. 66).

76. Smercleit

Smercleit is a settlement mound, ca. 50m in diameter, with a depth of deposits up to 3m (Parker Pearson, 2012, p. 61). A Norse-period bone/antler comb was discovered by a local (Parker Pearson, 2012, p. 64). The site was trial trenched and was surveyed by geophysical survey by John Raven. 5 test trenches were put into the mound, and the excavations showed a “complex series of structures” (Parker Pearson, 2012, p. 64). The dates of the mound range from the Middle Iron Age to the modern period, including a Norse phase.

77. Smercleit II

Smercleit II is a Norse settlement mound ca. 20m in diameter. The site was trial trenched by McDonald & Ryder in 2018 (unpublished). A 1x2 trench was established, and the excavators revealed a drystone-built structure, likely a foundation. No dateable artifacts were recovered, but the rapidly-eroding midden adjacent to the mound produced Norse pottery in the past.

78. Cille Donnain I

Cille Donnain is a settlement mound with unknown dimensions and depths of deposits, that produced a sherd of Viking Age grass-tempered platter, along with an undated piece of iron, and undated bone and shell (Parker Pearson, 2012, p. 52).

79. Cille Donnain II

This is a settlement mound with unknown dimensions and an unknown depth of deposits. This mound produced an IA rim pottery, and possesses a 10m long N-S line of stones that may be part of a longhouse (Parker Pearson, 2012, p. 52).

80. Druemsdal

Druemsdal is a settlement mound ca. 60m in diameter with a deposit depth of 2m, that produced multiple Viking Age sherds, including a rim sherd, and platter ware sherds, along with undated finds of shell and bone (Parker Pearson, 2012, p. 54).

81. Gerraidhfleugh

Gerraidhfleugh is a settlement mound ca. 40m in diameter, with depths of deposits up to 2m high. Viking pottery was found during excavations, along with undated shell and bone (Parker Pearson, 2012, p. 56).

82. Machair Mheananach 1

This is a settlement mound, ca. 40m in diameter with depth of deposits ca. 1.5m deep, that produced a Norse platter ware sherd. Raven conducted resistivity survey at the mound, and identified three anomalies which were trial trenched, but only one trench revealed substantial midden material, including slag, but could not be dated (Parker Pearson, 2012, p. 57, after Raven, 2005, p. 482).

83. Machair Mheananach 2

This is a settlement mound, ca. 20m in diameter with a depth of deposits of 50cm, that produced a Viking Age rim sherd, along with other VA sherds (Parker Pearson, 2012, p. 57). Other undated finds include stones, slag, a flat-topped nail/rivet, shell, and bone.

84. Machair Mheananach 3

This is a settlement mound ca. 15m in diameter, with a deposit depth of 50cm, that produced grass-impressed sherds dated to the Viking Age, along with undated finds of shell and bone (Parker Pearson, 2012, p. 59).

85. Machair Mheananach 4

This is a settlement mound ca. 30m in diameter with a depth of deposits of ca. 5.50m, that produced a Viking Age sherd along with several MIA sherds, and undated finds of shell and bone (Parker Pearson, 2012, p. 59).

86. Iochdrach

This site is a settlement mound ca. 35m in diameter that produced grass-impressed platter sherds dated to the Viking Age, along with undated finds of shell and bone (Parker Pearson, 2012, p. 63).

87. Baghasdal

This is a settlement mound ca. 50m in diameter with a depth of deposits of 1m, that produced Viking-period grass-impressed sherds, along with LIA plain ware sherds, undated finds of shell and bone, a 17th century coin, and porcelain. John Raven conducted geophysical survey of the mound and put in 8 trial trenches, which exposed multiple midden layers and some stone structures, but nothing was dated (Parker Pearson, 2012, p. 64, after Raven, 2005, p. 479).

6.7 Barra

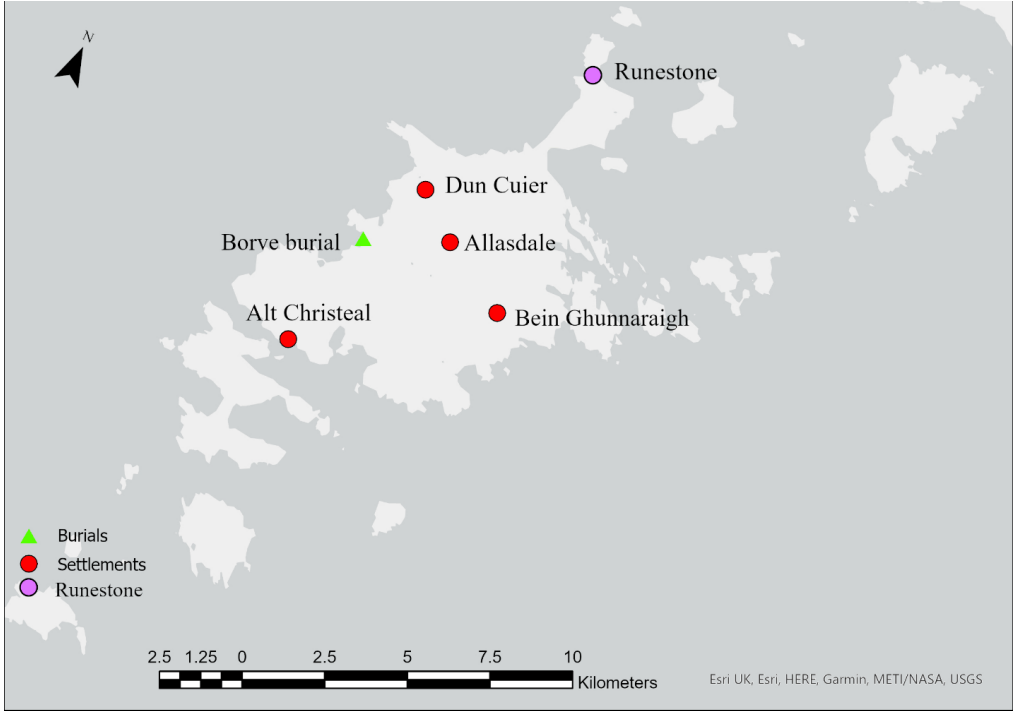


Figure 88: Viking and Late Norse period sites on Barra.

There are a total of 5 sites on Barra. The sites include 3 settlement sites, 1 burial, and 1 runestone.

88. Borve burial

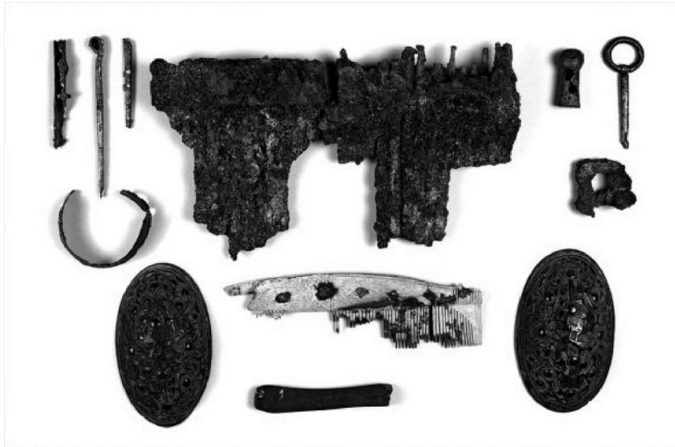


Figure 89: some of the finds from the burial at Borve, Barra. Photo @ the British National Museum.

This site is a burial site, excavated in 1862 by Commander Edye, and represents a high-status



Figure 90: the recumbent standing-stone as of 2018 that is likely the standing-stone that capped the original burial mound. Photo @the author.

Viking-period burial gendered as a woman (Grieg et al., 1940, pp. 67-70; MacPherson, 1878; McLeod, 2015a). This site was a sandy mound capped with a ca. 7m tall standing stone. The burial contained human remains, sexed as female, copper alloy oval brooches, a ringed-pin fragment, an iron weaving sword, a copper alloy terminal for a drinking horn, heckles, shears, an iron knife, a

bronze rod, a shell, a whetstone/touchstone, an antler composite comb, an iron belt buckle, a copper alloy needle case, among other finds. The objects and human remains were deposited in the British National Museum.

89. Dun Cuier

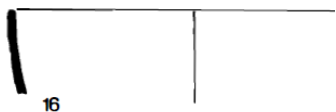


Figure 91: body and rim sherd from a Norse-period vessel at Dun Cuier, after Lane, 1983, p. 633, fig.27.

Dun Cuier is a broch site. The site was excavated and published by Allison Young in 1956. The pottery assemblage is important for the identification of Iron Age pottery, producing what Lane has termed “Dun Cuier ware” (Lane, 1983), and the assemblage has also produced a sherd of Norse pottery and the site had Norse-period occupation, but was not well recorded (Lane 1983, p. 312).

90. Allasdale Wheelhouse

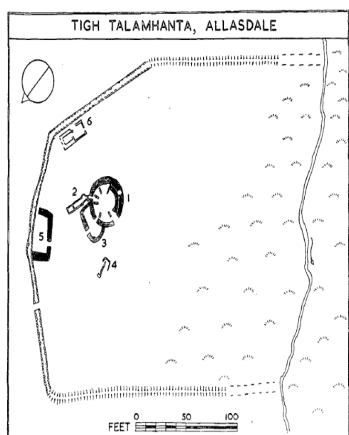


Fig. 1. No. 1, Parahouse; No. 2, Souterrain; No. 3, Kiln house; No. 4, Outside working place; No. 5, Standing; No. 6, Later structure.

Figure 92: plan of Tigh Talamhanta, after Young 1953.

The site at Tigh Talamhanta represents an Atlantic wheelhouse site, ca. 2km east into the valley of Allasdale, on Barra. It was excavated by Sir Lindsay Scott in 1950, and the site report was published by Allison Young (Young, 1955). The site also contains in addition to the wheelhouse, a souterrain, and an Early Modern farm complex (no.5&6 on the plan of Young,

1955) ca. 10m from the Iron Age complex. The site occupies a natural hillock at the foothills of the mountains of the interior of Barra, in a swampy area. Lane has said that the site report does not provide convincing stratigraphy and is not reliably dated (Lane, 1982, p. 303).

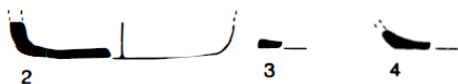


Figure 93: three Norse-period sherds from Lane, 1983, p. 633, fig. 27.

Lane has argued that some pottery sherds are Norse in origin (Lane, 1982, p. 303). These sherds came from the so-called “outside working place” (fig. 92). Lane has also argued that structure 3, which is later than the wheelhouse, is also likely a Norse structure (Lane 1982, p. 303). Foster has

noted that the intrusive sub-rectangular structure interpreted as a Norse shieling site is similar to the sub-rectangular structure located on the northeast side of the building at Alt Christeal (Foster, 1996).

91. Bheinn Gunnaraigh

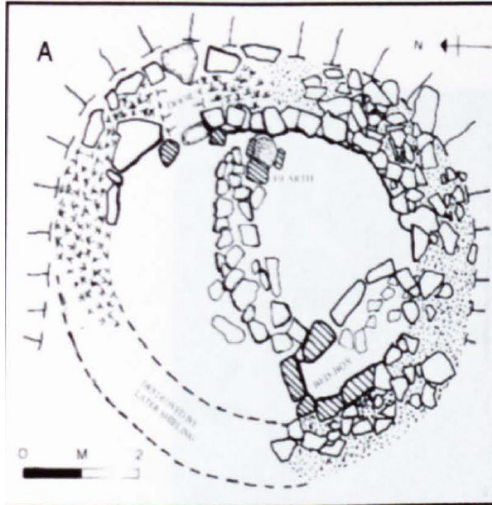


Figure 94: plan of Norse-period structure at Bheinn Gunnaraigh, after Brannigan and Foster, 2000.

This is a drystone built structure excavated by Brannigan & Foster (2000) (fig.94). The excavators reported the structure as oval-shaped, with a rectangular annexe to the south of the structure. The entire structure is 4.5x3.8 meters. The excavation uncovered steatite spindle whorls and has been

interpreted by the excavators as a Norse shieling. The structure at Gunnaraigh is likely Norse in origin, as there is no indication that it re-used a pre-existing structure. It also does not appear to have a post-Norse occupation phase. The shape of the structure, though sub-rectangular, does not resemble any other Norse-period structures discovered so far in the area of study.

92. Alt Christeal

Alt Christeal is a wheelhouse structure located on a terrace overlooking the Sound of Vatersay on the southern end of Barra. It was excavated by Foster in 1996-1997, and its earliest foundation dates to the Middle Iron Age, somewhat late for the construction of a wheelhouse (Foster, 1996).

A sub-rectangular structure some 5x2m was constructed on the north-western side of the wheelhouse (Foster, 1996). The wall of the wheelhouse is incorporated into the wall of the

structure, and this structure is a “later addition”. The structure produced finds of soapstone spindle whorls, dated to the Norse period, and has been interpreted as the site of a Norse shieling structure by Foster. This is one of two sites dated to the Norse period and interpreted as shieling sites on Barra by researchers prior to this thesis.

93. Kilbar runestone



This is a carved stone found at Kilbar, Barra. The material of the stone is garnet metapelite. On one side, Celtic artwork had been carved, on the other side, Younger Futhark runes were carved. The runic inscription is dated to the 10th-11th centuries AD (Fisher, 2002). The runic inscription reads: “This cross was raised in memory of Thorgerth, daughter of Steinar” (Fischer, 2002).

Figure 95: The Kilbar runestone, in the modern church at Kilbar, Barra. Photo @the author.

6.8 St Kilda

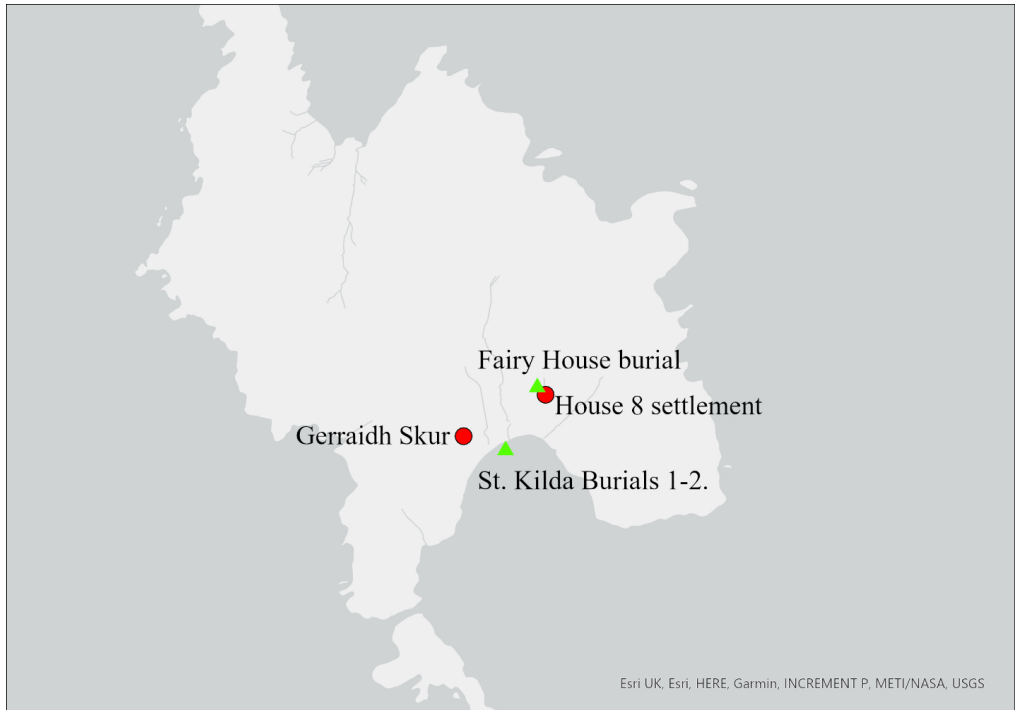


Figure 96: Viking and Late Norse period sites on St Kilda

There are 5 sites from St. Kilda, composed of 3 burial sites, and 2 settlement sites.

Burials

94. St Kilda Burial I

This is a Viking Age burial site from Village Bay, after a mound was removed. The artifacts included a sword, spear, whetstone, and iron fragments (Harrison, 2008, p. 485). The artifacts have been lost, and no photographs or drawings of them are known.



95. *St Kilda Burial II*

A pair of copper alloy tortoise-shell brooches were found in the Village Bay of St. Kilda, and deposited with the National Museum of Denmark (Harrison 2008, p. 484). No further information is known about them, and one brooch has since been lost.

Figure 97: copper alloy oval brooch from St. Kilda. Photo @canmore.co.uk.

96. *Fairy house burial (Burial 3)*

A spearhead was discovered in an assemblage from the “fairy house” souterrain, in Village Bay, Hirta (Canmore ID: **9697**). The spearhead appears to be Vike type A, identified from a photo of the assemblage (Kearton, 1897, p. 13).

Settlements

97. *Gerraidh Skur*

This site was excavated, and produced Norse pottery and midden material, and radiocarbon dates that suggest occupation between the 10th-13th centuries (Gannon & Geddes, 2015). Norse midden material, including soapstone fragments, was found ca. 25m directly below this terrace around a down-slope running stream is assumed to have been due to erosion from this site.

98. *House 8 – Village Bay*

“House 8”, one of the modern houses of Village Bay, produced Norse settlement material, including Norse pottery and a soapstone cup (Canmore ID: 9686). This material was found under a 19th excavated blackhouse.

6.9 Skye

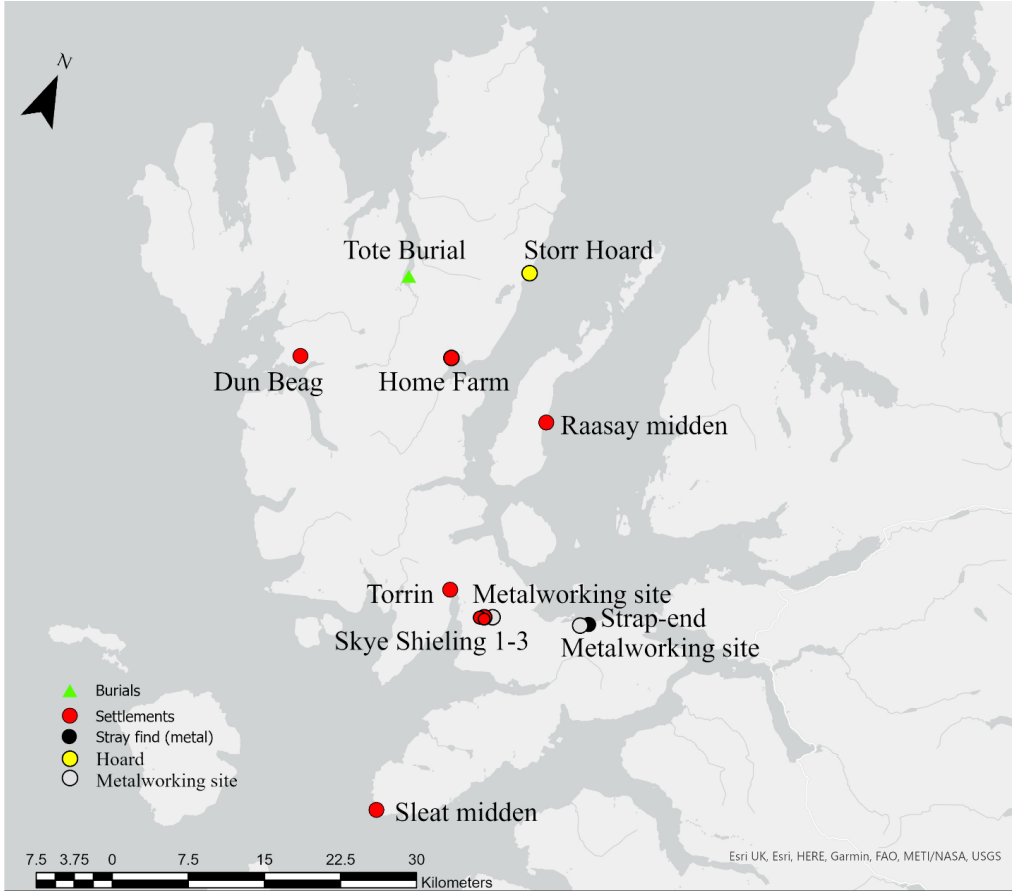


Figure 98: Viking and Late Norse period sites on Skye & Raasay.

There are 14 sites on Skye. 1 is a burial, 2 metalworking, 8 settlements, 1 hoard, 1 stray find, and 1 other.

Burials

99. Tote cairn

This is a burial site, which is a Viking Age re-use of a Bronze Age chambered cairn, where a Viking Age cremation burial was placed in the upper levels of the original cairn. This site was excavated and published by Lethbridge (1920). The artifacts include an axe (Petersen type E), a ringed-pin, a bone bead, a whetstone, a shield boss (both wood and iron conserved) and a single iron rivet.

Settlement sites

100. Coille Gaireallach

This site is an oval structure, 11 x 7.5m with walls 1.1m thick. Two test pits were put into the structure, and slag was found, which was radiocarbon dated to 760-890 (Wildgoose, 2016, p. 16). The site furthermore had a cobbled floor. A pit inside the structure was also excavated that contained slag and a hearth base, this was radiocarbon dated to 891-1012 AD (Wildgoose, 2016, p. 15-16). Other undated finds include pumice, burnt bone, and pieces of iron. This site was interpreted as a smithy by the excavators. There may be two separate occupations, one spanning the 8th-9th century, and the other the 9th-11th centuries, but this is unclear. The date of construction for the oval structure is unknown, but it may be contemporary with the earliest dates of the dated slag.

101. Ashaig ironworking site

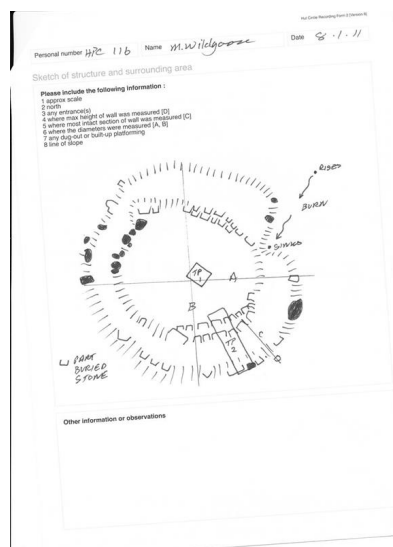
This is a shell-midden spanning the Mesolithic to modern periods that underwent keyhole excavation, with one layer slag and C14 dating to the 13th century (Wickham-Jones & Hardy, 2009), and has been interpreted as an ironworking site (HER: **MHG35894**). No structural

remains were recorded, or other dateable artefacts were in the vicinity. The site is located in the modern cemetery of Ashaig, with a ruined modern chapel. Less than 20m to the southwest, a loose find of a copper alloy belt strap-end dated to the 9th-10th centuries AD was discovered in a “rabbit scrap” (Wildgoose 2011, *site 110*). There is no indication of metalworking pre-13th century from the limited excavation of the midden, and no evidence of alloy smithing.

102. Home Farm, Portree

3 pits and 1 souterrain were excavated. 12 radiocarbon dates were conducted on soil samples from the pits, and produced dates between the 11-13th centuries AD. No structures or other features were recorded, and the nature of the pits is not known to the author (pers. comm. Susan Kruse 2019).

103. Ben Saurdal (Skye shieling 1)



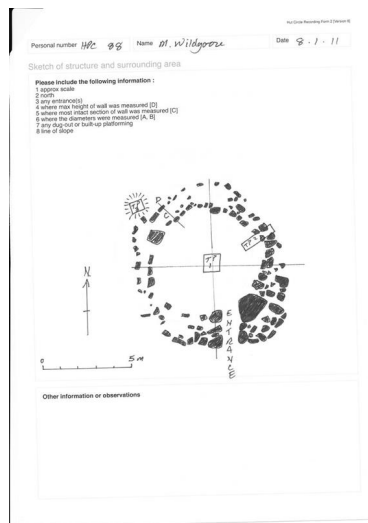
This is a roundhouse structure, with a double-skinned wall, 9m in diameter with stone walls 1.4m thick (HER ID: MHG45513). Two test pits were placed in the structure, with radiocarbon dates of charcoal revealed radiocarbon dates of 1120-1273 AD.

Figure 99: plan of Ben Saurdal. After Wildgoose, 2011.

104. Strath Saurdal (Skye shieling 2)

This is a roundhouse structure, 6m in diameter, which produced undated pottery sherds, lithics, and other finds. A radiocarbon date of a fragment of charcoal gave a 1205-1280 AD date (Wildgoose, 2011a).

Site 105: Strath Glebe (Skye Shieling 3)



This is a roundhouse structure, 14m in diameter, lying underneath a medieval or post-medieval structure (Wildgoose, 2011b). Test pits produced radiocarbon dating of a piece of charcoal gave a date of 1161-1262 AD (Wildgoose, 2011b).

Figure 100: Plan of Strath Glebe, after Wildgoose 2011.

106. Sleat Midden

This is an excavated shell-midden in a rockshelter at Sleat point, Skye, which produced radiocarbon dates to the Norse-period (9th-11th centuries) (Wickham-Jones & Hardy, 2009). There were no artifacts or structural remains recovered.

107. Raasay Midden

This is an excavated shell-midden in a rockshelter at Fairy Glen, Raasay, which produced radiocarbon dates to the Norse-period (10th-12th centuries) (Wickham-Jones & Hardy, 2009).

108. Dun Beag

Dun Beag is one of the most well-preserved broch sites in Scotland. The broch was of substantial size, with the interior being ca. 10m in diameter. The broch was excavated by Countess Vincent



Baillet de Latour, between 1914 and 1920 and subsequently published in the Portable Antiquities of Scotland volume 55 by Callander (Callander, 1921c). The excavators did not record the stratigraphy of the broch, but finds appear to be dated to the 1st century, the Norse period, the Late Medieval period, and the Early Modern period.

Figure 101: Norse body, base, and rim sherd from Dun Beag. After Lane, 1983, p. 633, fig. 27.

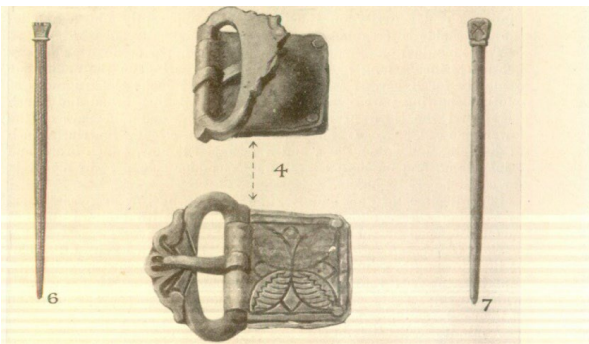


Figure 102: Norse-period metal (copper alloy) finds from Dun Beag, after Callander, 1921.

Later investigations of the broch argued that the broch was inhabited until “recent times” (18-19th century). These include several steatite whorls, a handled steatite cup, as well as a steatite crucible, all of which are almost certainly Norse period. Finds of a Norse-period gold finger ring and copper-alloy belt buckle were noted by

the excavators. These were later dated to the 11th-12th centuries by Graham-Campbell (1998, p. 78).

Alan Lane re-assessing the site found Norse pottery, including a “almost complete” pot Norse-period pot (Lane, 1983). The pottery finds include 1 rim, 1 body, and 2 base sherds.

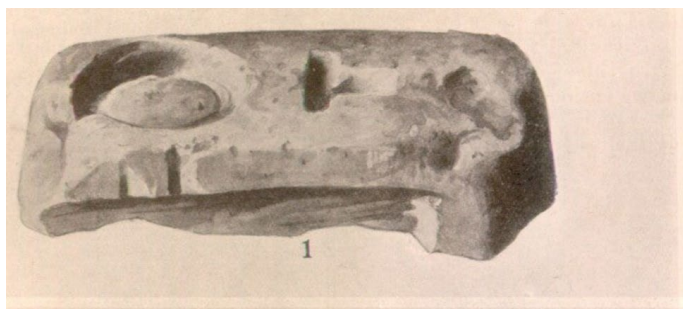


Figure 103: likely Viking-period soapstone crucible, after Callander, 1921.

Upon inspection of the artifacts recovered by the excavators, the author has found

likely Norse period artifacts that have gone unnoticed. These include

several steatite whorls, a handled steatite cup, as well as a steatite crucible, all of which are

almost certainly Norse period. The crucible, which was described as being able to cast a “T-shaped object” is likely for a Thor’s hammer pendant (*fig. 103*). Moreover, a significant amount of iron slag was noted from the broch. Other objects of probable Norse date are an unknown number of copper-alloy chainmail links, though these can be both pre-Norse or post-Norse.

109 Airidh na Creige, Torrin

This is a shieling complex, with circa 70 separate shieling sites. The majority of these shieling sites are believed to be modern. However, one shieling site, shieling 9, is a “cell shieling”, was excavated and produced Norse pottery sherds, among other undiagnostic finds such as metal and wood fragments (Canmore ID: **11454**). Though this appears to be a multi-phase shieling site, radiocarbon dating produced a date of the 11th-13th centuries AD.

Stray finds

Site 110: Ashaig strap-end



Figure 104: the copper alloy strap-end from Ashaig. Photo @ uhi.ac.uk.

This is a copper-alloy strap-end found in a “rabbit scrap” by Martin Wildgoose in 1994 (Dualchas, 1994, p. 43). It was originally listed as a medieval bookmark, but appears to be a Viking-period strap-end, likely the 9th-10th century, based on the knotwork which suggests a Borre style of art (Franco pers. commun. 2019). This was a strap-end where two rivets would have attached it to the end of a leather

belt, worn around the waist and over a tunic by Viking-period men. The artefact is somewhat

snake-shaped, and has parallels the Cumwhitton cemetery in northwest England (Maldonado, 2021, p. 67), as well as a similar strap-end from the Udal, in what was likely a storage pit to re-use alloys (Graham-Campbell, 1974, 73).

111. Kilbeg coin



A silver denier of Holy Roman Emperor Heinrich II (973-1024) was discovered by a metal detector in a ploughed field, in the plough zone, at Kilbeg, Skye (Susan Kruse pers. comm. 2020). The coin was probably minted between 1002-1024, likely in Cologne (HER: **MHG60727**). Since manuring is known in the area which could have moved the object, this site is classified as a stray find. Actual findspot withheld by request of Highland Environmental Record; no further spatial analysis will thus be conducted on this site.

Figure 105: silver denier of Heinrich II. Photo @ uhi.ac.uk.

112. Skye penannular brooch

This brooch was found by a local farmer while digging peat in a bog at Bay, Skye, in 1951 (Simpson, 1955). It is a penannular brooch of copper-alloy, about 9cm in diameter with a pin that is ca. 8cm in diameter. The brooch may have been gilded (Simpson, 1955, p. 194). The brooch is very similar to one of the brooches deposited in the Trewiddle hoard from Cornwall, another brooch from Bute, and one found in the Bergen Museum, dated to the end of the 9th century (Simpson, 1955, p. 194).

Hoard

113. Storr Hoard



Figure 106: Selection of hacksilver from the Storr Hoard. @ scan.

This is a silver hoard containing 111 coins (19 Arabic dirhams, the rest Anglo-Saxon), and 23 hacksilver fragments, all of them nicked (Graham-Campbell, 1995, p. 28). The hoard is dated to around 930-940 on the basis of numismatic evidence (Graham-Campbell, 1995, p. 28).

Other

114. Rubhn An Dunain

The site was topographically surveyed via drone after the discovery of a boat stem (probably from a Norse færing) in the inland loch (Loch na h-Airde) in 2007, by Martin and Martin (2010; 2018). The boat stem was radiocarbon dated to 1100 AD, placing it within the Late Norse period. The site is characterized by a man-made, stone-lined canal that leads from the sea to the inland loch. There are furthermore multiple stone-built boat nausts as well as a quay, and a structure interpreted as a storage house. The structures were not able to be dated, but it is suspected to be contemporary with the boat stem (Martin & Martin, 2018).

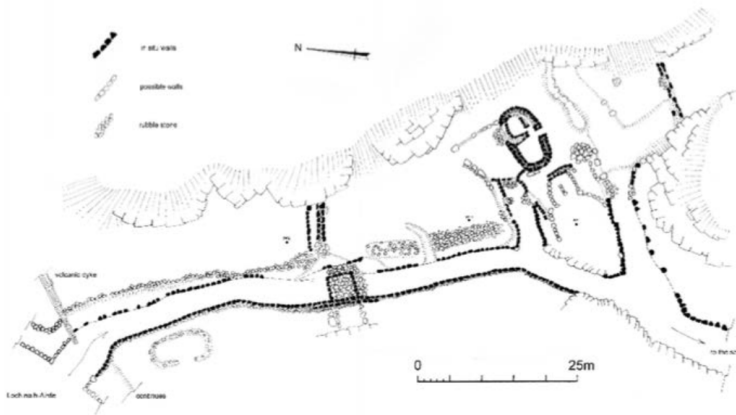


Figure 107: plan of canal, boat nausts, and structures. After Martin & Martin, 2010.

6.10 Eigg

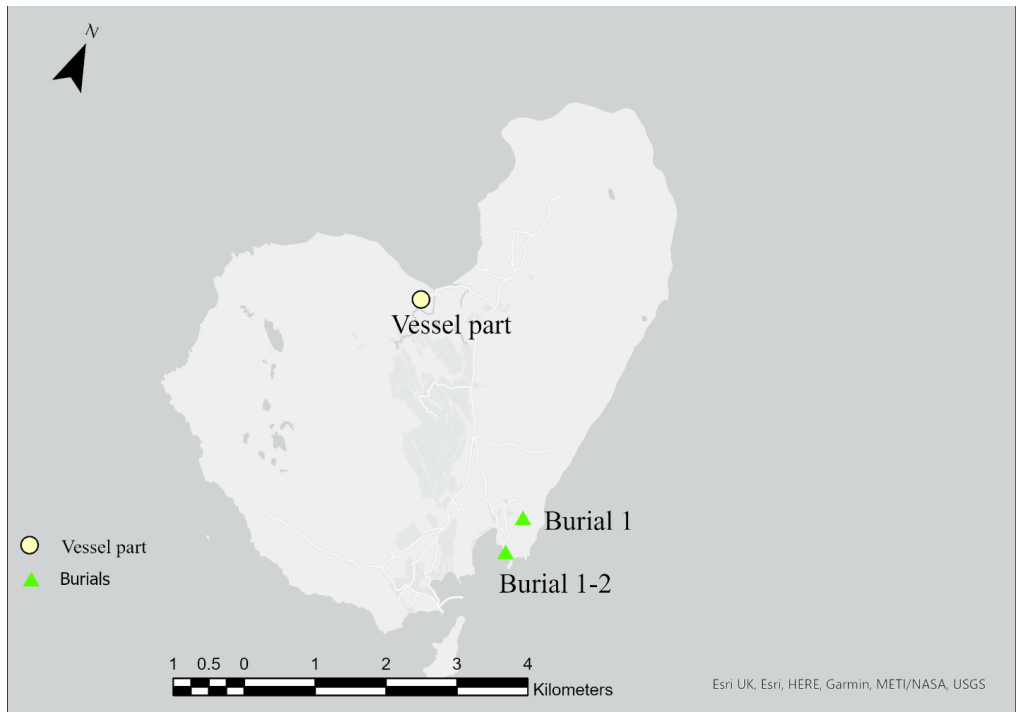


Figure 108: Viking and Late Norse period sites on Eigg.

Burials

115. Eigg burial I

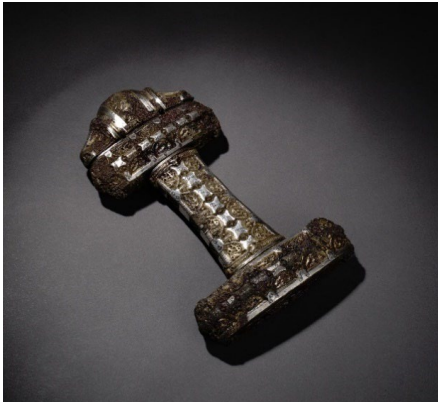


Figure 109: silver-plated Petersen Type D hilt. @ National Museum of Scotland.

This is a burial site found after the ploughing of a hillock, first published in 1878. Human remains were not mentioned in the original publication, but the records are poor (Harrison 2008, p. 476).

Objects found include a silver-plated sword hilt (Petersen type D, *fig. 109*), a copper alloy buckle, copper alloy bucket mounts, a whetstone, and another copper-alloy object.

116. Eigg Burial II

This burial site is a re-used neolithic chamber tomb, originally ca. 12m x 2m, investigated by MacPherson and Joass that produced Viking Age artifacts (MacPherson 1878, pp. 589-92).

The artifacts were found after digging in the soil of the tomb, and were listed as an axe, spearhead, large knife, copper alloy brooch (10th century), copper alloy buckle, 3 beads (2 amber, 1 jet), a sickle, and a whetstone (Harrison, 2008, p. 476).

117. Eigg burial III



Figure 110: 10th century copper alloy buckle.
Figure 111: whetstone (schist?), from Eigg burial II. Photo @

This is a burial in a mound or cairn, ca. 7x6m, just ca. 3m from the neolithic chamber tomb where Eigg II is located. It is unknown whether this mound was constructed in the Norse period, or is pre-Norse. It was investigated by MacPherson and Joass, who only described the artifacts and did not mention human remains (Harrison, 2008, p. 478).

The artifacts recovered were a sword, possible Type W,

(Żabiński, 2007, p. 46), a copper alloy brooch, a copper alloy buckle, two jet beads, a whetstone, and flint (Harrison, 2008, p. 478).

118. Eigg Boat stem

This is stem post of oak wood, used for a clinker-built Viking Age ship (Martin & Martin, 2018). The find was radiocarbon dated to 885-1035 AD. This artifact was found in a drained bog in the late 19th century at Laig.



Figure 112: 3D model of the boat stem from Laig, Eigg. Photo @ NMAS

6.11 Canna



Figure 113: Viking and Late Norse period sites on Canna.

2 sites are recorded from Canna, both stray finds.

119. Ringed-pin

A Viking-Age ringed-pin (9th-10th centuries) was discovered at the 19th century church of Scotland, Canna (Graham-Campbell & Batey, 1998, p. 84). It appears to be a chance find due to erosion. This was listed as in “private possession” (Graham-Campbell & Batey, 1998, p. 84). No further information is available.

120. Glass bead



Figure 114: glass bead from the Sanday beacon. Photo @ Scran.

A glass bead was found in the vicinity of the beacon (automatic lighthouse) of Sanday, Canna. The glass bead is Viking-period (9th-10th) in date of manufacture. It appears to be a stray find found near the unmanned beacon on the east coast of the island, and no further information has been found by the author. The find is listed as a stray find in the SCRAN database (scran.ac.uk). There does not appear to be any other archaeological material recorded in the area. There is an image available of the find in the SCRAN database (*fig.114*).

Chapter 7: The landscape relationship between Norse sites and pre-Norse sites

7.1.1 Introduction

The Norse settlers in the Norse Period (800-1250 AD) arrived in Skye and the Western Isles in an already-settled landscape that had been peopled since the Mesolithic, there were numerous stone-built monuments, including standing stones, brochs, duns,

wheelhouses, crannogs and other structures present in the landscape. The Norse would have found evidence of human activity throughout the isles, particularly on the arable

machair, where foundations of Iron Age settlement structures would have been still standing. Some of this evidence of human activity would have been midden material accumulated over the millennia and visible through erosion, similar to midden sites today. Other structures were likely substantial ruins, such as some coastal brochs, which could have been in use as waypoints for maritime travel, as argued for in Orkney (Pollard et al., 2016, p. 318). On the other hand, some brochs, such as the broch of Beirgh, was inhabited as late as the early 9th century AD, and would have been occupied or recently abandoned by the time of Norse colonization (Armit, 1996, p. 202). Some structures would also have been in use in the late 8th century, as operating, permanently occupied farmsteads, particularly the LIA farmsteads at the Udal, Bornais, and Bosta, Structures, funerary monuments, and other anthropogenic evidence of human activity were thus present in the landscape at various states of structural integrity. Some of these sites may have been populated, or recently abandoned, at the time of Norse settlement. Unfortunately, neither the Iron Age nor Norse settlement sites can be securely dated to suggest a clear overlap between periods. At Bornais, excavations were not

able to date whether or not the pre-Norse population were “evicted” by the Norse, or the settlement had been abandoned for some time (Sharples & Smith, 2009). There is thus a potentiality for 50-250 years of no archaeological evidence of settlement in the area of study. The majority of LIA settlement can be dated to the early-mid 8th century AD, while the clearest indications of Norse activity come in the mid-9th century (for burials) and the early-mid 10th century AD for settlement. This chronological difficulty has been discussed in greater detail in this thesis (Chapter 5.4.1). Furthermore, sites are mostly determined to be Norse on the basis of artifact assemblage, some of which could have a long period of use, such as Norse pottery, which can only date a site between 800-1250 AD. The author has argued that a landscape methodology could mend difficulties in the chronology of the material.

7.1.2 Dataset

Norse settlement sites related to different types of pre-Norse structures

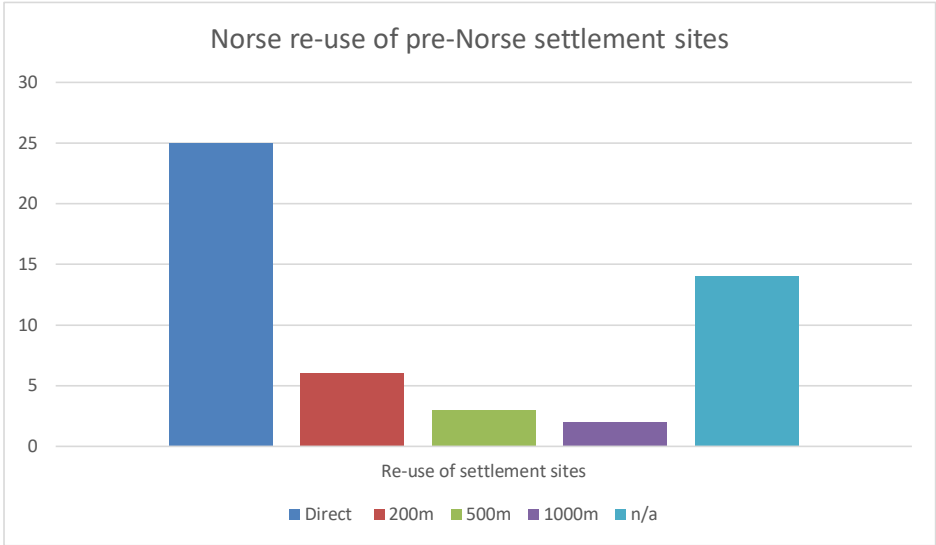


Figure 115: the number of pre-Norse sites deemed to be re-used in the Norse-period.

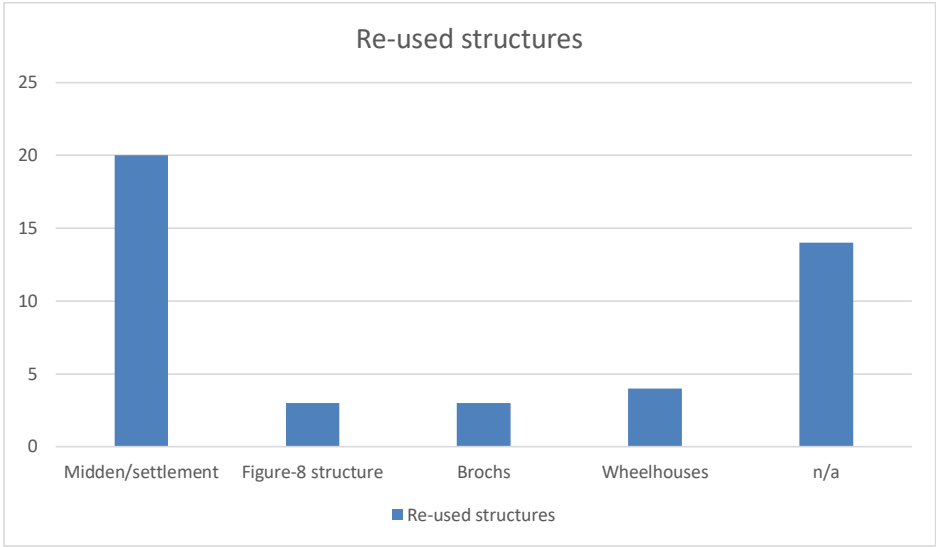


Figure 116: different categories of re-used structures.

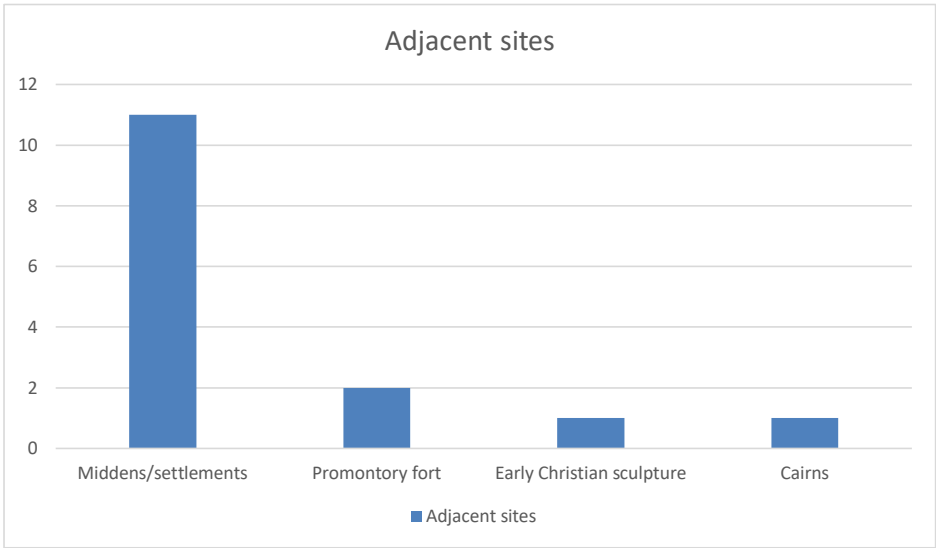


Figure 117: Norse sites adjacent to pre-Norse sites.

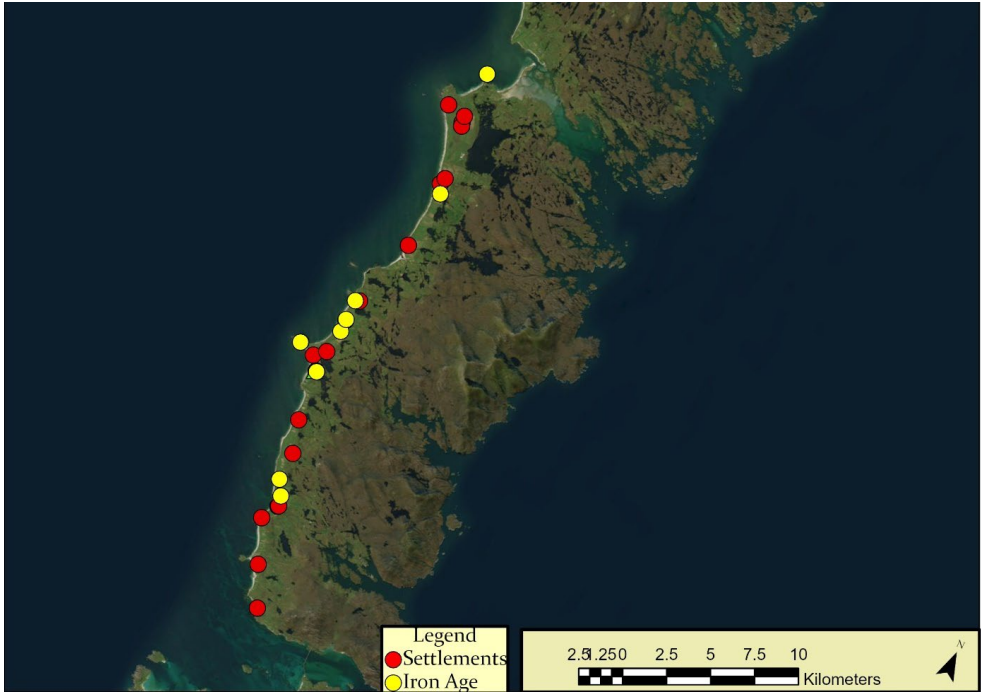


Figure 118: Norse and Iron Age sites on South Uist, showing a similar distribution.

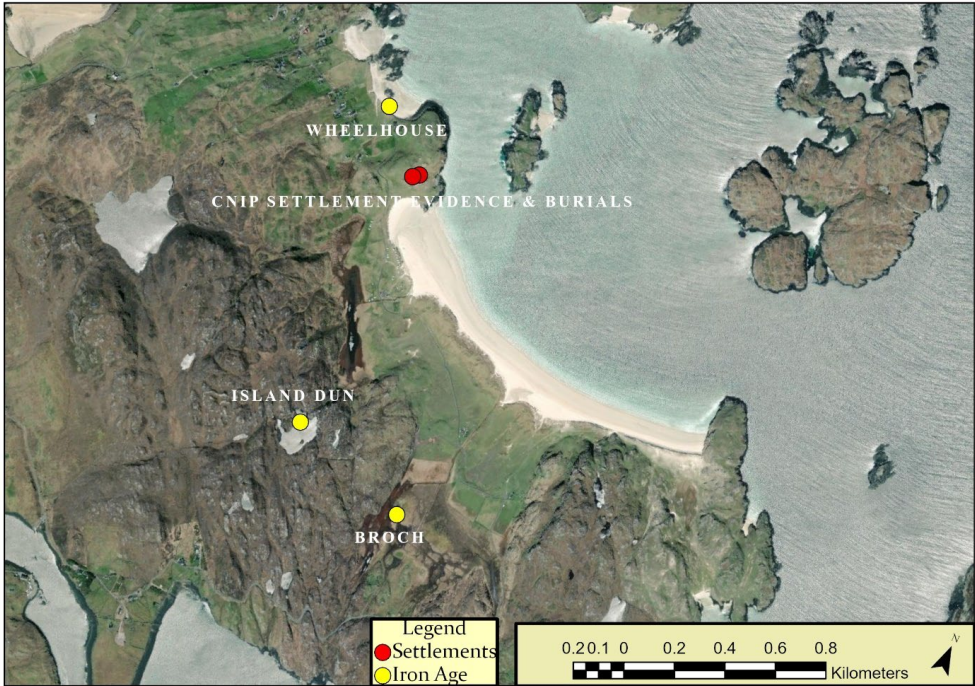


Figure 119: Norse and Iron Age sites at Cnip, Lewis.

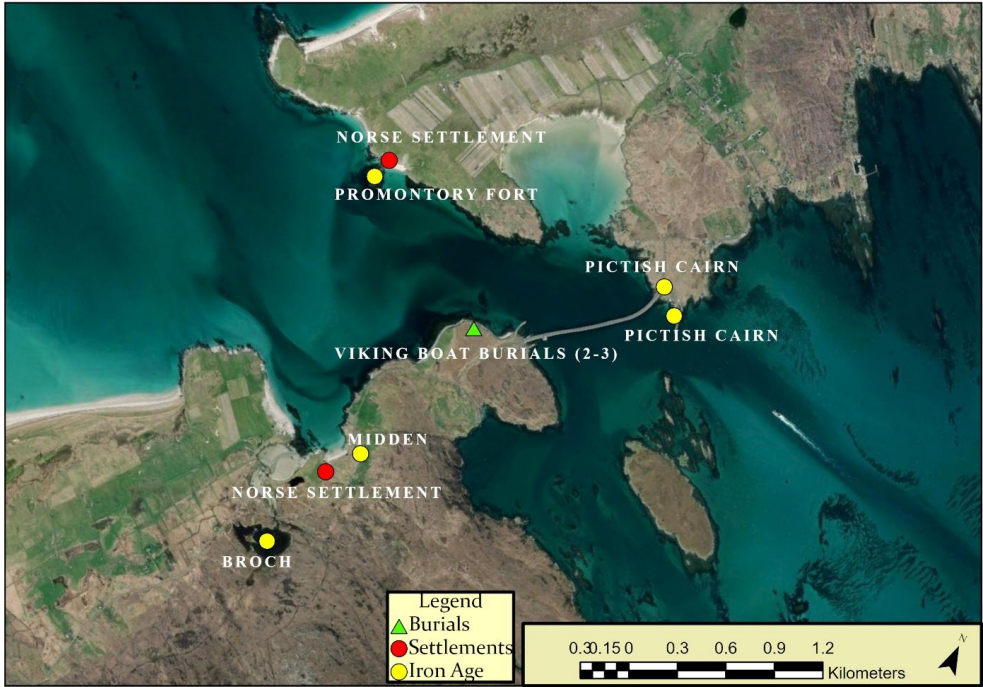


Figure 120: Norse and Iron Age sites around the Sound of Bernary.

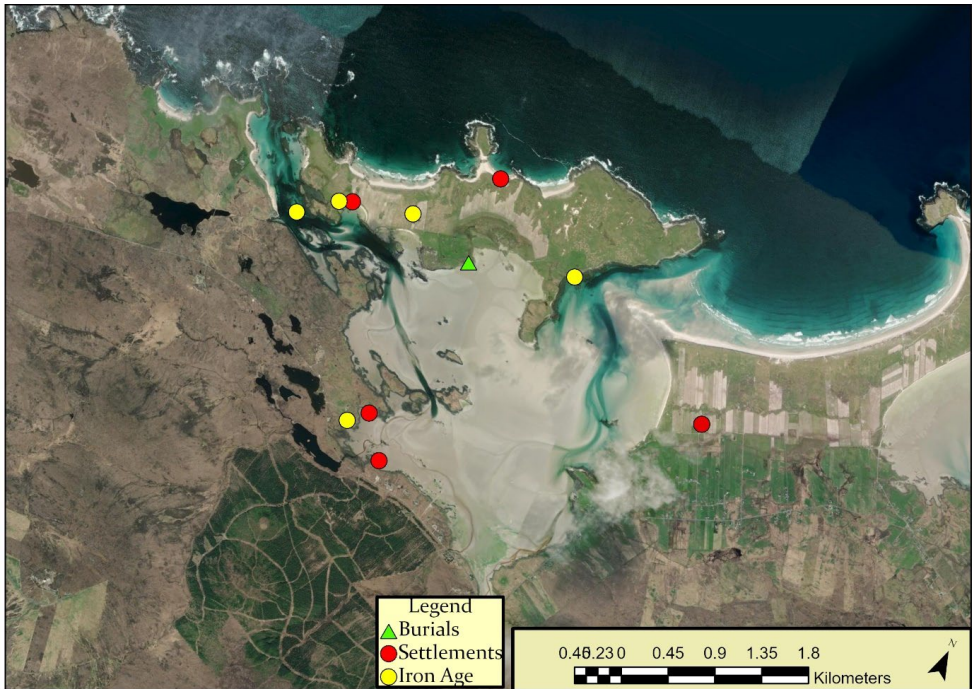


Figure 121: Norse and Iron Age sites around the Sound of Vallay.

The majority of Norse settlement sites were either placed upon pre-Norse settlement sites (23), or they were not placed over a settlement site at all (14). Very few sites were placed on, or in relation to, Iron Age monuments, but they still appear in significant numbers. Three brochs and four wheelhouses were re-used in the Norse period, and this re-use is further discussed below. Duns, promontory forts, crannogs⁷, and hillforts do not seem to have been re-used, at least not directly.

It must be cautioned that the third largest category is a Norse site that is not overlying a pre-Norse site, or within at least 500m of a pre-Norse site. For adjacent use, very few Norse sites (14) were not within at least 500m of another site. Areas of potential agriculture use were likely cultivated since the Early Neolithic (Parker Pearson, 2012, pp. 4-5), and there is a high density of above-ground sites in the area of study, rendering this number perhaps coincidental.

However, when these sites are broken down into IA and non-IA sites (Bronze Age, Neolithic, and undated), the majority of adjacent Norse settlement sites are within 500m of pre-Norse, Iron Age settlement sites (11), while the remaining (3) are within 500m of undated settlement sites. Sharples and Parker Pearson argued that Norse settlement mounds on the South Uist machair within 500m of Iron Age settlement sites suggest intentionality and therefore a continuity of landscape (1999). Their methodology has been criticized as being arbitrary and that 500m is too large of a measurement to be considered adjacent, and therefore coincidental (Jennings & Kruse, 2005). Based on the above data, the author argues that it does seem intentional to have placed Norse sites adjacent to pre-Norse sites, because the number of IA sites within 500m of Norse sites is nearly three times as many as Norse sites within 500m of non-IA, non-Norse settlement sites. Why some sites were chosen to be adjacent and not directly re-used is more difficult to interpret, but the author gives a potential explanation below.

Some Norse sites are within 500m to sites that are not Iron Age settlement sites, but other types of Iron Age sites. There are just four of these instances. Two are near promontory forts; one is dated to the Iron Age (Eilean Eistean, from Ness, Lewis), while the other is undated but suspected to be Iron Age. Cille Pheadair is within 50m radius of a Pictish square cairn, and

⁷ A crannog at An Dunain, Lewis, appears to have been used for grain storage in the Late Norse period (12-13 centuries AD) period.

has been argued to be possibly intentional (Parker Pearson, 2018). One site is within 200m of an Early Christian incised Latin Cross (Taransay II). Taransay II is the only instance of a Norse settlement site being within 500m of an Early Christian cross, and therefore is likely not statistically significant.

Of the very few Norse settlement mounds excavated, there is a high case of Norse structures overlying pre-Norse, LIA structures there is clear evidence of Norse structures overlaying Late Iron Age, Pictish structures (Bostadh, Bornais, and the Udal, Drimore, and Galson), and multiperiod middens (Rosinish, Nisabost, Norton), whereas two settlement sites excavated were not overlying pre-Norse structures (Barvas, Cille Pheadair), but both were within 500m of an Iron Age site (a settlement and Pictish cairn respectively).

7.1.3 Direct re-use – structural remains of excavated and surveyed sites

A majority of settlement sites can be said to be in relationship to pre-Norse, Iron Age settlement sites. Only a small amount of these sites has been excavated. Of the excavated sites, some of these sites did not uncover structural remains. Excavations of Norse sites at Bornais, the Udal, Drimore, and Bostadh revealed Norse structures imposed on pre-Norse structures. The excavations of Cille Pheadair and Barvas suggest that these Norse structures were not built over pre-Norse structures. Excavations of middens at Rosinish, Norton, and Nisabost revealed Norse layers in multi-period middens but not Norse structures. In part, this is perhaps due to the excavations not reaching structural remains during the trenching or probing of midden sites, and is not necessarily an indication of an absence of Norse structures at the site.

Chapter 8: The landscape of Viking Age Burials data analysis

8.1.1 Introduction

While the majority of sites in the corpus are settlement sites, a significant amount of Viking Age burials has also been recorded in the area of study. This section will explore the landscape of Viking Age burials of Skye and the Western Isles, to understand potential reasons for siting practices, and how these siting practices fit into the settlement landscape. This section aims to understand the landscape of the burial sites, in their relation to placenames, settlement sites, geographical and topographical features, arable land, sea-routes, and pre-Norse monuments such as pre-Norse graves. The objective of this section is to place the burial sites in their landscape context, in the hope of a greater understanding of Norse burial siting. The research on Viking Age burials in the broader Viking Age is detailed in the research history section of this thesis (chapter 3). The burial sites are further listed and discussed in section data (chapter 12) and the appendix of this thesis.

8.1.2 The Burials and finds

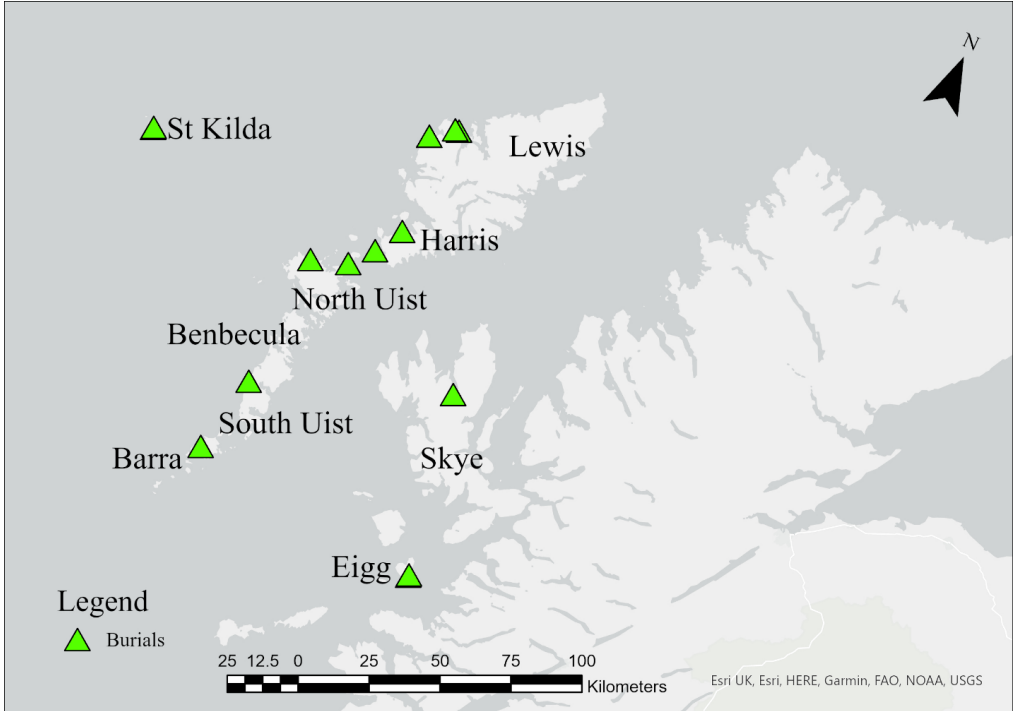


Figure 122: The burials with names of islands in the area of study.

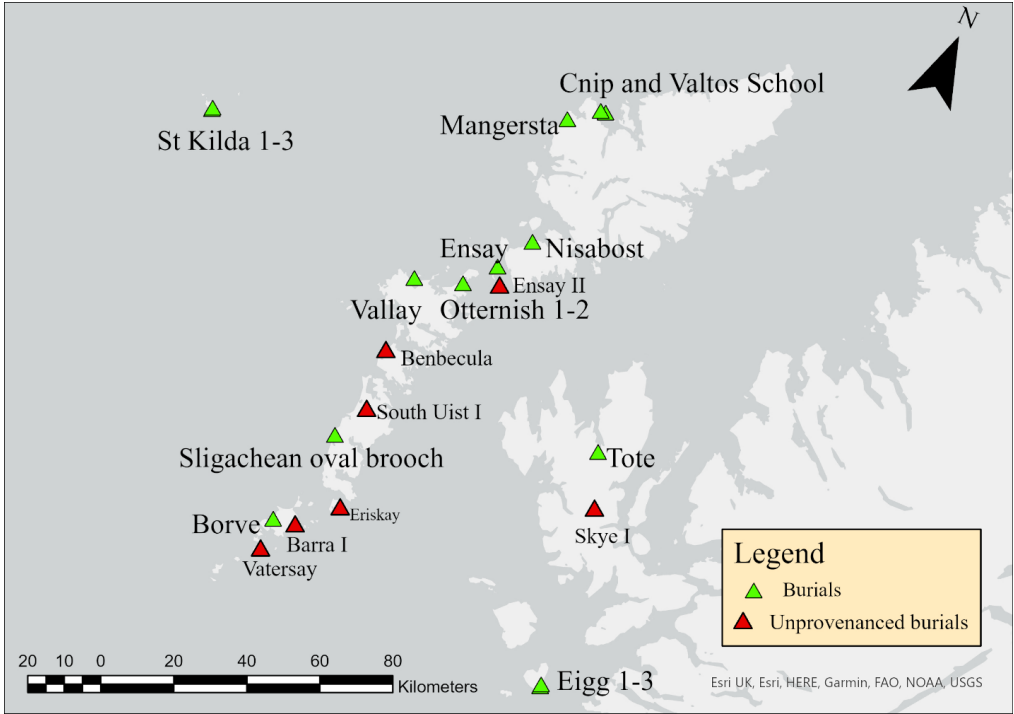


Figure 123: All burials, including unprovenanced burials, and their labels.

Name	Location	Place name	Burial type	Grave goods	Landscape	Re-use	
Cnip cemetery	Cnip, Lewis	ON: Steep	Cemetery (7 excavated inhumations) 2 adult females, 2 adult males, 1 male child, 1 infant, 1 newborn/neonate	Rich female – single/low number – no grave goods (9 th -late 10 th)	Machair plain Natural terrace West side of harbour Adjacent to the harbour	Under low mounds with cists, but neonate and infant were flat graves. Adjacent to BA cairn	7 burials in total were excavated, several (unknown exact) burials in a cemetery were not excavated.
Valtos school	Valtos school, Lewis	ON: Power house/river mouth	Single inhumation (female)	Rich female grave goods, Irish brooch (9 th -10 th century)	Machair Beach West side of harbour	Adjacent to IA structure/broch.	Exact location unknown, possibly from the IA structure/broch.
Mangersta	Mangersta, Lewis	ON: Magnús's <i>stadir</i>	Find of oval brooch fragment	Oval brooch fragment dated to late 9 th -early 10 th	Machair Beach east side of harbour	Re-used IA settlement mound	Middle-Late IA pottery and comb fragment recorded with the brooch, likely different contexts.
Nisabost	Nisabost, Scarista, Harris	ON: Ness - <i>Bostad</i> (<i>head and farmstead</i>)	Single inhumation (male 30-40)	Whetstone Knife	Beach/machair West side of landing-place	Unknown/eroded. Within viewshed of Macleod's stone 600m to N-NE.	Above ground surface eroded; another inhumation, undated, discovered 5m to northeast, possibly contemporary.

Ensay burial I	Manish, Ensay, Harris Sound	ON: Seagull headland	Single inhumation (not gendered)	Set of copper alloy scales Copper alloy Thor's hammer	Machair Beach Ca. 300m from harbour	Unknown, but likely within 500m of a Norse settlement (mound and pottery)	Exact location unknown, but likely from the machair plain, area of the eroding modern cemetery. Objects lost in late 19 th century; place of human remains unknown.
Ensay burial II	Ensay, Harris	ON: Ensay (Ewe island)	Pair of copper alloy oval brooches	Oval brooches, 9 th -10 th century	Unknown exact location	Determined to be from Ensay by Harrison (2005), artefacts lost in 20 th century.	The original findspot was recorded as "Lingay", an island in the Harris Sound that does not appear to exist.
Otternish I	Otternish, North Uist	ON: Otter's headland	Inhumation, aboveground but low-lying cairn.	32 iron rivets listed in NMAS from this site. Axe, glass beads and other objects mentioned in report	Machair plain Headland South/southwest of harbour	Boat or ship burial excavated by Beveridge, poorly recorded	Rivets in NMAS from this site, but human remains and other artefacts appear lost.

				but lost.			
Otternish II	Otternish, North Uist	ON: Ottar's headland	Inhumation, aboveground but low-lying cairn.	Iron rivets reported by Beveridge	Machair plain Headland South/southwest of harbour	Boat or ship burial excavated by Beveridge, poorly recorded	Artefacts lost.
Vallay burials	Traigh Vallay, North Uist	ON: water-island G: Sands	Two inhumation burials boat burials, possibly additional unrecorded, unreported burials.	Swords reported but not recorded; spearhead (Type K) in NMAS from site	Machair plain Coastal Near trackway across Vallay Sound	Likely boat burials, poorly recorded excavations by Beveridge. Status of aboveground monuments unknown.	Location of human remains and other artefacts unknown. The spearhead is a Petersen Type K, with CA rivets in the socket (possibly Irish sea type).
Barra burial I	Borgh, Barra	ON: borg (fort)	Inhumation (female)	Oval brooches Weaving sword CA buckle Heckles Needle case Drinking horn terminal	Machair plain Coastal Ca. 500m from harbour	Re-used mound (approx. 2.5m high) and re-used standing stone (approx. 2.5m high)	Rich female burial dated to the late 9 th -early 10 th based on artefact typology. Find of "Anglo-Saxon sword" from the mound not able to be verified.
Tote House	Tote, Skye	ON: Tote (ruins)	Cremation (male likely)	Axe (type E) Shield Boss	Natural terrace over Loch Snizort Harbour	Re-used bronze age burial cairn	Excavation by Lethbridge (1920). Early 10 th

				Rivets Ivory bead	Arable land		century based on artefact typology.
Eigg I	Kildonn an, Eigg	G: Church of Donna n	Inhumation (male)	Sword blade (hilt corrode d) Belt fittings Penann ular brooch Textile fragme nts (shagg y cloak, wool tunic, linen undertu nic)	Natural terrace overlookin g harbour Arable land	Re-used Neolithic chamber cairn	9 th -10 th century based on artefact typology
Eigg II	Kildonn an, Eigg	G: Church of Donna n	Inhumation (male)	Belt fittings Brooch Sword (type W?)	Natural terrace overlookin g harbour Arable land	Mound; potentially re-used. Within 5m of Eigg I	9 th -10 th century based on artefact typology. 875-950 if sword is Petersen Type W.
Eigg III	Dail Sithean, Eigg	ON: Meado w G: fairy	Unknown (male likely)	Sword hilt (type D) CA baldric CA anvil or Irish vessel part	Arable field Inland but views to the harbour	Natural mound	825-850 of date of manufact ure of sword hilt
St Kilda I	Village Bay, Hirta	E	Unknown (female)	Oval brooch pair	Arable land Harbour	Unknown, possibly mound	1 brooch lost, 1 in the National Museum

							of Denmark. 9 th -10 th century based on typology.
St Kilda II	Village Bay, Hirta	E	Unknown (male)	Sword, "iron objects"	Arable land Harbour	Mound	Artefacts lost and poorly recorded, but otherwise recorded as being from Village Bay.
St Kilda III	Fairy house, Hirta	E	Unknown (male)	Spear (Petersen type A or C)	Arable land Harbour	Souterrain	Poorly recorded, possibly not its original place of deposition. 9 th century based on artefact typology
Sligachean Oval brooch	Sligachean, South Uist	G: Shell place	Unknown (female)	Oval brooch fragment	Machair Inland; near Loch Donnain	Unknown, possibly standing stones or mounds, but likely a redistributed artefact	9 th -10 th century based on artefact typology. Context is suggestive of re-deposit.
Skye I	Skye (unknown provenance)		Inhumation (male)	Sword, other objects	Arable land Mound (ploughed)	Unknown provenance and poorly recorded, artefacts and human remains lost.	Non-provenanced burial.
Eriskay	Eriskay (unknown)		Unknown (likely inhumation) (male)	Sword (type O)	Arable land Mound (ploughed)	Unknown provenance and poorly recorded;	Non-provenanced burial. 925-950

	provenance)			Spear (small) Whetstone		artefacts in NMAS.	date for the sword hilt.
South Uist I	South Uist (unknown provenance)		Cremation? (unknown gender)	Antler comb	Machair, arable land	Re-used prehistoric cist; poorly recorded; artefact lost	Non-provenanced burial.
Barra I	Barra (unknown provenance)		Cremation? (unknown gender)	Antler comb, CA ringed-pin	Arable land	Poorly recorded; artefacts lost.	Non-provenanced burial.
Vatersay	Vatersay, Barra (unknown provenance)		Inhumation (male); Horse burial. Ship burial.	Only sword mentioned, likely many.	Arable land	Poorly recorded; artefacts not described; human/animal remains or whereabouts of artefacts unknown.	Non-provenanced burial.
Benbecula	Benbecula (exact provenance unknown, except "west coast")		Inhumation (male)	Sword Spearhead	Arable land	Poorly recorded; artefacts lost; human remains reburied	Non-provenanced burial.

Table 2: All burial sites from the area of study, including unprovenanced burials.



Figure 124: The Borge burial and its landscape context.

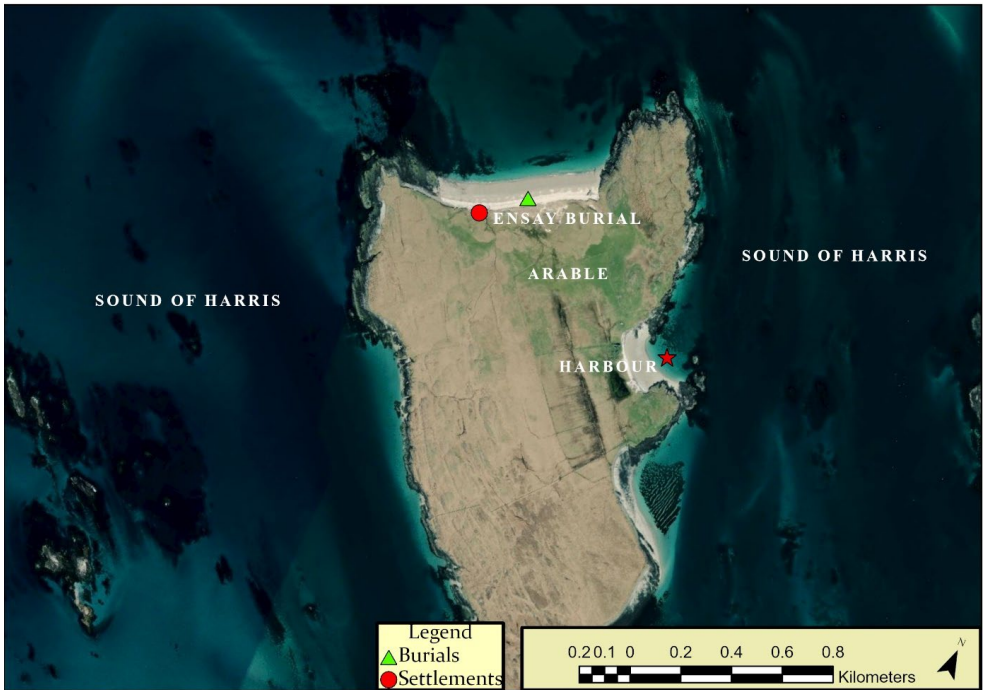


Figure 123: the burial at Ensay and its landscape context.

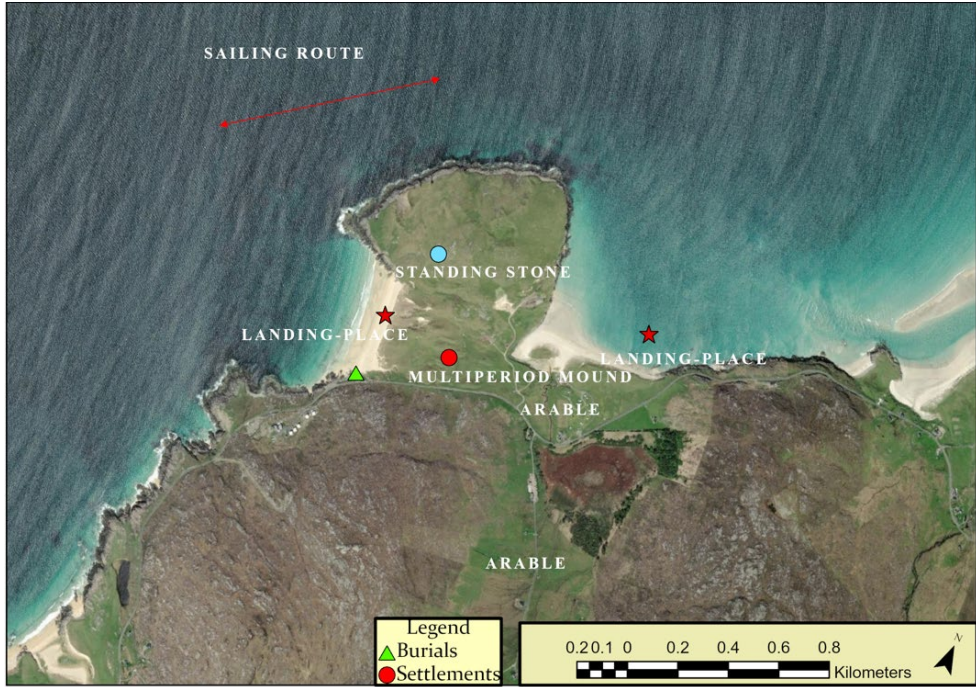


Figure 124: the burial at Nisabost and its landscape context.



Figure 125: the burial at Mangersta and its landscape context.



Figure 126: the burials at Kildonan and their landscape context.

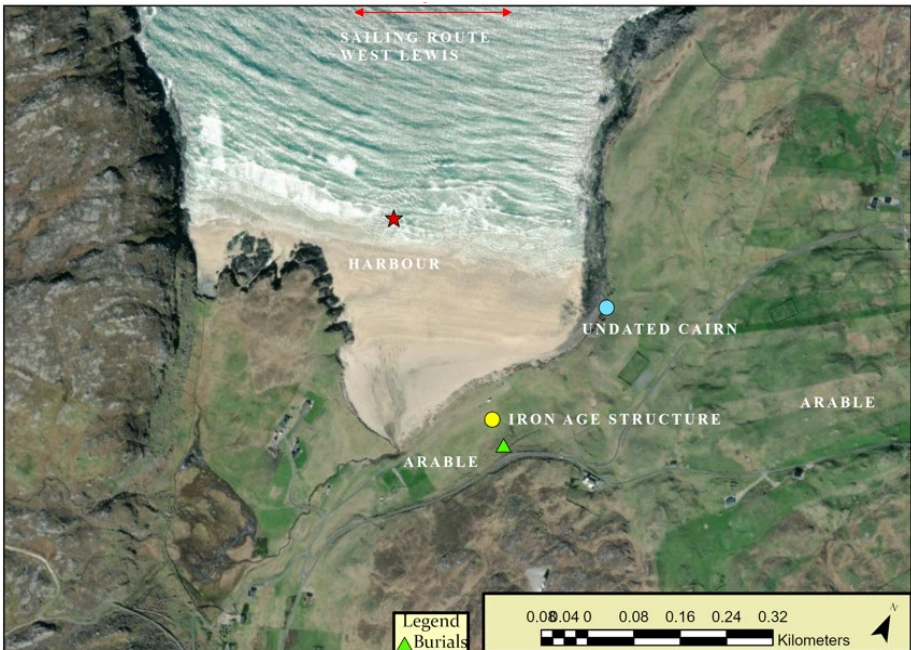


Figure 127: the burial at Valtos and its landscape context.

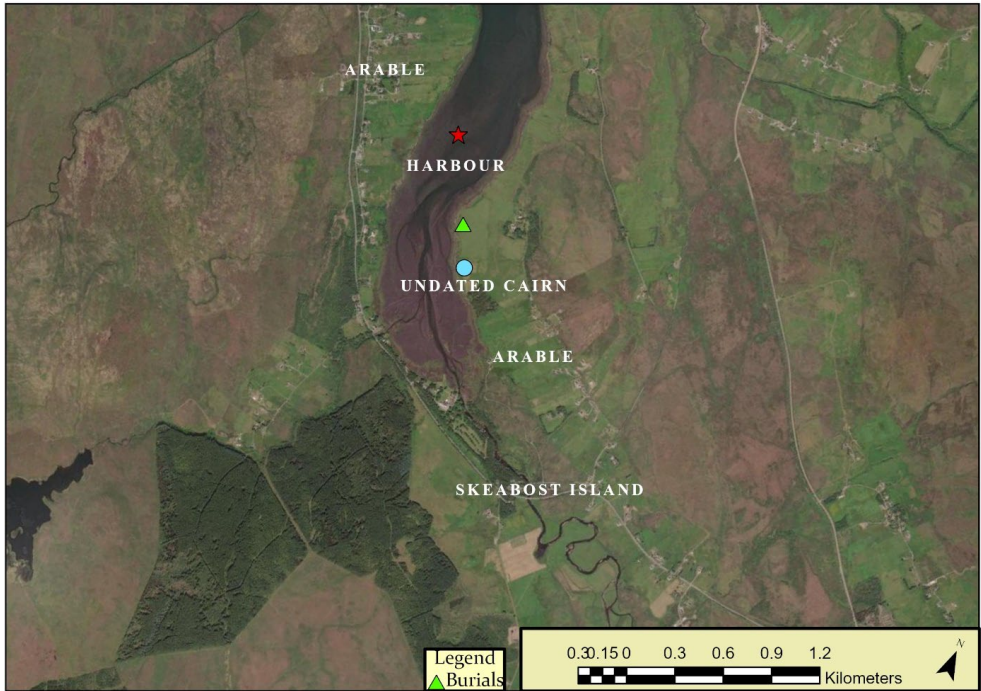


Figure 128: the burial at Tote and its landscape context.

The burial at the Cnip headland is represented by figure 119. The burials at the Sound of Bernary are represented by figure 120. The burials at Valley are represented by figure 121.

8.1.3 Data

The data show 24 Viking Age burial sites. Of the 24, nine lack provenance and were left out of the spatial analysis. Some burials with multiple inhumations were treated as one site, such as Cnip, and Kildonan 2 and 3.

Of the 24 burial sites, only two sites were excavated using modern techniques. Of these two sites, only 1 site had its burials undergo scientific evaluations such as c14 dating and isotopic analysis. The rest of the sites were dated based on artefact typology. Many burial sites were determined by the presence of specific objects that occur exclusively or mostly in burial contexts.

Of the 24 burials, all can be dated between 825-975, with the majority occurring around the 10th century AD, particularly 900-925 based on artefact typology.

There is just one cremation burial in the corpus. The other 23 sites are all inhumation burials or unknown.

Several boat burials are known. There are two from Otternish, 2 from Vallay, and 1 from Vatersay. None of these burials was recorded properly, and there is little information available about them, and only a handful of artefacts seem to have been preserved and catalogued professionally.

Two of the burials included animal remains. The boat burial at Vatersay included a horse skeleton; this was not recorded and is lost. Grave C from Cnip contained the molar of a cow, but this is likely from a different context and not intentionally buried (Dunwel et al., 1995).

Seven of the burials contained oval brooches. Of these seven burials, four included inhumation graves, while the other 3 designated a grave by the presence of the brooches.

There are 10 (possibly 11) sword burials reported from the area of study. Of these, 3 are from inhumation burials and are well documented, while an additional sword is found in the NMAS. The rest of the swords were not recorded, and their current whereabouts are unknown.

Of the 15 sites with provenance, 12 had placenames that are ON or derived from ON. The remaining 3 had purely English names.

Of the 15 sites with provenance, 14 could be associated with a natural, sheltered harbour and major-sea route. The 1 that did not was within 500m of an inland freshwater loch that could have possibly been connected to the sea. Of these, 13 were considered coastal, less than 200m from the nearest coast, while 1 was 600m from the nearest coast (Kildonnan III), and another over 1000m inland (Sligachean).

8.1.4 Agricultural land

All burials appear to be placed on or are in association with arable land. Interestingly, some of the non-provenanced and/or poorly recorded burials make note of agricultural land in the records, i.e., the records mention that a burial was discovered during ploughing a mound. While there can be a sampling bias in this assessment, as areas outside the agricultural areas tend to have more stable soil matrixes, this is similar to the placement of burials in Scandinavia and elsewhere in the Viking world, with some exceptions.

8.1.5 Placenames

The placenames of the burial locations were divided by function. The functions are defined as topographical, administrative, and personal names. Words that describe ruins, forts, or other structures were considered topographical because they are likely among the first toponyms that were coined. Three of the sites possessed placenames that can have two functions, and were counted twice, but will be divided during analysis. Furthermore, six burials could not be associated with ON names, but purely Gaelic and/or English (6).

8.6.1 Topographical names

10 are topographical names, including three double-functional names. These names are: borg (1), ruin (1), ness (4), steep (1), island (1), meadow (1), and thicket (1). It has been argued by some placename scholars that these names would have been some of the earliest settlement sites because they would have been the first places named, and then subsequently dwelled in for the names to be set in the areas (Jennings & Kruse, 2009). The high number of topographical placenames in association with Viking burials is not a surprise, given that Viking pagan burial practices likely declined after the mid-10th century and disappear by the early 11th at the latest in the area of study.

8.6.2 Administrative/habitational names

These placenames designate areas of law or households, particularly farmsteads.

Power house (1), Mangersta (stadir) (1), and Bostadr (1). Valtos, interpreted as “power house” in English, may designate a major centre of Norse administration and elite activity. Valtos is not only the name of the area where the Valtos School burial had been found, but of the peninsula and modern village as well. The Cnip cemetery is located on the Valtos peninsula, and there are two finds of Norse pottery that signify settlement as well. Nevertheless, the placename signifies elite activity, perhaps a centre of power in the hierarchy of the Viking Age of Lewis, and possibly later as well.

The other three names represent three habitational names. One is stadir, which would be a word used for a group of farms, usually in a hierarchical settlement (Anderson, 2014, p. 31). Bolstadr, much discussed, would be a secondary or specialized settlement site (Gammeltoft, 2001). The author believes that these names are not necessarily associated with the burials. In the case of Bolstadr, the name may post-date the burials, while Stadir is considered by placename scholars to be one of the earliest settlement names. The stadir however also includes a personal name, likely *Magnus* or possibly *monk* (Taylor, 2022, p. 115).

8.6.3 Personal Names

Personal names are present in three examples, with one placename for two sites. Mangersta, mentioned also in the subsection about habituation names, contains the personal name Old Norse name Magnus. Two burials are from Otternish, “Ottar’s ness”. Placenames containing personal names are relatively rare in the region, and will be discussed later in this thesis.

8.6.4 Discussion

The placenames show a tendency toward topographical features. 10 are of pure topographical nature, while the remaining 4 contain an element of a topographical feature. Just 2 of the provenanced burials with Old Norse names have no topographical feature: Valtos and Mangersta. An alternative name of Valtos is ON “river mouth” (Taylor, 2022, p. 156), which would make it a purely topographical name. The author finds that the placenames of the burial

sites are suggestive of earlier settlement, coinciding with the Viking Age pagan period of ca. 800-950 AD. This is furthermore suggestive that names of topographical places were settled at an early date, though there is little archaeological evidence of Norse settlement in this period at the current state of research.

8.2.1 Landscape

8.2.1.1 Elevation

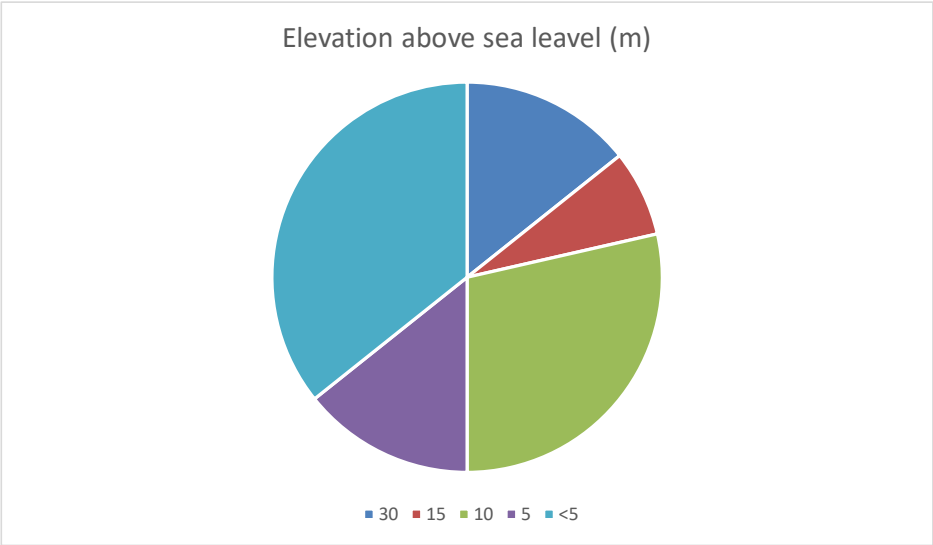


Figure 131: sites by elevation (meters).

Figure 101 shows that the majority of sites with reliable provenances tend to be less than 5m above sea level. The second-largest portion is 10m above sea level, while between 5-9m above sea level, and 30m or above sea level, are even. The majority of burials, however, can be said to be less sited less than 5m above sea level to 15m

above sea level. Sites that are 30m or above (1 on Eigg, 3 on St Kilda) can be seen as anomalies, but raise some interesting questions that will be discussed below. There seems to have been a preference for terraces or natural rises that are between 5-15m above sea level.

All burials but six were found on natural terraces or rises overlooking the sea.

At Tote, the burial was placed in a prehistoric cairn on a natural shelf overlooking the coast. At Nisabost, the burial was placed on a natural rise at the 10m contour line. The cemetery of Cnip is found on a natural terrace that overlooks the sea-loch, Loch Roag (*fig. 119*). The mound of Mangersta is found at what appears to be a natural rise in the landscape overlooking the harbour (*fig. 126*). At Kildonan, Eigg, the two prehistoric cairns are found on a natural terrace/rise overlooking Kildonan bay (*fig. 127*). The site at Borge appears to have been placed on a high flat and broad terrace that overlooks the sea (*fig. 122*).

Three sites appear as distinct headlands. Otternish 1 and 2 are found on the headland of Otternish, on the western portion of the landform, overlooking the sea and coast to the north, east, and west, and arable land to the south (*fig. 120*). The burial site at Vallay, though its location may be unreliable, is found on a headland/hook overlooking the Sound of Vallay (*fig. 121*).

A few of the burial sites can be considered inland. Kildonan 1 is located 30m above sea level, on a plateau of arable land, though the sea is visible from the site (*fig. 127*). The three burials recorded at Hirta, St. Kilda, are all likely 30m above sea level, but the exact location of these sites is unknown, with the exception possibly being the spearhead found in the souterrain. The harbour of Village Bay is visible from throughout the glebe, the agricultural valley of the island where the burials were likely placed. The object found at Sligachean was recovered at less than 5m above sea level, but it is likely not its original area of deposition. Interestingly, the object was found less than 50m from a natural terrace/rise in the otherwise flat machair plain in the area (*fig. 123*). Furthermore, the findspot does not overlook the sea, but an inland sea-loch (Loch Cille Donnain).

8.1.7.6 Land capacity for agriculture

4.2: Tote; Sligachean

5.1: Eigg 1,2,3; Borge; Vallay; Ensay; Nisabost; Mangersta

5.3 Otternish

6.1: Cnip, Valtos

Table 3: Burial sites with provenance by land capacity for agriculture values (1-7).

All known provenanced burials occur on the land of arable use, and there is a strong correlation between burial and arable land. There appear to be no burials that were placed on what could be considered exclusively pastureland or the outfield. (6.2-7)

The majority of burial sites occur on arable land, valued at 5.1 by the James Hutton institute. 2 burial sites occur on some of the highest valued land in the area of study (4.2). Two burial sites occur at 6.1, the lowest, but these two grave sites are two of the richest and are found near large tracks of modern farmland.

8.2.1 Harbours & Landing-places

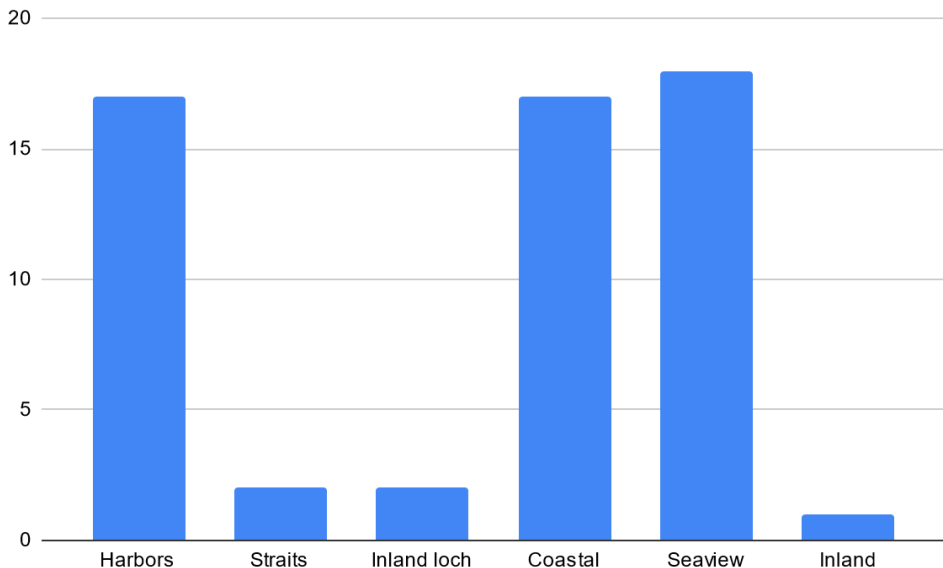


Figure 132: bar graph showing the relationship between Viking-period burial sites and marine features.

All except one of the burials are within 500m of a sheltered harbour, landing place, or bay (*table 2*). The artefact recovered was a surface find and may not represent a provenanced burial but was from a disturbed burial assemblage that was redeposited in the area of discovery by manuring.

8.3.1 Re-use

The majority of burials are in association with a pre-Norse monument, such as cairns, standing stones/stone settings, or burial sites. 9 burial sites have no known provenances and were left out of the analysis. Of the remaining 14 burial sites, 1 could not be associated with a pre-Norse monument. The highest number of these were either adjacent to a burial monument (4) and explicit re-use of a pre-Norse cairn or mound (4). 3 of the burials were adjacent to pre-Christian stone sculptures. While single examples adjacent to other pre-Norse monuments (an Iron Age ruined structure), a standing stone, a re-used souterrain, and a re-used Iron Age settlement mound are all present.

The burial sites of Skye and the Western Isles show a distinct landscape pattern: association with both arable land and a landing-place for vessels. The author has found the previous interpretations of burials in the Hebrides to be supported by the data. Harrison (2007) in particular shows that a typical Hebridean Viking-period burial is found on one side of a harbour, on arable land, at the threshold between agricultural land and beach. The data shows that with a few exceptions, this is largely the case in Skye and the Western Isles.

The dates of most burials cluster around the early 10th century AD, similar to a recent assessment of the dates of burials in Iceland by Vésteinsson (2020, p. 185), but dating Viking-period burials in Skye and the Western Isles is largely based on artefact typology and more data is required to investigate this possible similarity further.

There does not seem to be any significant differences in landscape between burials that are rich or richer than others. The burial at Nisabost, which perhaps could be seen as “poor” since the grave goods only consist of a knife and whetstone, did not differ in placement than burials with swords or oval brooches, which can be seen as richer. However, the overall lack of documentation for many burials, and the small number of burials with provenance, means that analyses such as this may not be showing the full picture.

Chapter 9: Viking Age hoards

9.1 introduction

A hoard can be defined as two or more objects, usually metal, deposited intentionally in a collective. Hoards of metal objects are known from Northern Europe since the Bronze Age (i.e. Bradley, 2000). Hoards in the Viking Age are diverse, but there is a tendency for the deposition of silver hoards, and hacksilver and coin hoards are the most common (Graham-Campbell, 1995). Hoards in the Viking Age can be classified as coinless hoards, coin hoards, or mixed hoards (Graham-Campbell, 1995, p. 46).

Research on hoards in the Viking Age has been suggestive of either storage or votive deposits, similar to the general debate about hoards throughout the Bronze, Iron, and

Medieval eras in British scholarship (i.e., Bradley, 2000). The landscape of hoards in the Viking Age has been suggestive, particularly in Ireland, of wealth, and borders between territories (Sheehan, 1995).

There are four hoards with provenance in the area of study. There is 1 hoard without provenance (1 from Skye) from the area of study that have been left out of this analysis, but are included in the appendix.



Figure 133: Viking age hoards with provenance in Skye and the Western Isles.

9.2.1 Dell Hoard

Placename: ON: Dalr (valley)

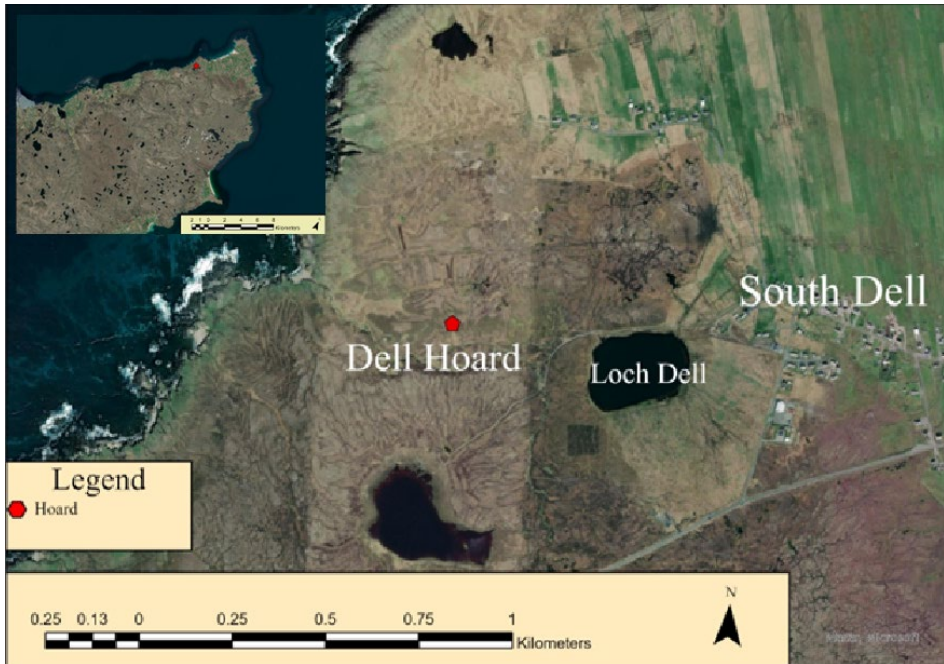


Figure 134: the Dell hoard and its environs.

Landscape:

The landscape of this hoard is bogland, ca. 400m southeast of the modern township of Dell. The area today is used for peat extraction. The area can be considered the outfield between the arable farms of Dell to the east, and Galson to the southwest. The author has noted that the findspot seems to occur at the centre of a triangle defined by three bodies of water, in a spot where one can see the ocean to the north, a stream to the south, and Loch Dhibadail to the southeast. This is perhaps intentional.

The place of the hoard in the outfield, at the border between two agricultural landscapes, suggests that it was perhaps placed at a boundary.

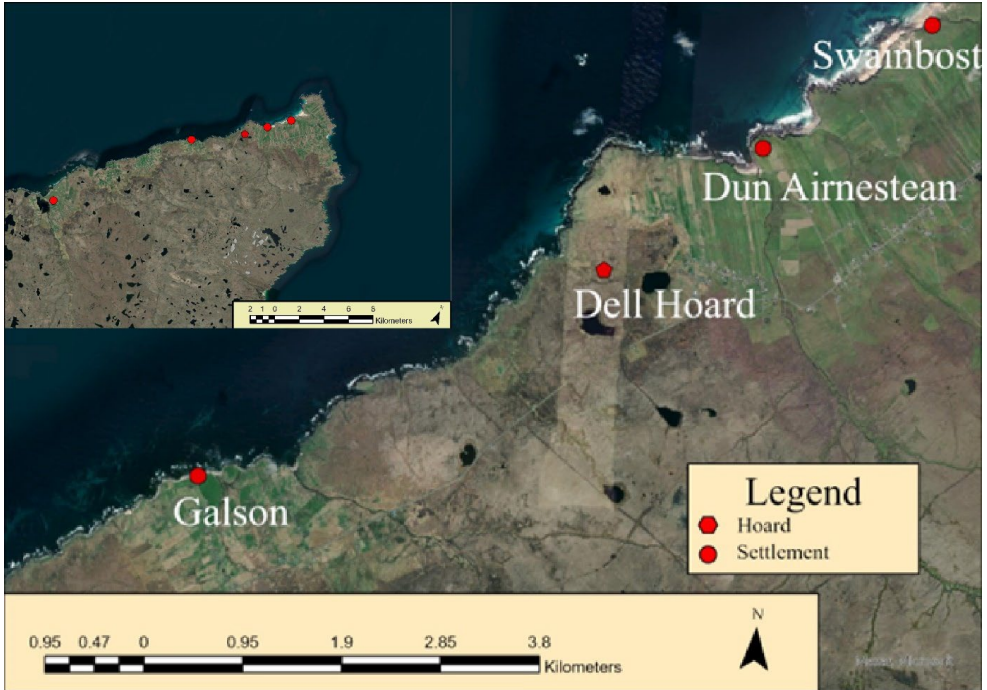


Figure 135: the moss hoard in its settlement context, with three Norse settlement sites labelled as Galson, Dun Airnestean, and Swainbost.

9.2.3 Lews Castle Hoard

Placename: Stornoway (ON: Steering bay)

Landscape

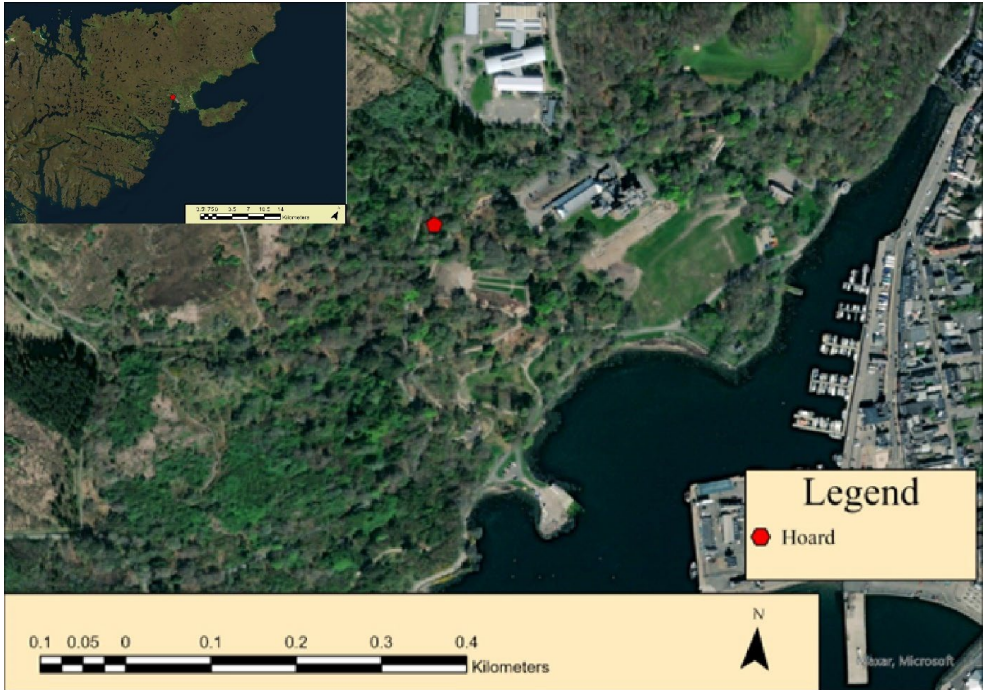


Figure 136: the location of the Stornoway hoard deposition.

The area today, where the hoard was found, is forested, and is within the Lews Castle grounds. It can also be seen as an outfield site, as the area does not appear cultivatable, overlooking the bay where primary agricultural settlement would have taken place.

9.2.4 Skye Storr hoard

Placename: Storr ON: (Big/great)

Landscape

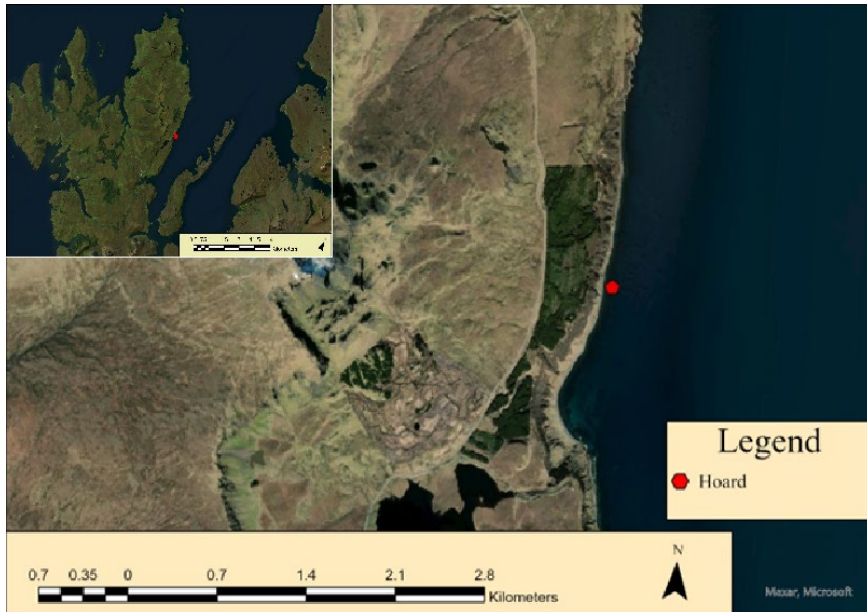


Figure 137: approximate location of the reported findspot of the Storr hoard, Skye.

The hoard was found on a small strip of rocky, sandy land after a steep escarpment just east of Storr Rock, Skye. The exact location is not known but is likely somewhere along the coast of Storr (fig. 137). The area is restricted and inhospitable. Besides shell-collecting, does not seem to have much use agriculturally, with the closest plot of arable land being at Bearraig, ca. 1.5km to the southeast. It has been suggested that its location near the Storr Rock ensured it was able to be retrieved (Graham-Campbell, 1995), though it does not appear that the Storr rock itself is visible from the likely area of deposition. Given its location along a restricted strip of rocky coastline, it can be said that the hoard was placed in a liminal area.

9.2.5 Orosay hoard

Placename: ON: Tidal island

Landscape:

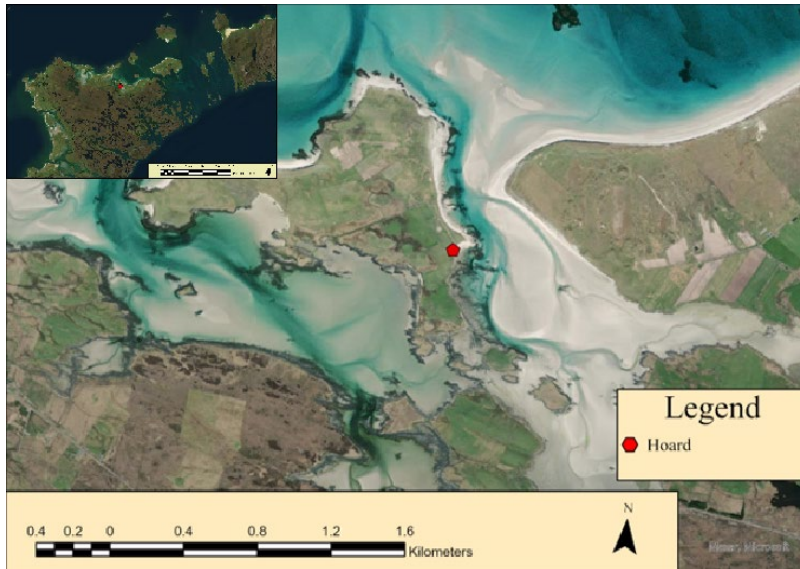


Figure 138: Orosay and the given findspot of the Orosay hoard, North Uist.

Orosay is a small island (approx. 500m x 500m) located in on the northern coast of North Uist. The island, despite its small size, is flat and arable, and today is connected to the mainland by causeways via two islets, possible at low tide. The hoard was found on the eastern side of the island, and the exact findspot is given as the shoreline, of the beach.

9.3 Summary of hoards

The Orosay hoard was discovered by shepherds digging for shells in the late 19th century, and the author is sceptical about the exact findspot. Gold hoards are rare in the Viking Age, however, and this appears to be the only gold hoard discovered in Scotland dated to the Viking Age.

The area was reported to have been centred at the east side of Orosay, where there is a landing place for a boat. It is the only hoard found at a harbour or landing place, and it is just a few meters southeast and downhill from the machair plain of the small island. It is the only hoard that has been found near the infield or land of agricultural potential; however, it was reported to have been found on the beach, so may still be considered an outfield find, even if the beach is rather narrow. This thus still can be considered an outfield find, albeit much closer to the

infield than the abovementioned hoards. However, there could have been significant coastal change in the area since the deposition of the hoard, and therefore, this interpretation is speculative.

Three of the four hoards with known provenances were found within liminal or outfield areas, while 1 was found on the boundary between agricultural land and the sea. None were found about known settlement sites. In the case of the Storr Hoard and the Dell Hoard, it is unlikely that there were any permanent Norse settlements within several hundred meters.

There is much difficulty in interpreting hoards, especially at a low number such as this dataset. The most likely interpretation is that the hoards were deposited at boundaries of property, due to the presence of the hoards at seemingly liminal or areas of borders.

Chapter 10 Stray Finds

10.1 Introduction

This chapter will place objects that can be classified as stray finds into their landscape context. This chapter aims to understand artefacts without archaeological context, and place them into a larger dataset. The objective of this chapter is to attempt to understand the findspots of stray finds in the Norse period.

A stray find can be defined as an artefact that cannot be connected to a known archaeological site, such as a settlement or a burial. Most stray finds are discovered due to erosion, animal burrowing, or other chance finds.

This chapter will discuss stray finds from Skye and the Western Isles dated to the Norse period. The objects used in the analysis will only include stray finds with provenance. Stray finds without provenance will be listed in the appendix but has been left out of the analysis.

10.2 Data

Name	Island	Type	Details	Landscape	Agri. Value	Maritime?
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Bay brooch	Skye	Brooch	Copper-Alloy, penannular	Bog, but arable land nearby	4.1	Harbour (500m) Undated Naust
Ashaig belt	Skye	Strap-end	Copper-alloy, Hiberno-Norse	Arable	5.1	Harbour (<50m)
Kilbeg	Skye	Coin	Silver, Ottonian	Arable (ploughed)	5.1	Harbour
Ringed Pin	Canna	Ringed pin	Copper-alloy	Arable	5.3	Harbour
Glass Bead	Canna	Bead	Glass, 9th-10th AD	Rough pasture	6.3	Coastal
Bog Butter	Lewis	Food storage	In wooden vessel	Bogland	6.3	No
Wood dish	Lewis	Dish	Alder wood	Bogland; ford of river Arnol	6.3	No
Mount	Lewis	Brooch/mount	Copper-alloy, Vendel period 8th AD	Rocky beach	6.1	Harbour/fjord
Trefoil brooch	Harris	High-status woman's brooch	Copper-alloy, 9th century AD	Sand dune system, arable	5.1	Double harbour; isthmus
Whalebone Plaque	Berneray	Cutting board/linen smoother	Whalebone (likely baleen whale)	Sand dune; machair plain	5.1	Harbour and beach
Ringed pin	Heisker	Ringed pin	Copper-alloy, 11-12th century AD	Arable	6.1	Harbour (600m)

Table 4: artefacts classified as stray finds with provenance in the area of study and their relation to landscape, including agricultural and maritime.

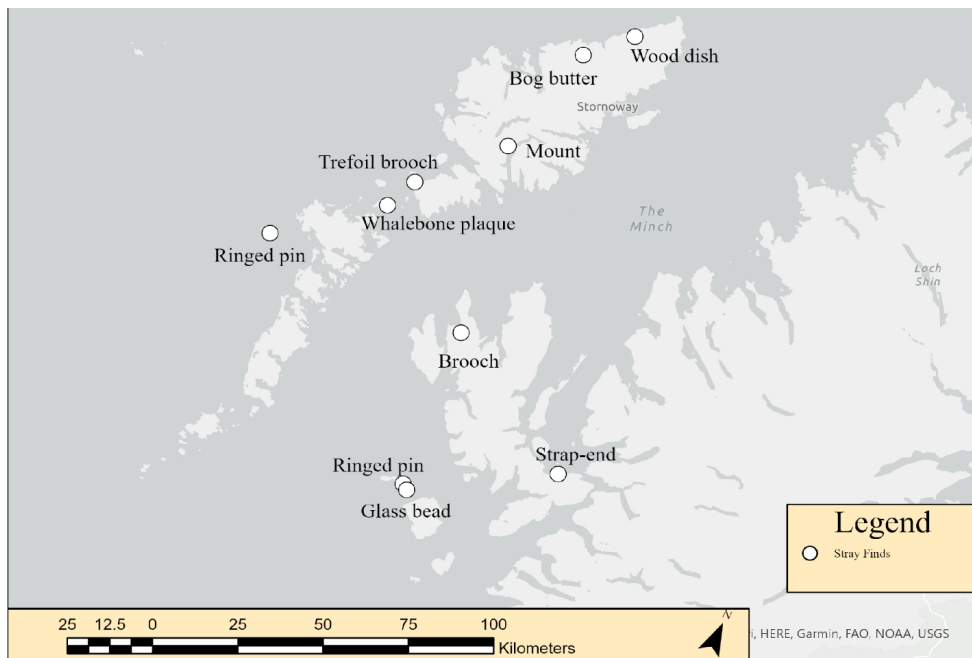


Figure 139: an overview of the findspots of stray finds with provenance in the area of study.

10.2.1 Skye

Bay Penannular brooch

Placename: E (bay)

Landscape: the findspot is circa 500m from the natural, sheltered harbour of Bay, Waternish, on Skye. The findspot was in a peat bog, and found ca. 1m deep. While the findspot was found in a bog, there is a large swathe of arable land to the west of the findspot, rated as 4.2 on the James Hutton Institute map for land capacity for agriculture.

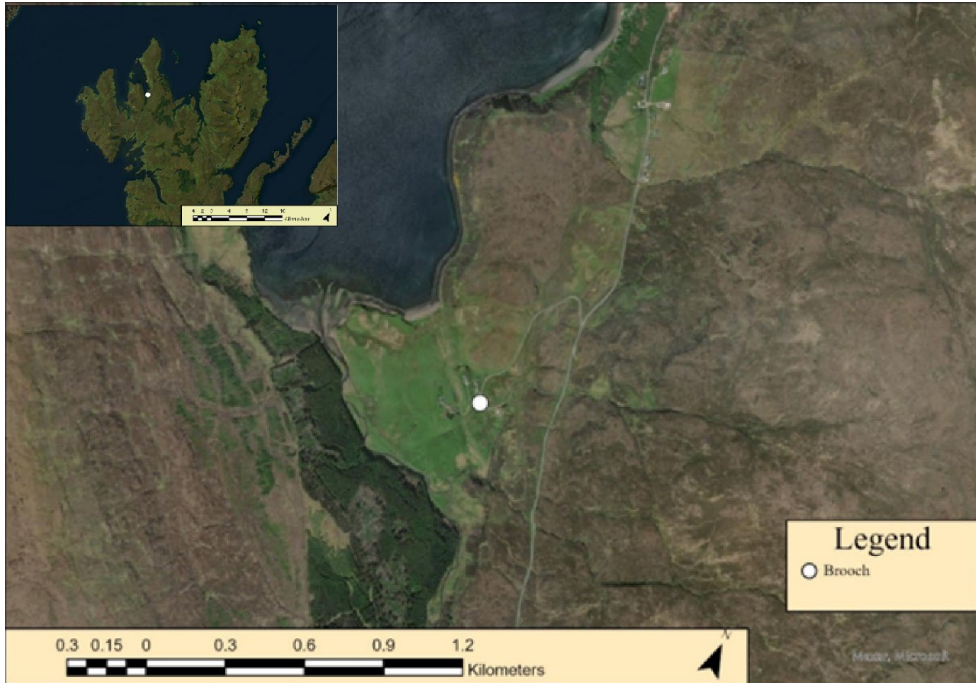


Figure 140: the Bay brooch in its landscape context.

Discussion

While findspots of metal objects in bogs are not uncommon deposits in the Viking Age, a single find of this brooch out of context is difficult to assess. Bay is a natural sheltered harbour, but the area that the brooch had been found in can be considered the outfield, lying several kilometres from the nearest tracks of arable land. No other finds were reported, but it is possible that this object was part of a hoard.

*Kilbeg coin*⁸

Placename: G (little church?) / Armadale farm (ON: Arm valley (Taylor, 2022: 8).

Landscape: This is a find from the Sleat peninsula on the island of Skye in Armadale, the exact location of the findspot is withheld due to the artefact being recovered by illegal metal detecting (Susan Kruse pers. comm. 2020). It is however was recovered from the ploughzone of the farm at Kilbeg. It is unlikely that this is the original findspot of the coin, because artefacts in the ploughzone are often moved to different farms during manuring, but would not have come from outside of the general area (Kruse pers. comm. 2020).

Discussion

As far as the author knows, is the only mainland European coin that can be dated to the Viking Age in the area of study. A coin of Ottonian minting is not unusual in Scandinavia. Whether or not this coin came directly from present-day Germany to Skye, or through Scandinavia or the British Isles, is unknown. This coin could be part of a hoard, or a loss at a settlement or elsewhere, but this is unknown due to the circumstances of recovery.

Ashaig belt strap-end

Placename: Either G (the ferry) or ON (Ash-bay), no current scholarly consensus.

Landscape: Ashaig has been discussed due to the presence of a shell midden that appears to be a Late Norse ironworking smithy. This is roughly 20m away from the findspot of the strap-end. Ashaig is a natural, sheltered harbour. Ashaig, according to local tradition, used to have a ferry that connects Skye to Applecross on the mainland.

The environs of the findspot are ca. 50m to tracks of land cultivated today, including the farmsteads of Ashaig and Breakish.

⁸ Findspot withheld; no map data produced.



Figure 141: the Ashaig strap-end in its landscape context.

Discussion

Due to similar strap-ends being found at ecclesiastical sites around the British Isles, Maldonado has suggested that this is likely from a burial (Maldonado, 2021, p. 67). The author agrees, and also adds that the findspot fits into a burial landscape pattern (at a natural sheltered harbour or landing-place, near or on fertile land), though without further evidence of artefacts or grave markers, this site is considered a stray find for the sake of this thesis.

10.2.2 Canna

Canna ringed-pin

Placename: Canna harbour (ON or G; E)

Landscape: The ringed pin was found on the north-western side of a headland (Rubha Carrinnis: Gaelic and ON: Cari's headland). The site is found to the east of the harbour (Canna

harbour, *fig. 142*), ca. 20m. The findspot of the ringed pin is just under the southeast corner of the stone wall of the 19th-century church. The findspot is less than 50m from cultivatable land, while the exact findspot is on land that appears to have been cultivated in the past. It is ca. 200m from the later medieval/modern sea-stack castle of Coroghan Mor.



Figure 142: the ringed-pin found at Canna harbour in its landscape context.

Discussion

The findspot of a ringed pin on a flat headland on one side of a natural, sheltered harbour, on an area of agricultural potential, and within 200m of later medieval elite

activity, is heavily indicative of a Viking-period burial site. Unfortunately, there is no further information about this discovery, and there is no mention of human remains or additional artefacts. While it is possible that Viking burial sites were chosen as places for later burial sites, the date of the church and site appears modern (late 19th century). Even so, there is

nothing else to indicate that this is a burial, and could still easily come from a settlement or represent a chance loss.

Canna glass bead

Placename: Ceann an Eileann (Gaelic – end of the island?)

Landscape: the findspot is ca. 50m away from the coast, which comprises of cliffs and steep embankments. The area around the findspot, and much of the island of Sanday is considered rough grazing, and not suitable for arable land use. The findspot is coastal and there are viewsheds over the harbour of Sanday, as well as the sea routes to Rhum and elsewhere in Sound of Canna (*fig. 143*).

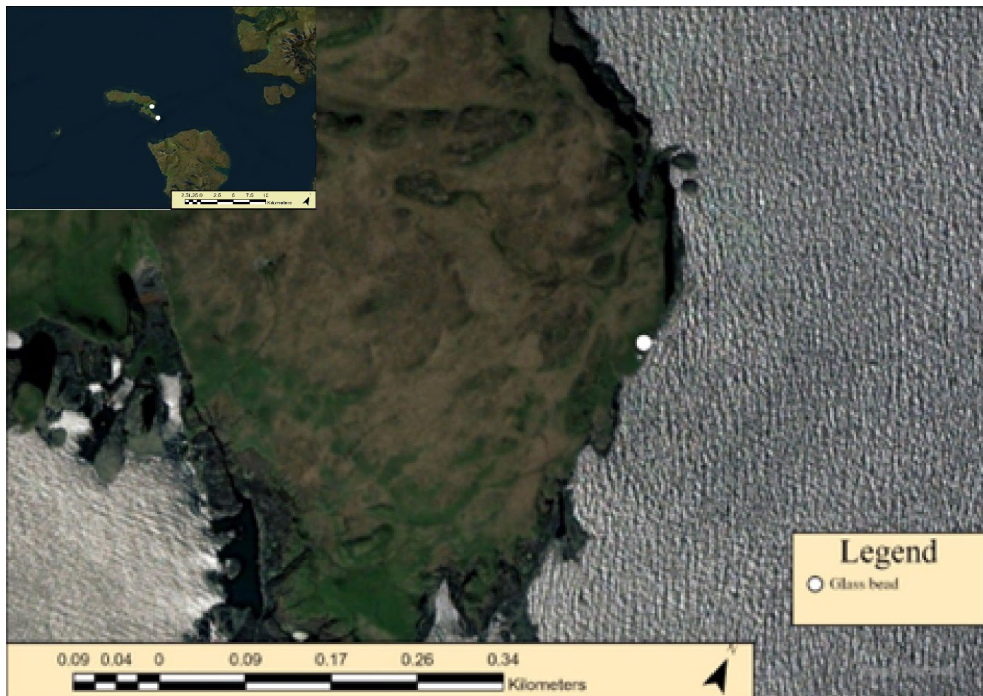


Figure 143: the glass bead in its landscape context.

Discussion

Beads are usually found in settlement or burial contexts. The landscape does not fit a model for Viking-period burials, being over 2km from a harbour or landing-place, and in the

outfield. It is possible, though, that a potential burial was connected to the sea route of the Sound of Canna. This is unlikely, however, and the lack of context along with any mention of artefacts or above-ground monuments makes this a very unlikely place for a burial. This find may be connected to movements throughout the outfield, as there are post-Norse shieling sites recorded in the general area, and likely represents a chance loss rather than connected to burial or settlement.

10.2.3 Lewis

Vendel-period mount

Placename: Loch Seaforth (ON: ship fjord).

Landscape: the findspot was at the Ath Linne hunting lodge, on a rocky strip of beach on Loch Seaforth. The land around the findspot is grassy and hilly, and mountainous ca.50m to the north and west. Loch Seaforth is sheltered and is known for being a proper fjord. The findspot has viewsheds southward down Loch Seaforth toward the Minch (*fig.144*).



Figure 144: the view southward from the findspot of the Vendel-period mount, showing the fjord and access to the Minch.



Figure 145: the Vendel mount in its landscape context.

Discussion

The find of an 8th-century Swedish Vendel-period belt stud is unusual and unique in the area of study. As far as the author knows, this is the single earliest Scandinavian artefact in the area of study. Its repurpose as a brooch is suggestive that it had been used later, and without proper archaeological context, it is unknown when precisely this brooch was deposited. It was found in an area that has not been archaeologically surveyed, but with high potential for Norse-period activity due to it resembling a proper Norwegian fjord system, including strips of arable land along with the loch itself (Murphy pers. commun 2018). Maldonado suggests that this is likely from a disturbed assemblage of a burial (2021, pp. 50-51). The author agrees, but without further examples or archaeological context, this is difficult to interpret as a burial site.

Wooden dish

Placename: Gleann Bragar (G: Glenn, ON: Bragar (borg)).



Figure 146: the Arnol wooden dish in its landscape context.

Landscape: the dish was found in a peat bog less than 10m to the southwest of the river Arnol, in Gleann Bragar. The area can be considered bogland. On the OS map, the findspot appears right where a ford is marked crossing the river. The findspot of the dish is circa 6m away from the nearest tracks of arable land in Bragar to the north.

Discussion

Two undated stone-built shieling sites are within 200m of the findspot. The findspot is well within the outfield, and while approx. 6km from the infield is not very far, the presence of the undated shieling sites is evidence that the area was used for outfield activity. This find, though lacking archaeological context, is certainly evidence of outfield activity in the 10th century AD of Lewis. Finds of wood are unusual due to

general decomposition, making it difficult to compare to other sites. Its location next to a ford across the river may be of some significance.

Bog Butter

Placename: High Borve (E: High, ON: Borve (Borg))

Landscape: the findspot is in a bog circa 50m northeast of the Abhainn Bhuirgh river, just on the 40m contour line. The findspot is ca 600m arable land at Borve, ca 700m from High Borve, and circa 2km from Fivepenny, all modern agricultural townships.

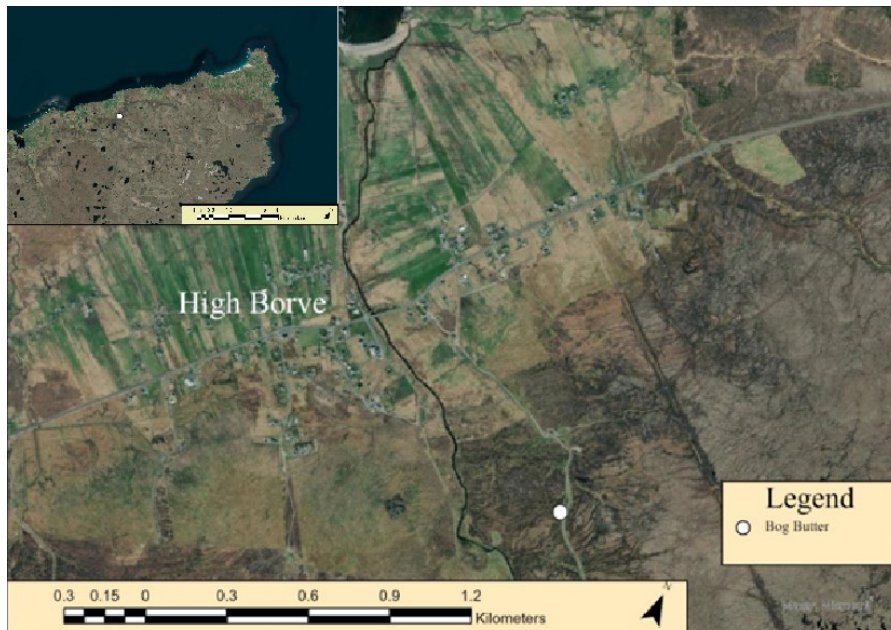


Figure 147: the find of bog butter in its landscape context.

Discussion

This is the only findspot of bog butter dated to the Norse period in the area of study. Most bog butter finds in the area of study were discovered in the 19th century, and lost before radiocarbon dating became available (Canmore IDs: **128035**, **128062**, including one found 2.5 km southeast of High Borve near Ballantrushal, **4280**). Bog butter appears to be a unique

phenomenon occurring in Ireland, Scotland, and England, with finds ranging from the Bronze Age to the modern period, for example, a find dated to the 19th century at Kilmaluag, Skye (Earwood, 1992, p. 235). Since there was no tradition of making bog butter in Scandinavia (Walaker Nordeide pers. commun. 2018), the storage of dairy products in bogs on Lewis during the Norse period is evidence of either a continuation of non-Norse practices, evidence of non-Norse Gaels from Scotland or Ireland bringing this practice with them to Norse Lewis, or evidence of these practices being adopted by the native Norse.

10.2.4 Harris

Trefoil brooch



Placename: Chaipavel (G)

Figure 148: view of the harbour at Scarista from the approx. findspot of the trefoil brooch, facing north-eastward. Photo @ the author.

Landscape: the findspot is centred in the sand dunes of Chaipavel, but due to it likely being used as a target for shooting, the original location is unknown. It is likely, however, that it had not travelled

too far. The dunes of Chaipavel are arable, and the location was likely either on the isthmus of Uidh, or somewhere on the Toe head headland. Some 500m to the southwest of the findspot are potential Viking-period cist burials, but these are unexcavated.



Figure 149: the trefoil brooch in its landscape context.

Discussion

Trefoil brooches are known from a variety of contexts, particularly burials and hoards, though settlement is also possible. The find was without archaeological context, and it is unknown just how far the artefact had moved before being found by the landowner. However, due to the corrosion imprint of the textile on the reverse, which could have only happened due to prolonged contact with a decomposing textile, this is very likely from a Viking-period burial. This is still considered a stray artefact because of a lack of archaeological context.

10.2.5 Harris Sound

Berneray whalebone plaque

Placename: Ruisigarry (ON: meadow-enclosure)

Landscape: the artefact was found from an eroding cliffside over the beach at Ruisigarry. The location of the artefact appears to have come from an area of machair (*fig. 150*). The land is arable and has a high potential of 5.1 on the Hutton scale. The site of discovery overlooks a sandy beach.



Figure 150: the whalebone plaque at Ruisigarry in its landscape context.

Discussion

This is likely evidence of an eroded burial, due to the presence of whalebone plaques primarily in burial sites (Dalland & Owen, 1999, p. 80). There is, however, a few examples of whalebone plaque fragments from farm mounds in Northern Norway and as loose finds from the urban settlement of Ribe, Denmark (Isaksen, 2012, pp. 117,

125), and a further example from an excavated layer at Birsay, Orkney (Graham-Campbell, 1994, p. 216). The find at North Uist was considered a stray find for this analysis rather than evidence of a burial site. Since no other archaeological sites are dating to the Viking Age in the vicinity, it is not possible to determine if this is from a settlement or burial, though a burial is likely. Eva Isaksen argues that the density of whalebone plaques in North Norway is indicative of an origin of production (Isaksen, 2012, p. 100). Moreover, this is presence of elite activity in the area, due to the rarity and prestige these whalebone plaques are associated with, including the most prestigious or powerful family in a region (Isaksen, 2012, p. 110).

10.2.6 North Uist

Ringed pin (Heisker)

Placename: Cladh Na Bleide (G and ON?)



Figure 151: the ringed-pin found at the chapel on Heisker, in its landscape context.

Landscape: the ringed pin was found in the modern burial ground of Cladh Na Bleide, on the eastern side of the island of Ceann Ear, part of Heisker (also called the Monach islands). The ring was found on a hillock 10m above sea level, ca. 200m from the harbour of Port Ruadh. Ceann Ear is a small island, 2km by 1km, and is arable (machair, 5.1 on the James Hutton institute agricultural potential scale).

Discussion

This ringed pin from the burial ground at Heisker has been considered a burial site by past scholarship, for example, Graham-Campbell & Batey considered it as potentially the pin of a shroud for a Christian burial (Graham-Campbell & Batey, 1998, p. 76). However, there is no evidence of human remains. The author, therefore, considers this site a stray find.

Chapter 11 Data analysis of settlement location

11.1.1 Introduction

This section of the thesis examines the natural landscape such as arable land, harbours, and isthmuses and their importance to Norse settlement in the Scandinavian homeland and beyond. This section will discuss the relationship between the natural landscape and the siting of Norse settlement sites.

11.2.1 Land Capacity for agriculture

Sites for agricultural potential

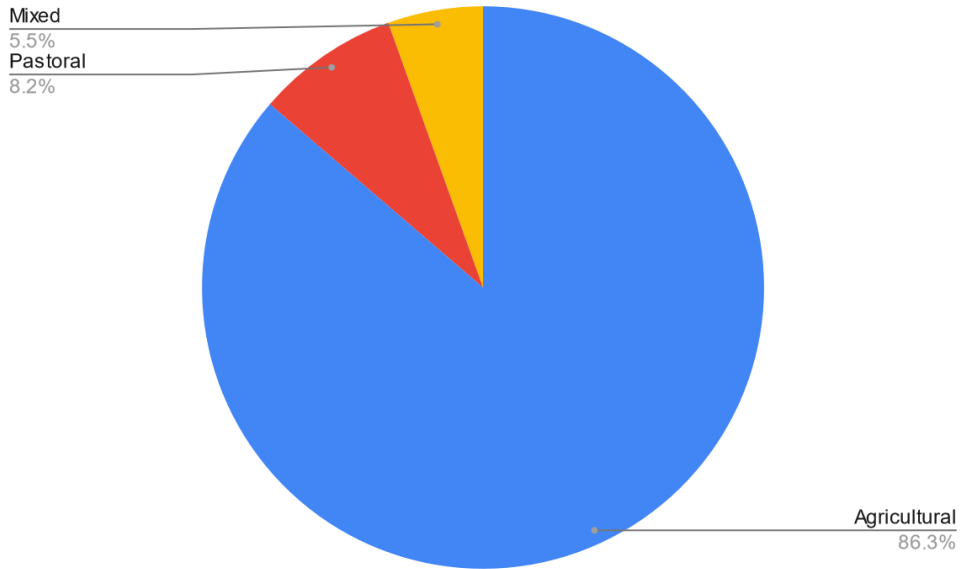


Figure 152: Percentage of sites found on arable land, pastoral land, or at the boundary between arable and pastoral.















In order to assess Norse exploitation of agricultural land, the author has utilized available data for the Land Capacity for Agriculture. Using the James Hutton institute for soil for agricultural potential maps, each Norse settlement site was evaluated by its agricultural potential, based on criteria from the soil survey conducted in 1981 (Bibby et al., 1991). A similar analysis was conducted by Crawford for the Papar Project, which assessed each ecclesiastical site on Pabbay islands using the John Hutton Institute system. Crawford found that the ecclesiastical sites on Pabbay were placed upon areas roughly 5.1-5.3, suggesting that the ecclesiastical settlement sites were primarily agriculturally based (Crawford, 2005).

The Norse settlement sites were mapped using ArcGIS, and compared to the Land Capacity for Agriculture Soils map at the scale of 1:250,000. The data was accessed through the mapping service of the website of the James Hutton Institute (<http://map.environment.gov.scot>). The Norse sites were determined by a point of approximately 5m. One challenge in using this system is that Norse settlement sites, especially settlement mounds, can have a large spread of anthropogenic activity that is difficult to pinpoint on a map. Moreover, many of the sites were found at boundaries of soils assessed at different levels, some of them drastically. A site, for example, could be located in

soil assessed at 4.2, but land assessed at 6.3 could be within 500m. Therefore, the data were determined to be associated with a particular land assessment.

All of the sites that appear to be settlement sites were included in this analysis. The sites from St. Kilda were left out due to data for the archipelago being unavailable.

Legend (Bibby et al., 1991):

	1 - Land capable of producing a very wide range of crops.
	2 - Land capable of producing a wide range of crops.
	3.1 - Land capable of producing consistently high yields of a narrow range of crops and/ or moderate yields of a wider range. Short grass leys are common.
	3.2 - Land capable of average production though high yields of barley, oats and grass can be obtained. Grass leys are common.
	4.1 - Land capable of producing a narrow range of crops, primarily grassland with short arable breaks of forage crops and cereal.
	4.2 - Land capable of producing a narrow range of crops, primarily on grassland with short arable breaks of forage crops.
	5.1 - Land capable of use as improved grassland. Few problems with pasture establishment and maintenance and potential high yields.
	5.2 - Land capable of use as improved grassland. Few problems with pasture establishment but may be difficult to maintain.
	5.3 - Land capable of use as improved grassland. Pasture deteriorates quickly.
	6.1 - Land capable of use as rough grazings with a high proportion of palatable plants.
	6.2 - Land capable of use as rough grazings with moderate quality plants.
	6.3 - Land capable of use as rough grazings with low quality plants.
	7 - Land of very limited agricultural value.
	Urban

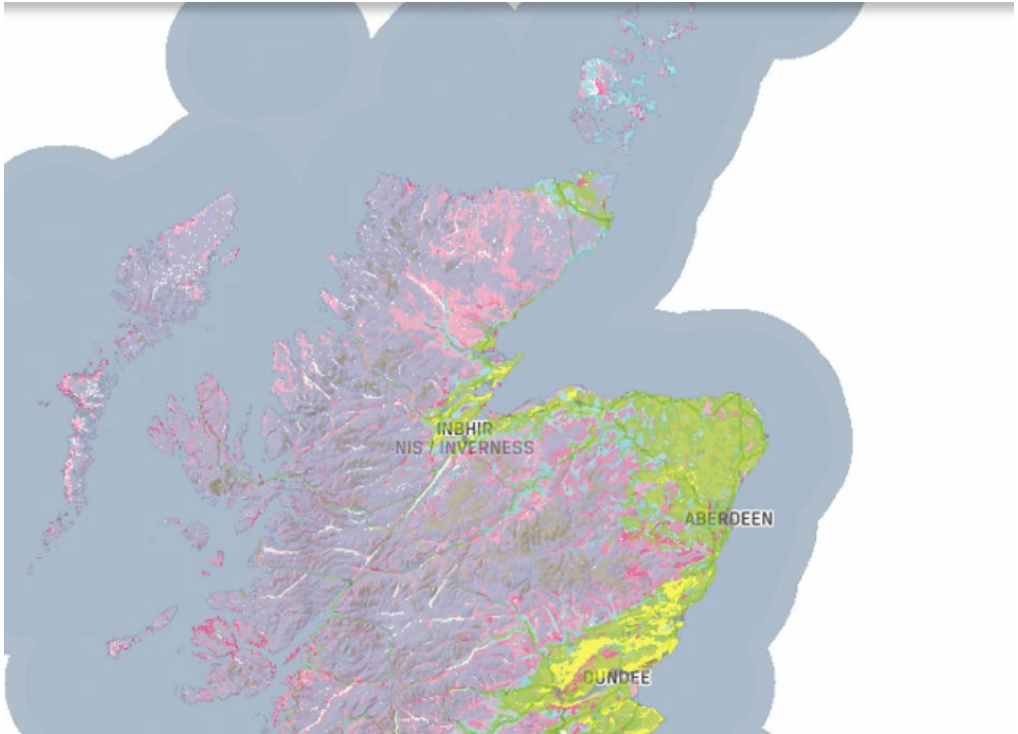


Figure 153: Land Capacity in Scotland, @ the James Hutton Institute.

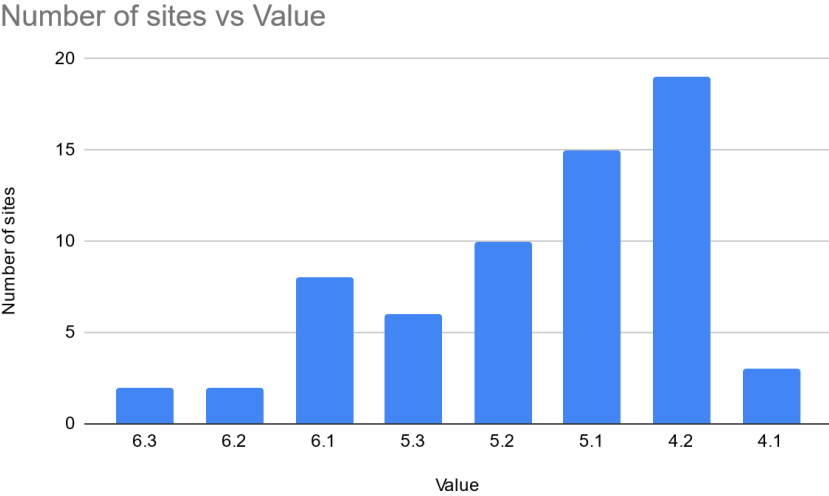


Figure 154: The Land Capacity value for Norse settlement sites.

The results show a high tendency of Norse settlement activity to be found at areas of high agricultural potential in the area of study, with 4.2 being the highest. The category that most settlements sites can be assessed to is found to be on area classified as 4.2, with 5.1 and 5.2 being the next most common.

This placement of Norse settlement sites on areas classified as 4.1 and 4.2 are of great interest, particularly because they are relatively uncommon in the area of study overall, just being found on Northern Lewis, Skye, and South Uist. There are farms classified as 4.1 that has not produced archaeological evidence of Norse activity, such as some areas around Stornoway, along with a majority of Skye, neither of which have much evidence for archaeological activity dating to the Norse period, but placenames suggesting Norse settlement likely can show that these areas too were of importance and is likely the result of a lack of survey or identification.

Norse elite or central magnate halls may not be found on the best agricultural land, but there may be other important factors, such as local centrality or control of a strategic harbour and sea-route (Sindbæk, 2011, p. 117). However, good agricultural land was likely sought out as it is paramount to sustenance, and its control in the hands of a dominant power, as seen in Western Norway (Dommasnes, Gutsmedl-Schümann, & Hommedal, 2016).

The data are however suggestive that the Norse likely sought out to exploit the best possible arable land, as has been postulated by Dockrill & Bond at Jarlshof on Shetland (Dockrill & Bond, 2014). Given that the land had already been exploited in the pre-Norse period, it is possible that the Norse assumed control over existing flourishing, rich farmsteads, and acquired local knowledge about where the best soils would have been, both for agriculture as well as grazing.

11.3.1 Settlement site elevation

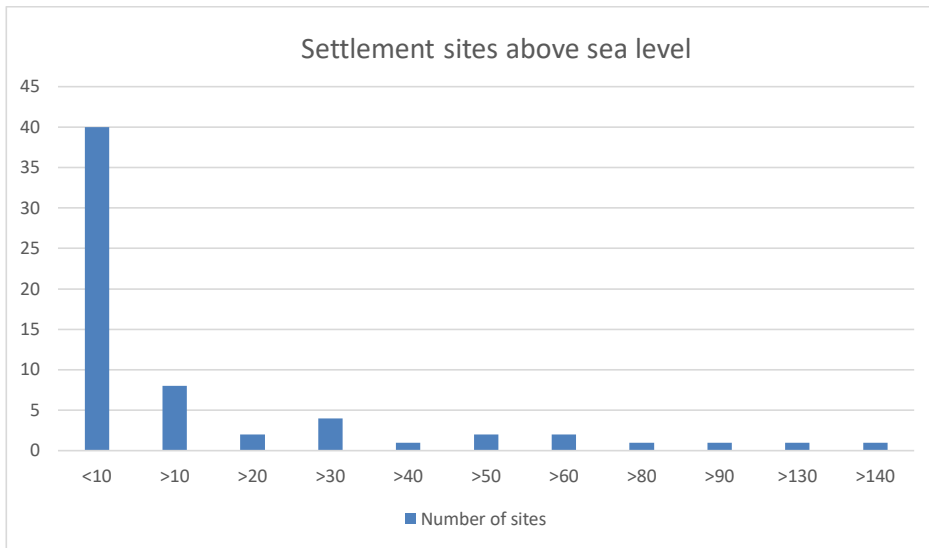


Figure 155: settlement site elevation in meters above sea level.

The elevation of each site was measured in order to determine a distinctive pattern in the elevation of sites its potential significance. Each settlement site was measured by its OS grid reference and displayed in *figure 155*. Numbers were rounded up or down. Settlement sites without exact locations (1 total number of sites: Cnip, Lewis) were left out of the analysis.

The data show that the majority of settlement sites are found 10m below sea level, represented by a great majority of 40 settlement sites. A further 9 settlement sites can be found at 10m above sea level. 2 sites were 20m above sea level, 4 sites were 30 meters above sea level, 1 40m above sea level, 2 sites 50m above sea level, and 2 sites 60m above sea level. A further one site each were, 80, 90, 130, and 140 meters above sea level.

From this data, there is a clear preference for Norse settlement sites to be found less than 10 meters below or greater than 10m above sea level. This is likely in part due to agricultural land in the Hebrides tending to be coastal, and the majority of these sites are found on arable land, and are associated with agricultural activity (86%, see *fig. 152*).

Sites found occupying Iron Age brochs tended to be higher above sea level than most, with Dun Carloway, Dun Cuier, and Dun Beag all occupying natural rises 40 to 60m above sea level. There are unique in the archaeological record of the region in that they all display a similar landscape pattern and are discussed further in the section **11.7.1**.

A small number of sites are found in areas greater than 60m above sea level (4 sites in total). Each of these sites are found far inland and can be associated with shieling activities, but one site that has been interpreted by past scholarship as a shieling occurs at 20m above sea level (Dun Torrin), and another, Alt Christeal, is at 30m above sea level. This is discussed further in the outfield section (11.11).

The elevation data shows a tendency for settlement sites to be between less than 10m and above 10m but usually 20m below sea level. This overall may display a coastal bias in the data. Areas along the coast tend to be less stable due to coastal erosion, and these areas are often arable and therefore ploughed, leading to a much higher number of sites identified due to survey and rescue excavation. The elevation data therefore reflects this pattern of discovery and identification, but the exploitation of arable crops is reflected in the archaeological record and it can be assumed that arable land, or the infield, is where a majority of permanent settlement took place.

11.4.1 Settlement site distance to freshwater

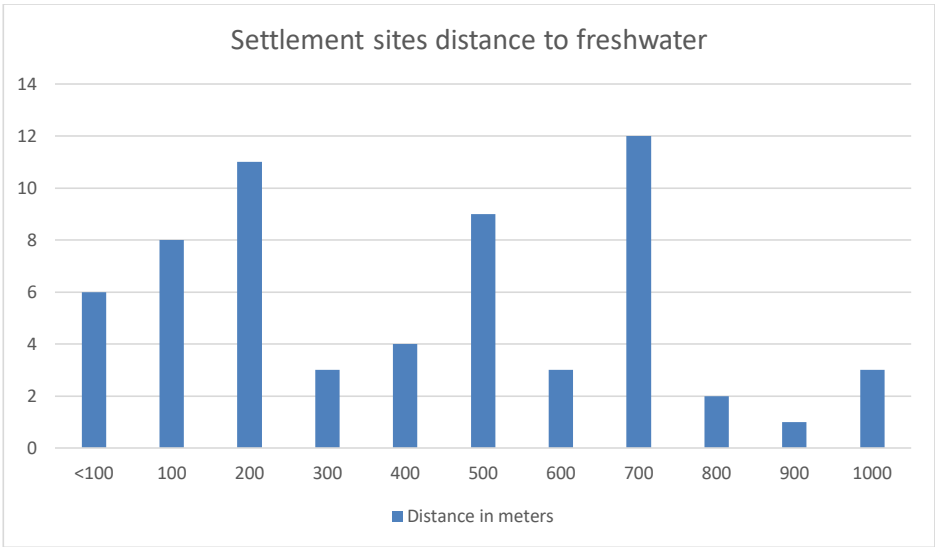


Figure 156: distance between settlement sites and freshwater.

Freshwater is vital for both humans and animals. In addition to drinking water, freshwater is used to bathe, clean, cook, and for various crafting activities such as smithing. Freshwater can furthermore be a source of fish, with trout and salmon present in many of the freshwater lochs and rivers of the Hebrides (Murray, 1973, p. 82), but are not present in significant quantities in fishbone assemblages from Bornais (Sharples, 2019), so it is unclear if the exploitation of freshwater fish was important in the Norse period. Freshwater is furthermore important for supplying seacraft and is a staple of a harbour. Finally, freshwater has certain cultural values, with freshwater bodies such as lakes, rivers, or streams serving as borders between farms in Scandinavia (Lund, 2008), and rivers and bogs being often areas of ritual activity.

The distance from each settlement site to a source of freshwater was measured. Each site was assigned an OS grid reference and then measured centred on that grid reference to an approximate location of freshwater.

The highest number of sites are found within 700m of a water source, the second largest amount is 11 sites within 200m. There are furthermore 9 sites within 500m, 8 sites within 100m, 6 sites within under 100m, 4 sites within 400m, 3 sites within 200m, 3 sites within 600m, 2 sites within 800m, 1 site within 900m, and 3 sites over 1000m or more.

Sources of freshwater were determined using data available from openmaps.co.uk. The sources of freshwater were either freshwater lochs (lakes) or streams, and in one case, a well. There are some problems with this sort of analysis, and they are as follows:

1. The measurement from settlement site to location of water is semi arbitrary: it is not possible to know where exactly freshwater would have been collected. There may have been designated collecting areas that are not possible to determine.
2. Sources of freshwater could have changed over the centuries, with streams or lochs drying up, water tables rising or falling, streams rerouting, water channels could have been altered or rerouted by humans due to irrigation systems, and so on. Moreover, there could have been wells or springs not visible or identified.

That being said, some patterns can be determined. The vast majority of settlement sites can be said to be within 1000m of freshwater, with only 3 sites being found more than 1km from a freshwater source. There appears to be a preference for settlements to be within at least 700m, with no stark difference between 200m and 700m in terms of number of sites. Journeys to and

from the water source of no more than 700m would not have been arduous and would have likely taken place daily. Moreover, the majority of sites are found in relatively flat or undulating areas and thus fetching water would not have been strenuous.

There are 3 sites that are not within 1000m of a water source, though it must be stressed that sources of freshwater may not be visible or detectable today for various reasons as mentioned above. A 1000m return journey to and from a water source would not have been strenuous or required much prior planning. The exception is perhaps the shieling site at Ben Gunnaraigh, Barra, some 1.3km from the closest identifiable water source, which occurs in a mountainous area. It is however a very likely shieling site, and the needs of freshwater would have been different than a permanent settlement site in an arable location.

11.5.1 Settlement sites and landing-places for seacraft

A place to land a boat, while important for a maritime-oriented culture which relied on the sea for sustenance in addition to trade and travel, is not the only important factor in siting a settlement.

Some anchorages, bays, inlets, harbours and landing-places were likely used during the Norse-period as they are today. The information gathered is mostly from the recent Sailing Direction series, along with some secondary sources that seem to have drawn upon local traditions and placenames, such as Crawford (2005).

Settlement sites were considered in relation to a landing-place, bay, inlet, harbour, or anchorage if they are within a 1000m radius.

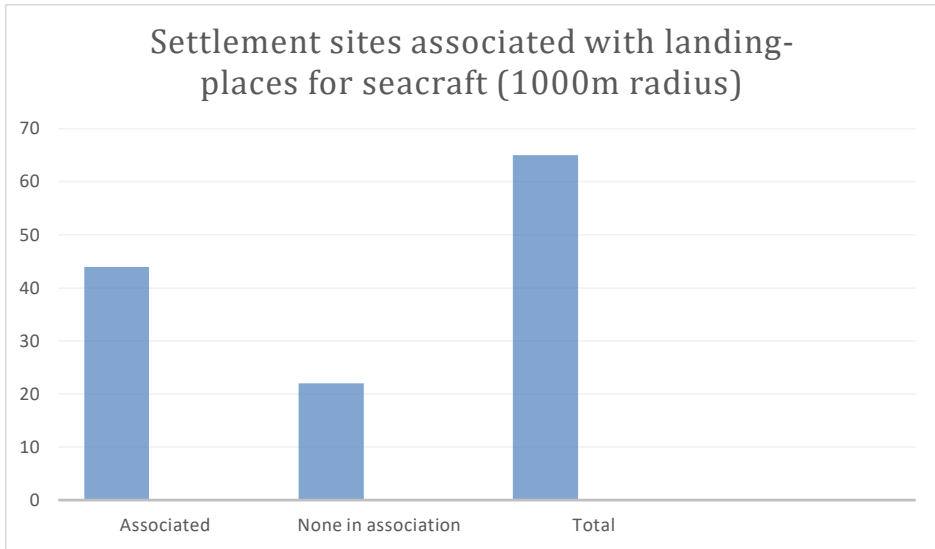


Figure 157: Number of settlement sites in association with places to land seacraft (1000m).

Site	Type	Landing-place	Distance	Reference
Swainbost	Norse midden	Inlet	100m	Modern vessel stations
Airnestean	Norse settlement	Inlet	150m	Modern vessel stations
Galson	Norse settlement	Bay	400m	Evalm 2018
Barvas	Norse settlement	Bay	600m	Modern naval infrastructure
Bragar	Norse settlement	Port	50m	Modern port

Arnol	Norse settlement	Port	200m	Modern port
Dun Carloway	Norse re-use of broch	Anchorage/Bay	ca. 800m	Admiralty Map 1963
Bostadh	Norse settlement	Inlet	50m	Thoms 2004
Cnip	Norse settlement	Bay	ca. 100m	Modern slipway
Carinish	Norse settlement	Bay	100m	Lawrence 2017
Baible/Eye Aiginish 1 & 2	Norse settlement	Bay	ca. 500m	Crawford 2005
Nisabost	Norse settlement	Isthmus/landing-places	Coastal	McCallough 2000
Scarista	Norse settlement	Inlet	200m	MacLeod 2013
Norton	Norse settlement	Bay	100m	Modern vessel stations
Uidhe	Norse settlement	Bay/isthmus	ca. 200m	Modern vessel stations
Taransay I	Norse settlement	Bay/isthmus	ca. 200m	Modern vessel stations
Taransay II	Norse settlement	Bay	600m	Placename (ON)
Manish	Norse settlement	Bay/isthmus	600m	Placename (ON)
Killegray	Norse settlement	Inlet	400m	Harrison 2008: 485
Pabbay	Norse settlement	Inlet	100m	Modern naval infrastructure
Scaalan Port Nan Long	Norse settlement	Inlet	200m	Crawford 2005
Sheabie	Norse settlement	Harbour/anchorage	900m	Modern harbour
The Udal Cul Na Muice	Norse settlement	Bay/modern port	50m	Modern port
Seidinish	Norse settlement	Anchorage/sound	Coastal	Lawrence 2017
Garry Iochdrach	Norse re-use of IA structure	Double anchorage	100m	Serjeantson 2013
Eilean Maliet	Norse re-use of IA structure	Anchorage/bay	700m	Lawrence 2017
		Anchorage/bay	Coastal	Lawrence 2017

Hougharry	Norse midden	Bay	Coastal	Modern naval infrastructure
Baleshare	Norse settlement	Landing-place	Coastal	Submerged jetty
Borve	Norse settlement	Landing-place/bay?	400m	Auger 2022
Rosinish	Norse settlement	Bay	100m	Lawrence 2017
Grimsay	Norse re-use IA			MacKenzie 2005
	wheelhouse	Harbour/anchorage	200m	
Bornais South	Norse settlement	Anchorage	700m	Modern naval infrastructure
Bornais	Norse settlement	Anchorage	400m	Modern naval infrastructure
Baghasdal 1	Norse settlement	Anchorage	300-500m	Modern naval infrastructure
				Pre-modern naval infrastructure
Smercleit 1	Norse settlement	Bay/inlet	600m	
	Norse re-use IA			Modern naval infrastructure
Alt Christeal	wheelhouse	Bay	300m	Admiralty Map 1776
Torrin	Norse shieling	Anchorage	200m	
	Norse metalworking site	Bay/anchorage	200m	Admiralty Map 1776
Village Bay	Norse settlement	Bay/anchorage	Coastal	Lawrence 2017
Gerraidh Skur	Norse Settlement	Bay/anchorage	500m	Lawrence 2017

Table 5: list of sites in association with a landing-place for seacraft (within 1000m).

The majority of Norse settlement sites occur at bays, inlets, anchorages, harbours, and other places suitable to land a boat (*table 5*). The data for this was compiled through a combination of sources dealing with modern and traditional navigation in the islands, as explained in the methodology section (5). Settlement sites can be determined on the basis of domestic artifacts recovered, usually in conjunction with a farm mound or midden, or some other domestic structure, though some of the material was collected from ploughed ground surface without a clear association of a mound.

Association with a landing-place, bay, anchorage, or harbour (1000m) is demonstrable for 44 settlement sites in total (11.5.1). A remaining 22 are not within 1000m. However, this corpus includes the settlement sites for South Uist, which as noted above as well as by Angus (2018), may have had a different maritime situation in the Norse period. Besides South Uist, sites that appear to be inland (greater than 1000m) can be observed throughout the area of study, particularly on Barra, where these sites may be associated with shieling activity as discussed later in this thesis.

Lewis

All sites on Lewis can be said to be in association with natural, sheltered harbours. It must be said, however, the western coast of Lewis is considered by sailors to be somewhat dangerous for vessels after traveling east from Loch Roag (Lawrence, 2017). Traditional boating, particularly for fishing, can be attested to since the early modern period around Ness. The majority of sites are coastal, with some sites right at the edge of the ocean and suffering from severe erosion and wave damage (such as at Galson). The site that is furthest from the coast is Barvas (circa 750m). There are 5 identified Norse settlement sites in East Lewis, all around the Stornoway area. While no settlement site can be associated with Stornoway harbour, Stornoway would be the first safe anchorage when voyaging south from Cape Wrath (Lawrence, 2017), and its Old Norse placename (translated as *Steering Bay*) also signifies importance of harbours in the Norse period.



Figure 158: Swainbost in its maritime setting.



Figure 159: Airnisteán in its maritime setting.



Figure 160: Galson in its maritime setting.



Figure 161: Barvas in its maritime setting.



Figure 162: Arnol in its maritime setting.

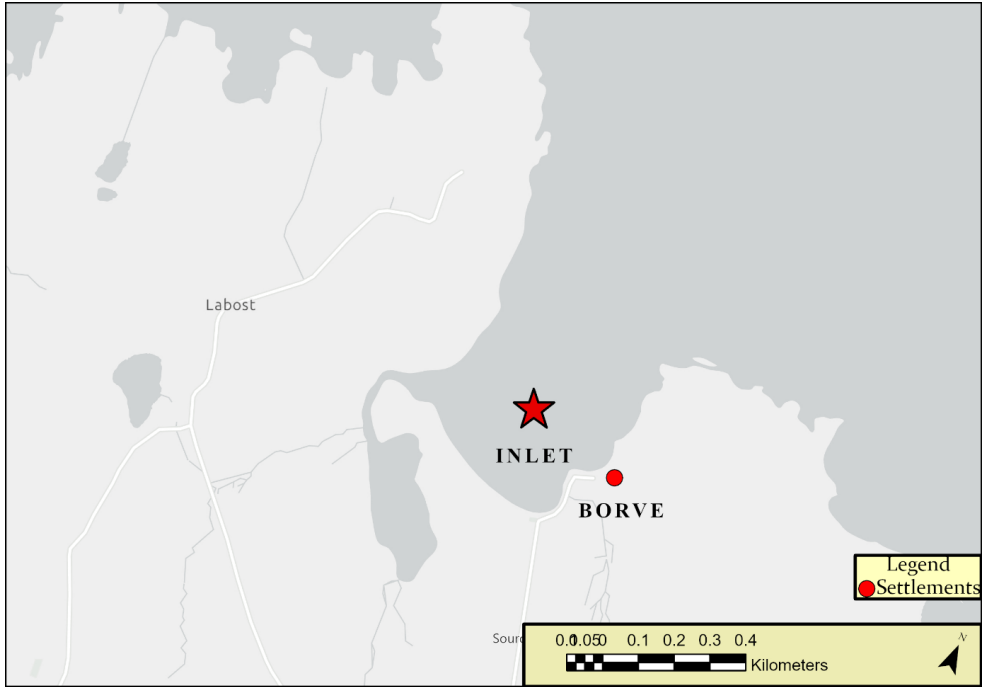


Figure 163: Borge in its maritime setting.



Figure 164: Dun Carloway in its maritime setting.

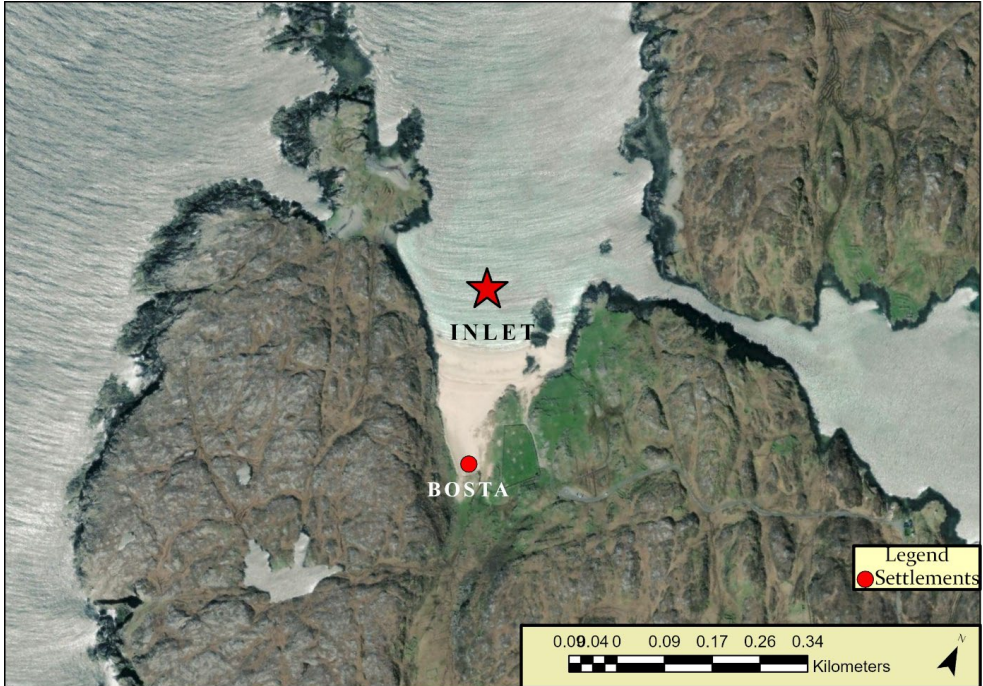


Figure 165: Bosta in its maritime setting.



Figure 166: Cnip settlement in its maritime setting.



Figure 167: the settlement sites around the modern city of Stornoway in their maritime setting.

Harris

All of the Norse settlement sites discovered on Harris, though few in number, can be shown to occur in relation to bays, inlets, isthmuses, and other natural maritime features related to the landing of seacraft (*table 5*). The use of the interior of the island by the Norse can be designated on the basis of placenames and likely for shielings other outfield activity, but archaeological identification is generally lacking. There are two Norse settlement sites on Taransay, both located within 600m of harbours. The two are also at areas with the placenames that designate “isthmus”, though it must be cautioned that Taransay 1, does not appear to have a geographical isthmus.



Figure 168: Nisabost in its maritime setting.



Figure 169: Scarista in its maritime setting.



Figure 170: Norton in its maritime setting.

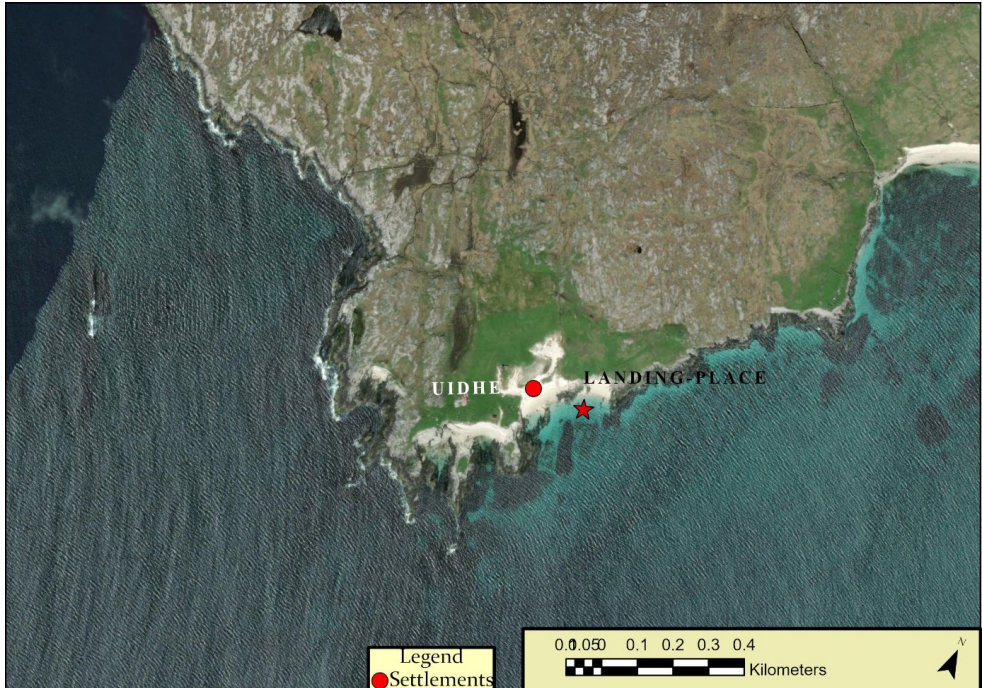


Figure 171: Uidhe in its maritime setting.



Figure 172: Taransay II in its maritime setting.

Harris Sound

All of the sites on the islands in the Harris Sound are associated with sheltered inlets capable of landing seacraft (*table 5*). Two sites appear at the isthmus of Norton (Uidhe and Norton on *table 5*).

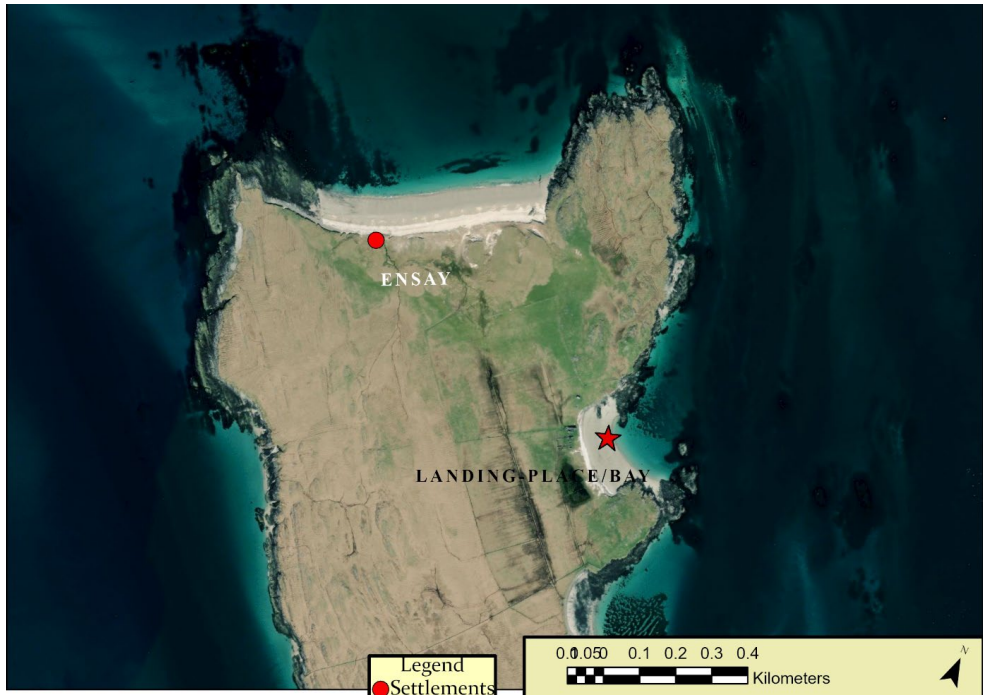


Figure 173: Ensay in its maritime setting.

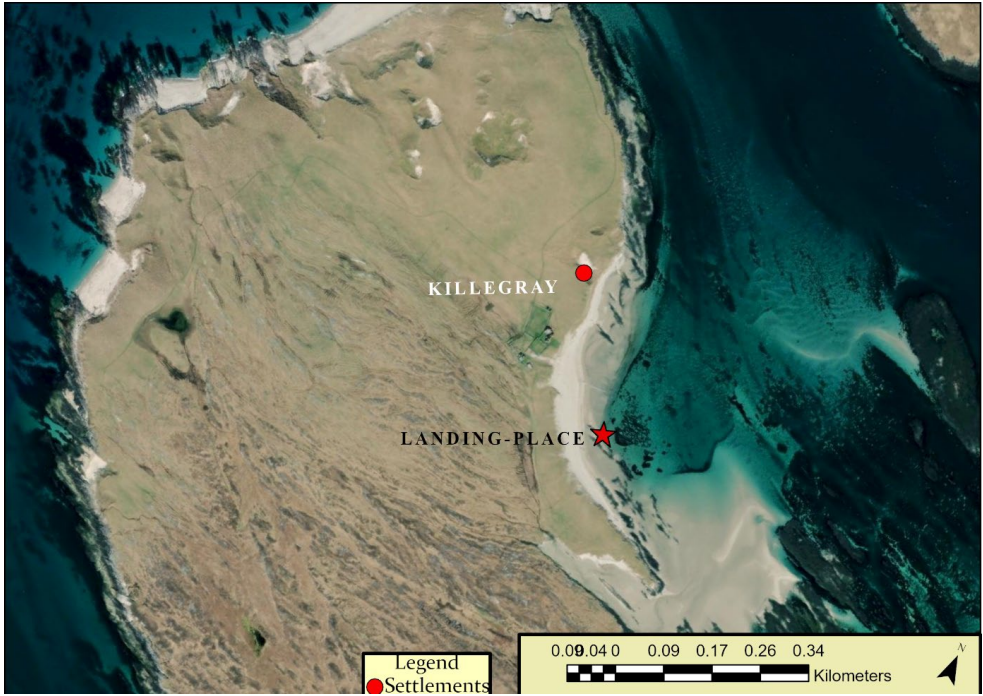


Figure 174: Killegray in its maritime setting.



Figure 175: Sheabie in its maritime setting.

North Uist

All of the settlement sites of North Uist appear at natural, sheltered harbours. The Udal possesses a double-harbour. To the northwest of the Udal, there are undated boat nausts noted by the author that do not appear to have been recorded in Canmore. There is a cluster of Norse domestic activity around the Sound of Vallay, where it is only navigable (and likely just by smaller craft) at high tide. Finally, the site of Baleshare has a submerged jetty (Canmore ID: **10009**), signifying its potential as a harbour. The north coast of North Uist is known for being dangerous for navigation, and traditionally, the portage between Loch Euphort and Bernera was used to avoid the Sound of Harris (McCallough, 2000, p. 243).

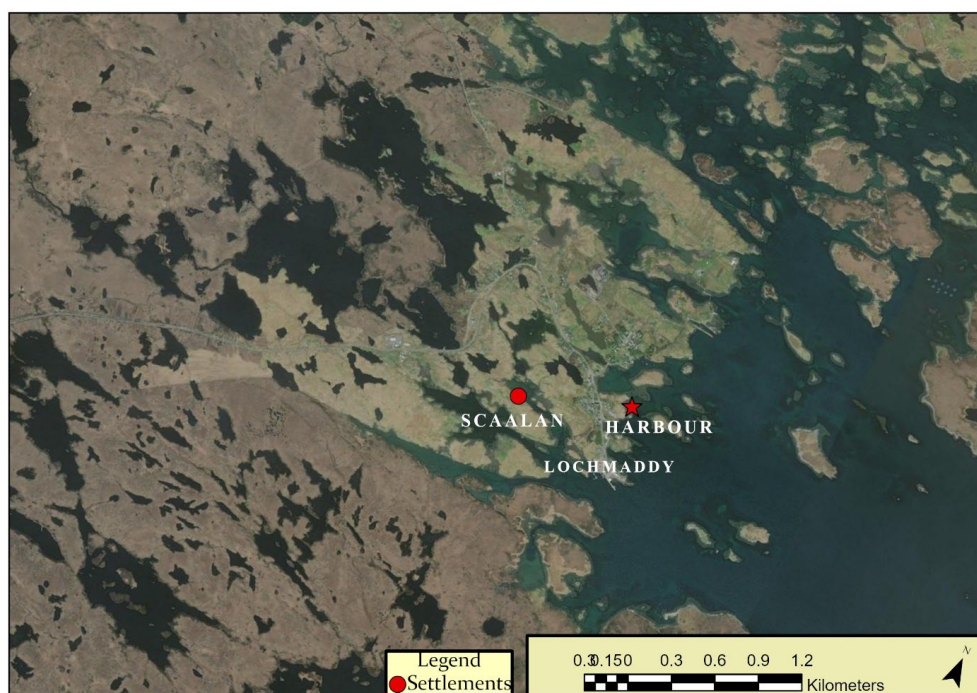


Figure 176: Scaalan in its maritime setting. Lochmaddy, a modern harbour and ferry terminal also represented.



Figure 177: Port Nan Long in its maritime setting.



Figure 178: The Udal in its maritime setting.



Figure 179: The settlements around Vatersay and the Sound of Vatersay in their maritime setting.



Figure 180: Hougharry in its maritime setting.



Figure 181: Baleshare in its maritime setting.

Benbecula

The evidence from Benbecula is meagre, but each site is associated with a landing-place for seacraft. One site occurs on the machair plain in the west at Borve, the other two are in the east of the island, including one on the tidal island of Grimsay, which possesses a small jetty and naust that may be contemporary with either the Iron Age or the Norse period of the wheelhouse site (MacKenzie, 2005). The Grimsay island is within a zone with many anchorages and two harbours, at Kallin and St. Peter's (Lawrence, 2017, p. 58).



Figure 182: Grimsay wheelhouse in its maritime setting.

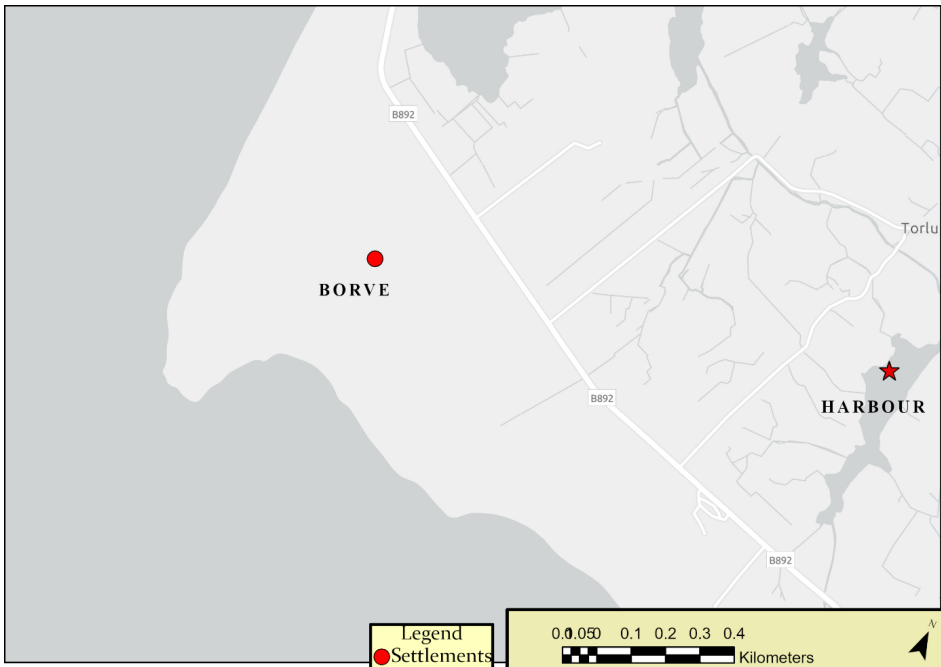


Figure 183: Borve (Benbecula) in its maritime setting.



Figure 184: Rosinish in its maritime setting.

South Uist

As noted above, South Uist has a different maritime situation than the rest of Skye and the Western Isles. Its agricultural area, the western coast, is coastal but without many places to land seacraft safely, with just two anchorages at Ardvule and Orosay (table 5). Its east coast possesses natural, sheltered harbours in the form of sea lochs, which likely served as harbours in the Norse period due to the presence of maritime ON placenames, such as *hafn* present in Loch Aioneart (Maclaren in Parker Pearson, 2012, p. 92). Four sites are in relation to harbours, though it is likely that the settlement mound cluster Bornais is in relation to the harbour, even though it is ca. 1400m to the northeast (table 2). Moreover, there may be a substantial Norse settlement mound adjacent to the island of Orosay, underneath a modern church and graveyard.



Figure 185: Baghasdal in its maritime setting.

Barra

Just one of the archaeological settlement sites on Barra appear coastal, and only one can be said to be in association with a landing-place for seacraft, that is, a modern slipway (table 5).



Figure 186: Alt Christeal in its maritime setting.

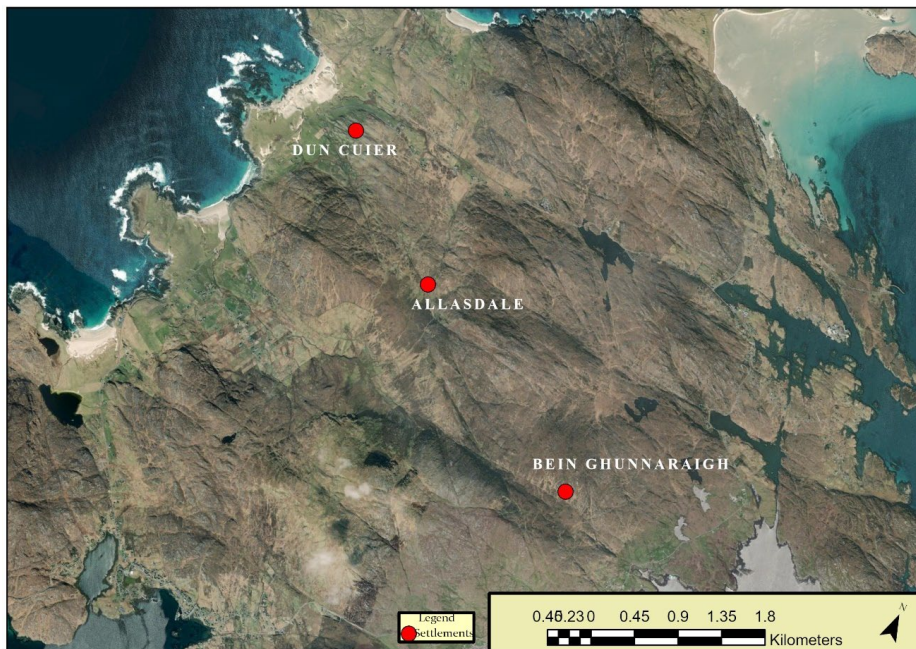


Figure 187: Three settlement sites on Barra that occur more than 2km inland. Bein Ghunnaraigh has been previously interpreted as a shieling site.

The two Norse settlement sites are both in relation to Village Bay, a natural, sheltered anchorage and bay on Hirta (Village Bay and Gerraiddh Skur on table 5).



Figure 188: The two settlement sites on Hirta in their maritime setting.

Skye and the Small Isles

Skye and the Small Isles only possesses three sites dated to the Norse-period that can be found in association with a place to land a seacraft. All three of these sites are on the island of Skye. Dun Beag, a broch site, seems to be located along the inlet centred around three places of maritime interest (*fig. 189*). The Ashaig metalworking site is located near the bay of Broadford (ON: Broad-fjord), along with being located near a traditional landing for a ferry to Applecross on the mainland. Home Farm is located at the modern city and harbour of Portree, and while the evidence for Norse settlement is ephemeral, its location near Portree shows activity at this important and excellent naturally sheltered harbour during the Norse period.



Figure 189: Dun Beag in its maritime setting.



Figure 190: Home farm in its maritime setting. Portree, a modern city and harbour, also represented.



Figure 191: The Ashaig metalworking site in its maritime context.

Summary

The majority of settlement sites occur at landing-places for seacraft: inlets, bays, sheltered anchorages, harbours, and modern ports. It is rare that any settlement sites could be found more than 1000m away from a natural topographical place to land a vessel. While this may be expected, given the maritime environment of the Hebrides and the maritime culture of its settlers, there are some variables here:

1. *Sampling.* A good deal of settlements produced finds of Norse pottery because of coastal erosion.
2. *Space.* A Norse settlement would be located on flat, agricultural land, of which the coasts of the Hebrides often provide, particularly along the western machair plains of the Outer Hebrides.

There are also some considerations with analogies to other areas of Scandinavian settlement. In west Norway, settlement sites tend to take place far up the coast,

roughly 600m from the harbour (Dommasnes, Gutsmedl-Schumann, & Hommedal, 2016). In Iceland, settlements seem to take place around inner harbours, some 600m away in the Viking Age, and moved toward the coast in the early medieval period (Wilken et al., 2016). From the surveys and excavations of Skye and the Western Isles, the settlement sites were mostly placed very close to the harbour, and these settlement site locations did not seem to change until the post-medieval period, e.g., the movement to the blacklands in the post-medieval period (Sharples, 2005, p. 196).

In Western Norway, for instance, high-status or elite settlement sites such as magnate farmsteads tended to take place deep within the fjord system – the exception to this seems to be Avaldsnes (Kruse, 2017). Topographically, there are similarities between the west coast of Scotland and West Norway (Kruse, 2017), though this can be viewed more on a macro-level: the *Nordvegr* and the Minch are comparable when viewing the two as arteries of travel. West Norway lacks the extreme difference of high and low tide, and the fjord system is all together much calmer and safer for naval travel than Western Scotland (Walaker Nordeide pers. comm. 2018).

There are indications that the sites on coastal areas were large, occupied for a long period of time, and probably represent high status or magnate sites. The Udal, for instance, is likely the highest status or elite settlement site on North Uist, even if the excavator, Ian Crawford, may have overstated its importance. The site is located between two anchorages, no more than 200-300m from either on the east and west (*fig. 178*), and perhaps is the site of an early Viking Age overwintering camp (Raffield, 2016, p. 10)

Many of these Norse sites are multiperiod as well, and have Iron Age precursors. While some Norse sites do not seem to have been built over a pre-Norse, Iron Age site (i.e., Barvas, site 4), the majority of Norse settlement sites are overlain pre-Norse predecessors. Often, these sites are not excavated, and it is difficult to say just how long the gap between the Iron Age and Norse periods are. It is quite possible, however, that the Norse sought out pre-Norse sites to settle, due to pre-Norse agricultural settlement sites often consisting of settlement mounds, and this effected the landscape pattern, which in turn would explain the discrepancy between placement in the landscape in the Hebrides and Northern Isles.

The data overall shows a preference for Norse settlement sites to be within 1000m of a place to land a boat. Due to the nature of the data where many settlement sites are undated, it is

difficult to extrapolate a deeper analysis of some of the sites. Many of the sites, for example, appear on small islands and on the coast, such as Killegray. The author suspects some of these sites may be specialized fishing sites, but without excavation, this remains speculation.

Some settlement sites are known to be elite residences due to excavation, namely the settlement sites of Bornais and the Udal. Both of these sites are in association with important maritime features. Bornais is found at one of two summer anchorages on the west side of South Uist, and is possibly linked to the eastern sea-loch through portages (5.6.2). The Udal possesses two anchorages, on each side of its peninsula (*table 5*). Their locations may be of maritime strategic importance and will be explored further in this thesis.

Some unexcavated sites may be in association with secondary maritime topographical features, and they will be explored in the following subsections.

11.6.1 Isthmus and portages

An isthmus is a long, narrow stretch of land between two bodies of water. Isthmuses can be found all throughout the Hebrides, and were likely some of the first natural features to be recognized by Norse sailors as important features of the maritime landscape. This is due for the ability for Norse ships to be hauled by land over isthmuses, cutting down travel time by sea by avoiding longer sea-voyages, and/or avoiding dangerous stretches of the sea-ways (Brøgger & Shetelig, 1950; McCullough, 2000). Isthmuses and portages were both important aspects of the Norse maritime landscape both in Scandinavian and the Norse North Atlantic (McCallough 2000; Crawford 1987). Beyond the Viking Age, the medieval Swedish and Russian states vied for power over the isthmus of Karelia (Lind, 2004, p. 7). Isthmuses were likely sought after for control during the colonization of Scandinavian Scotland (Crawford, 1987, p. 24).

Some important and well-known portages in the Scandinavian homeland include Spangereid, Norway, Kolhavn, Denmark, and at Drageset, near Birka, Sweden (Solberg, 2003, p. 296), and the Mavis Grind on Shetland (Fellows-Jenson, 2016, p.

17). In the Hebrides, many of these routes have been identified, from Norse times to historical times (McCallough, 2000).

From a placename perspective, portages could be identified through both names derived from Old Norse, and post-Norse Gaelic. *Eidh*, *Uidh*, and *Aig* are derived from the Old Norse word, *eið* (MacBain, 1922). The Gaelic word for a portage, *Tarbert*, which means portage, is found throughout the Hebrides (Caldwell, 2014), such as at *Tarbert*, *Harris*, the modern capitol settlement of the island.

In the past scholarship, placename scholars have proposed *Tarbert* as a pre-Norse survival, or loanword into the Norse period (summarized by Caldwell, 2014). This led to an interpretation that indicated a survival of Picts or pre-Norse Gaels stationed or settled at portages. The implication was that this would explain why the word *Tarbert* is found at some portages but not others, as well as the Gaelic-speakers being used as manual labour, unloading cargo and hauling boats over the portages. Caldwell has called into question that this word is pre-Norse, however, and has argued that the word cannot be shown to be pre-Norse (Caldwell, 2014), which would in turn explain why the word did not entirely replace the ON *eið*.

McCallough has argued for the presence of portages in the Hebrides on the basis of placenames and geographical features (2000). In my area of study, he has identified them on Lewis (*Aiginish*), *Harris* (*Tarbert*), North Uist (*Loch Euphort*), South Uist (*Loch Skipport*), Skye (*Loch Tarbert*), and *Canna* (*Loch Tarbert*). That is not to say that he has identified all of them, however. Through placenames, geographical features, and local traditions, there are additional portages in my area of study at *Uidhe*, *Harris*, *Uidh*, *Taransay*, and *Uidh*, *Vatersay*. These names likely indicate Norse portages (Crawford, 1987; MacBain, 1922). This section will just focus on portages that have had Norse archaeological activity linked to the portage – such as on the isthmus itself, or at one or another end of the portage.

11.6.2 Isthmus sites

The isthmuses would have been strategic points of the sea-scape, capable of cutting down travel time and avoiding dangerous passes of the sea. In the pre-industrial era, portages formed important townships that relied on both the trade and hauling of ships, such as at *Tarbert*, *Harris*, and *Uidh*, *Vatersay*. In Norse Scandinavia, settlements at isthmuses likely played a similar roll. A passage tax, for instance, could be extracted (Walaker Nordeide pers. commun 2018). Moreover, these settlements at isthmuses could have served as trade hubs,

since cargo would have anyway had to have been unloaded while the vessel was taken across the isthmus (McCullough, 2000, p. 45; Mowat, 2007, p. 78).

In the area of study, there are likely settlement sites placed on or close (less than 20m) next to isthmuses. It can be said that there is definite activity at the isthmuses of portages, at Taransay (site 32), Uidhe (site 31) and Aiginis 1&2 (site 18-19). In the case of Aiginis, it was placed on the east side of the isthmus, where the Eye peninsula begins. On Taransay, it was placed to the northwest side, whereas on the Northon, nearly central on the peninsula. Given that there may have been other factors involved in the physical placement of settlement sites – these sites were likely multipurpose, participating in agriculture, fishing and other activities – for example, the sites could have all been placed on top of pre-Norse settlement sites. Of the three sites, only Aiginis is clearly a multi-period settlement mound on the basis of artefactual recovery, though the site at Taransay 1 is likely multi-period as well. It could be that the exact physical location of the site could have been placed where the older settlement was. There could have been other factors as well, such as wind-direction, but this is beyond the scale of this thesis.

Further interpretation is hindered by the lack of excavation conducted at these settlement sites on isthmus. Aiginis in particular seems to be an extensive and rich mound, possibly encompassing two mounds, with items of personal ornamentation, and worked steatite, found in the vicinity. Moreover, it is likely that other Norse activity lie underneath the modern urbanized town of Tarbert, Harris, or the abandoned 19th century settlement at Uidh, Vatersay. It is possible to posit that these settlement sites were placed at isthmuses in order to control the flow of sea traffic throughout the Hebrides, or at least, were specifically placed at the isthmuses.

11.6.2.1 Uidhe, Harris

This isthmus is less than 500m in width, connecting the sound of Harris with the sound of Taransay. Crossing the isthmus must be done at high tide, since on the eastern side of the isthmus, there is a span of mudflats during low tide. Nevertheless, if one were to cross the isthmus, they would avoid rounding the toe of Harris to the northwest, avoiding some 10km of coastline.



Figure 192: The portage at Uidhe, Harris.

11.6.2.2 Taransay – Loch Na Uidhe

The placename Uidhe, present in both the loch on the southern side of the isthmus, as well as on land directly to the east (*Uidh*), is evidence of a portage. The isthmus is circa 300-400m in width.

To cross the isthmus at Taransay would save approx. 5km of travel time, both north and southwards (my estimation).



Figure 193: the portage at Taransay.

11.6.2.3 Aiginis 1 & 2

The placename Aiginis is derived from ON *eið*, meaning isthmus. McCallough has identified the isthmus as a portage (McCallough, 2000). The mounds at Aiginis, though unexcavated, demonstrates that the Norse placed settlement sites at strategic places along the sea-routes on these portages. This may represent early Norse settlement, where elites sought control of portages and sea-routes.



Figure 194: the portage at Aiginis.

11.6.3 Sites at one end of a portage

11.6.3.1 Ceardach Rudh, Baleshare, North Uist

The portage that begins at Loch Euphort would end north of the Norse settlement site at Baleshare, some 200m north. The portage crosses the middle of North Uist east from Loch Euphort and terminates 200m north of Baleshare, avoiding the often-dangerous northern coast of North Uist (McCallough, 2000, p. 243). The site also possesses a submerged jetty (Canmore ID: **10009**), while undated, is an indicator that the site was/is capable of supporting maritime activity. The Norse settlement, though poorly understood, is found on the Western end of the portage.

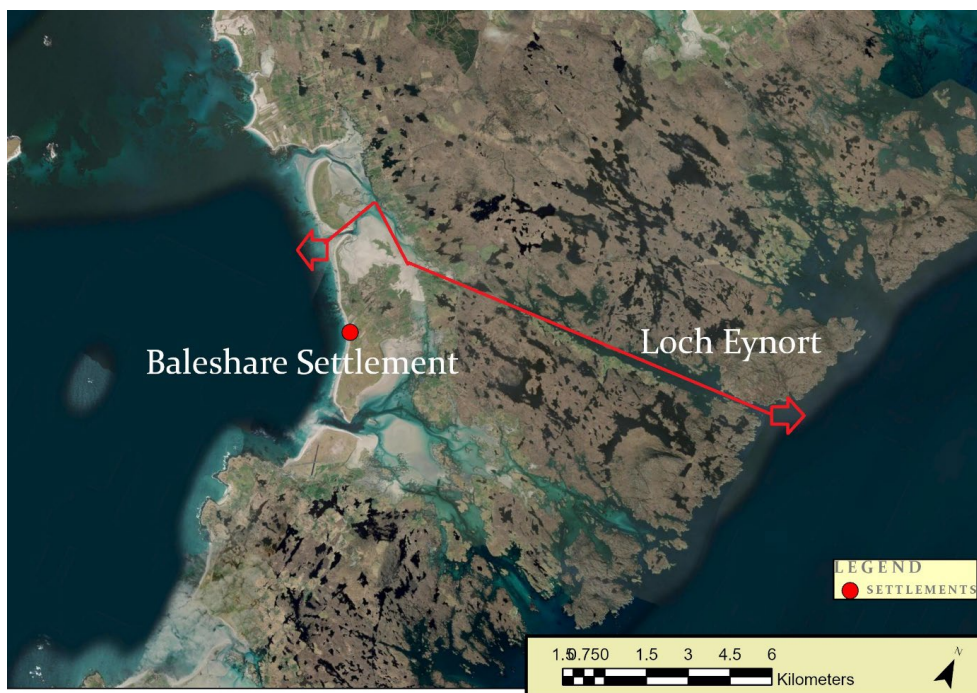


Figure 195: the portage from Loch Euphort to the Atlantic.

11.6.3.2 Machair Mheanach, South Uist

One portage route exists at Loch Skipport (ON: ship fjord), from the east of South Uist to Loch Bee (McCullough, 2000, p. 250). Probably not coincidentally, along the machair between Loch Bee and the Atlantic is the highest concentration of Norse settlement mounds on South Uist besides Bornais. The portage from Loch Bee to Loch Skipport does not appear to involve the necessity to haul a boat over land, though the author does not know if the narrow channel between the two lochs is man-made or natural. The land at Machair Mheanach is assessed at the highest to 4.1. Given the dense cluster of mounds, high capacity for agriculture, and its place on a portage, Machair Mheanach likely represents a primary settlement site on South Uist.

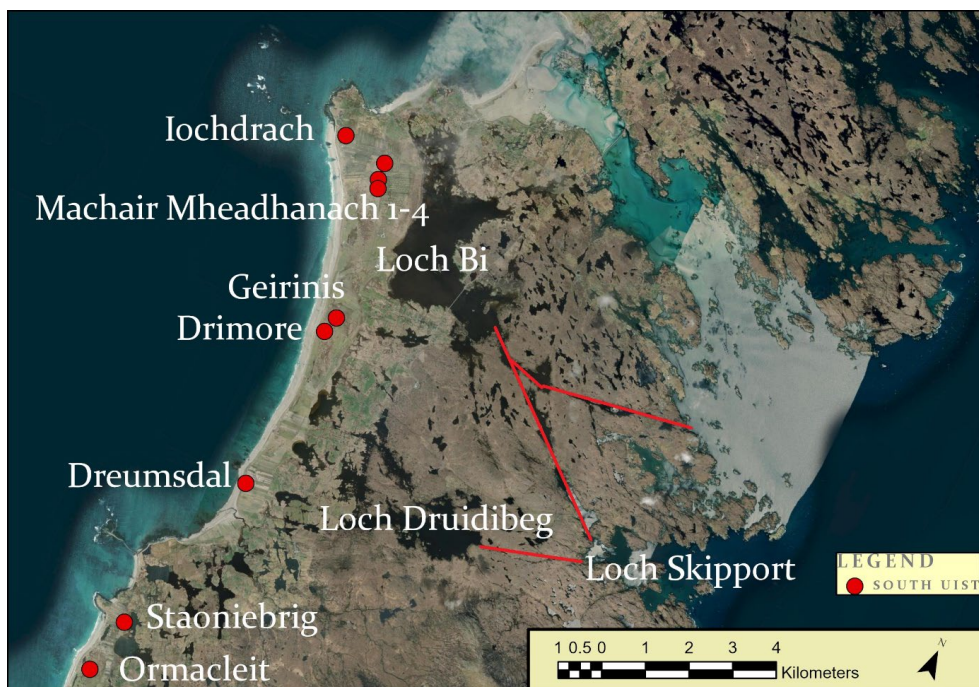


Figure 196: natural sea-channels from the Minch to inland lochs on South Uist.

11.7 Brochs

11.7.1 Dun Beag

Placename: Dun Beag is an entirely Gaelic name, “the small fort”. Other names around the vicinity are “Struan” or “stream” from Gaelic. Ullinish appears to be the only Norse name within 500m of the site on the current OS map, which can mean “Wolf’s headland” “Ulli’s (personal name) headland” or “Ullr’s (the Norse god) headland”.



Figure 197: view from Dun Beag, facing south. @the author.

Dun Beag is situated on a prominent natural rise and has viewsheds overlooking the sea, though it is roughly ca. 2km from the coast, the nearest harbour being at Struan. The site is located in an area of pastureland, but is rather (ca. 200m) to arable land to the south. Due to a substantial amount of slag as well as a soapstone crucible, the author has interpreted this site as a likely smithy. Since blacksmithing was often a craft that took place in the outfield, its landscape context, in conjunction with its role as a smithy, fits well into the site being a focus of outfield activity in the Norse period.

11.7.2 Dun Cuier

Placename: Gaelic (dun or fort), ON: Cattlefold.

Dun Cuier occupies a prominent hill on the isle of Barra with views to the sea, in the moorland east of the machair and beaches of the coast. In addition, 1.5km to the east, the wheelhouse Allasdale produced Norse-period activity, as mentioned previously (*site 90*).



Figure 198: Dun Cuier showing its coastal location.

11.7.3 Dun Carloway

The famous broch at Carloway, Lewis, occupies a natural hill overlooking the bay of Carloway. Similar to both Dun Cuier and Dun Beag, it is situated on a natural rise, about 1km away from the coast, but has viewsheds along the sea.

11.7.4 The Norse use of brochs

The issue of brochs in the landscape of the Viking and Late Norse period has been frequently commented on, particularly by Raven in his Ph.D. on the landscape of the Late Norse and Early Medieval periods of South Uist (2005). The most pressing issue is their lack of use during the Viking Age and Norse periods in Skye and the Western Isles (Raven, 2005, p. 192). The issue of the abandonment of brochs, and occupation of the brochs after the end of the Norse period, has been argued by Macleod Rivett (2016) and Raven (2005) to be intentional.

In Skye and the Western Isles, very few brochs have been excavated, and of those that have been excavated, many of the excavations were done by antiquarians. Interestingly, a broch found within 200m of the extensive, high-status Viking and Late Norse site of Bornish was excavated, Dun Vulcan, and produced nothing to suggest Norse occupation (Raven, 2005, p. 192; Sharples, 2005). Other brochs, for example at Beirgh, have been excavated and produced no Norse finds, despite being Late Iron Age in origin and within 500m of a probable Norse settlement, and a Viking Age cemetery site (Armit 1996). Raven has argued that the brochs were intentionally abandoned by the Norse, and then intentionally reoccupied at the end of the Norse era, in the Gaelic Renaissance, by Gaels seeking to reclaim their lost identity (Raven, 2005; MacLeod, 2016). Unfortunately, none of the abovementioned evidence can either support or disprove the theory of intentional re-use of broch sites due to fragmentary nature of the archaeological evidence of the brochs.

11.8 Viking-Late Norse period Shieling sites

11.8.1 Bheinn *Gunnaraigh*

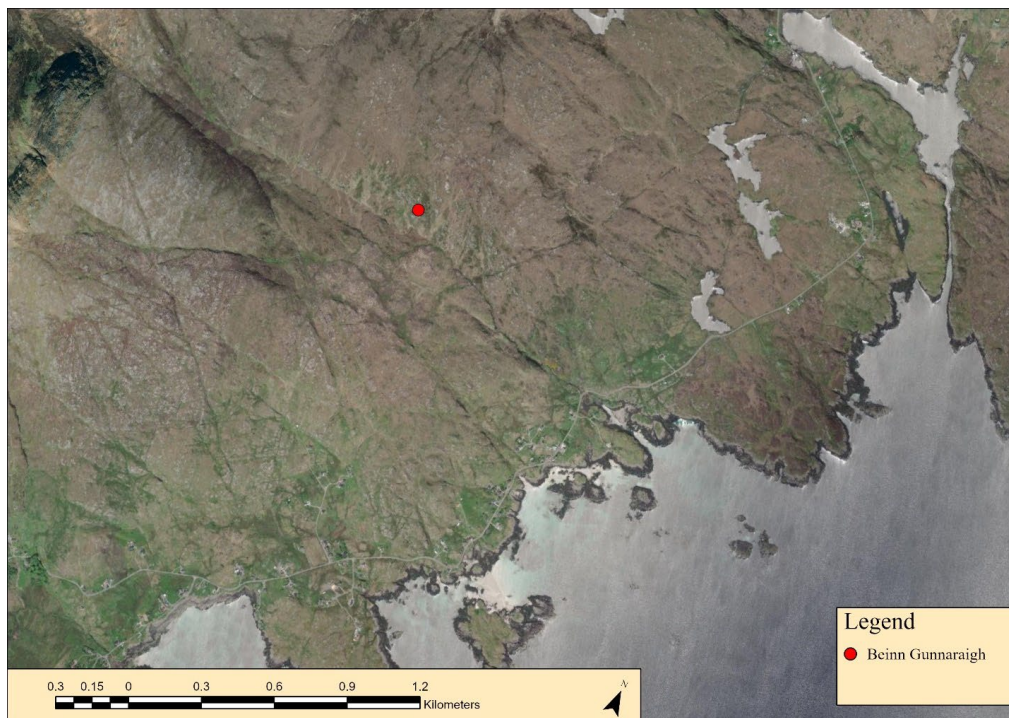


Figure 199: Bheinn Gunnaraigh in its landscape context.

Placename: Gunnaraigh is from Gunnar, a Norse masculine personal name (Stahl, 1999, p. 142). Aigh is from Ærgi. The name is *Gunnar's ærgi*, and refers to an ON word that originated from Gaelic that means “milking shieling”, as mentioned above.

The landscape of this site is located on the southern edge of the mountain called Bheinn Gunnaraigh, on a natural terrace just above the 100m contour line. The site at Bheinn Gunnaraigh is some 1000m from the nearest coast, the harbour is Breivik (ON: broad harbour), a natural, sheltered harbour, located ca. 1200m away from the site. The terrain Bheinn Gunnaraigh is located in is mountainous and rugged, and it is no surprise that a Norse shieling site would have been located in this landscape.

11.8.2 Torrin

Placename: (G) the hillocks

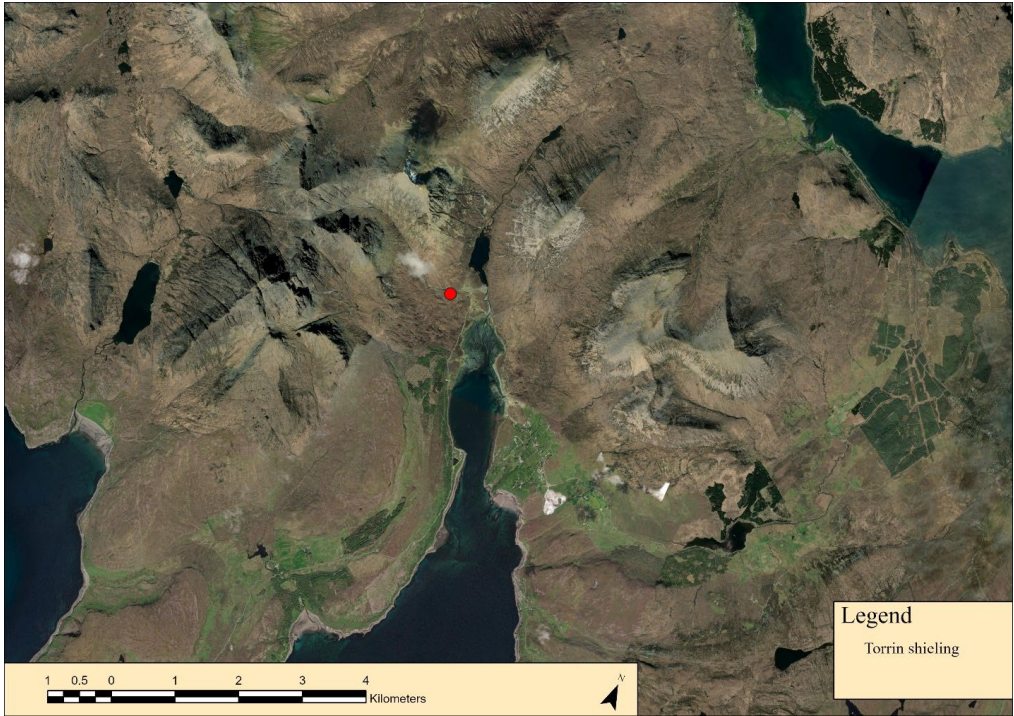


Figure 200: the shieling at Torrín in its landscape context.

The shieling site at Torrín is located inland, in an area of rugged terrain, and ca. 1.5km away from the nearest arable land. Its elevation is ca. 160m above sea level. Its location is similar to Bheinn Gunnaraigh. There are dozens of other shieling sites recorded in the vicinity, some of them dating to the modern (post 18th century) period.

11.9.1 Late Norse shieling sites

Placenames:

Ben Saurdal: G (mountain) and ON (grassy valley)

Strath Saurdal: G (Strath: wide valley)

Strath Glebe: G (strath parish)

In the area of study, there are an additional 3 sites that produced radiocarbon dates to the Late Norse period (12-13th century AD), interpreted as shieling sites by the excavators and other researchers (Wildgoose, 2011). The 3 sites are on Skye, located in the Saurdal valley. The three sites do not seem to have produced artefacts dateable to the Norse period, and the forms of the structures are generally round or sub-rectangular.

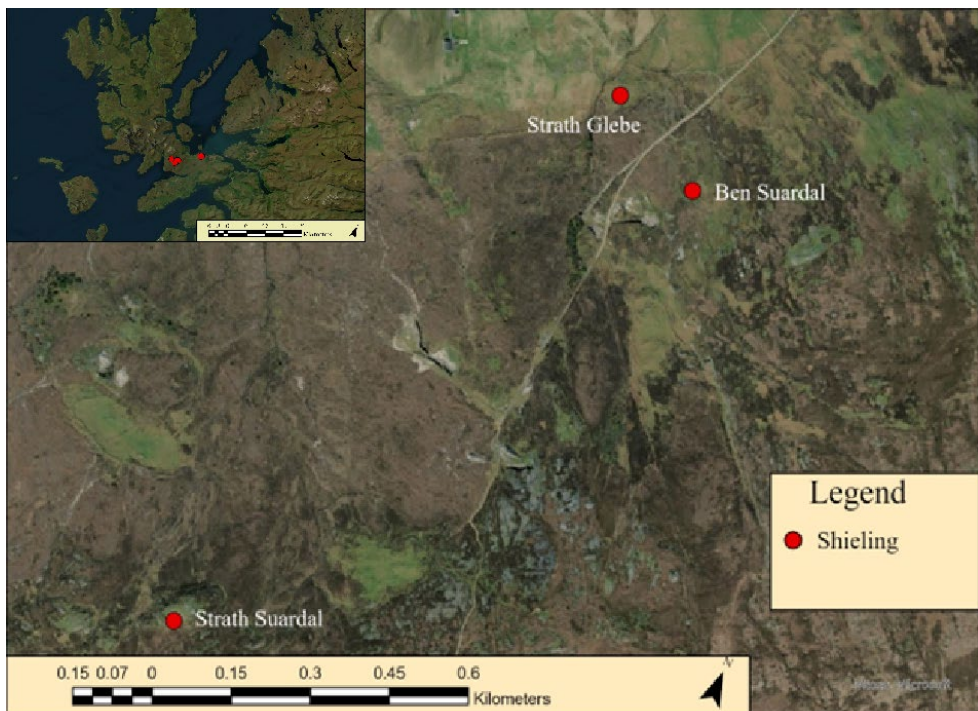


Figure 201: shieling sites in Glen Saurdal. 296

Landscape

All 3 sites are located in what can be called the outfield, or areas of little arable productivity. In the case of Strath Glebe and Ben Saurdal, they are somewhat close to arable land, circa 200-300m to the nearest land with agricultural capacity. Strath Saurdal is somewhat further

away, in higher elevation (meters), roughly 600-800m from the nearest agricultural land. The three structures appear to all be re-used Early Iron Age (1st century) roundhouse structures, and occupation continues into the later medieval and modern periods.

Discussion

The three Late Norse sites do appear to be shieling sites. Interestingly, all three sites show re-use of pre-Norse, Iron Age structures, in the form of Atlantic roundhouses. This suggests that there was a tendency or pattern of re-occupation of much earlier structures in the Late Norse period, at the very least, in the Saurdal valley on Skye. Some of this occupation appears to continue into the 14th century and beyond.

11.10.1 Metalworking sites

There are two metalworking sites in the area of study interpreted as such by past researchers. One site dates to the Viking Age (9th-11th century AD) while the other is Late Norse, dated to the 13th century AD.

Coille Gaireallach

Placename: Gaelic (rough wood), but the area is generally called, Saurdal is “grassy valley” in ON (Taylor, 2022, p. 110).

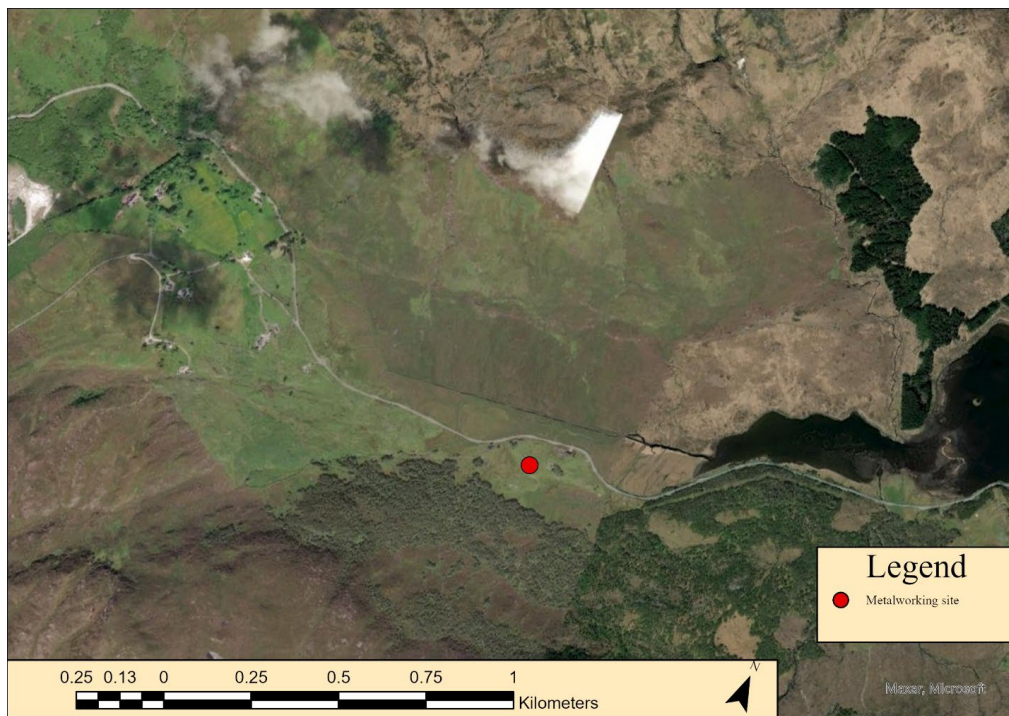


Figure 202: the metalworking site at Coille Gaireallach, Skye, in its landscape of the Saurdal valley.

Landscape

Coille Gaireallach is located circa. 500m from the closest arable land on Skye to the west. The site is located on a natural terrace some 20m above sea level, 200m from a freshwater inland loch, and circa 20m from a forest. The site can be considered an outfield site.

Ashaig metalworking site



Figure 203: the metalworking site at Ashaig, Skye, in its landscape context.

Placename: This is either Gaelic for ferry crossing or ON for ash-bay (Taylor, 2022, p. 20); there appears to be no consensus if the placename is Norse or Gaelic in origin exists.

Landscape

The site at Ashaig occurs in a swampy area less than 50m from the coast and ca. 1.7m from the harbour of Broadford (ON: broad-fjord). The site is situated ca. 200m to the east of arable land at Breakish (ON: broad-headland), and 500m to the south of arable land at Ashaig. It appears to be an outfield site, close but not situated on arable land. The site is located under the modern-day cemetery of Ashaig, and ca. 100m from the airport of Broadford.

11.10.1.2 The landscape of metalworking sites

Both metalworking sites can be interpreted as outfield sites ca. 200-500m away from the nearest likely farmsteads. This is suggestive that metalworking sites were located in the outfield, with Dun Beag being another potential example (*site 110*). The location of a smithy away from the home or in the outfield is common for Norway throughout the Iron, Viking, and Medieval periods, and there is further evidence of local blacksmiths operating in the outfield into the industrial era (Walaker Nordeide pers. commun. 2018). These sites would be unique in Scotland for the Viking and Late Norse periods.

11.11 Wheelhouses

11.11.1 Definition of a wheelhouse

Wheelhouse is a term for Atlantic Scottish stone-built roundhouses with interior radial walls from a centre that gives the structure an appearance of a spoked wheel (Armit, 1996, p. 136). The origination of these structures dates to around the 1st-2nd centuries AD, found in the Western Isles and Shetland (Armit, 1996, p. 136). These structures were abandoned, for the most part, around the mid-1st millennium, falling out of favour for the Pictish cellular or figure-of-8 house (Armit 1996: 158), though some were occupied into the Late Iron Age (200-800 AD) (MacKie, 2010). Their function seems primarily as chiefly farmsteads on agricultural land, preferably on the machair (Armit, 1996, p. 84; MacKie, 2007), but a few examples are known from the moorlands in the Western Isles (MacKenzie, 2005). Wheelhouse sites that were placed far from agricultural land have been argued to have had a more specialized role. For example, textile producing function been argued for the main function of the Grimsay wheelhouse by MacKenzie (2005).

11.11.2 The Norse use of wheelhouses

Despite some exceptions, excavations at wheelhouses have shown that most were abandoned centuries before the first known Norse voyages to Scotland took place, for example, at Cnip, the wheelhouse, dated to the 1st century AD, was likely abandoned by the 2nd century AD (Armit, 1994, p. 80). Wheelhouses, however, likely existed in different states of preservation during the Norse period. When the Norse arrived in the region, there was likely a variation in

appearance of these wheelhouses, with some standing structures, others ruins, and others appearing as mounds, yet others may have been recently abandoned or perhaps still occupied.

At Old Scatness, Shetland one wheelhouse seems to have been occupied throughout the Norse period on the basis of finds of steatite and other Norse cultural signifies (Dockrill & Bond, 2014). It was not clear if this represents a Pictish population that has adopted Norse culture, Norse occupying a wheelhouse, or a mix of both (Dockrill & Bond, 2014). It is however, a likely midden or rubbish dump (Bond & Dockrill, 2013). Another wheelhouse was utilized by the Norse that was some 20m away from the main Norse settlement site, which contained a Norse longhouse. According to excavations, the other wheelhouse seems to have been used as a workshop for textile production and metalsmithing (Dockrill & Bond, 2014).

In Western Isles, there have been some notable wheelhouse excavations from antiquarian times until the last few decades (i.e., Beveridge, 1911; Armit, 1996). There has been, however, some neglected or overlooked evidence of Norse activity at wheelhouse sites. Graham-Campbell & Batey have identified a structure at the Garry Lochdrach wheelhouse as a likely Norse longhouse (Graham-Campbell & Batey, 1998, p. 81). Similarly, Alan Lane has argued that the “working area” of the Allasdale wheelhouse is likely a longhouse due to finds of Norse pottery, in addition to a hearth and drain that suggests the structure was more substantial and not just a “working area” (1983, p. 302). Moreover, Lane argued that the other sub-rectangular structures near the wheelhouse were Norse or at least, something also thought by the excavator (Lane 1983, p. 302). The author has compiled the evidence of Norse activity at wheelhouse sites and is listed and discussed below.

11.11.3 Wheelhouse sites that have produced Norse artifacts

Site	Placename	Finds	Landscape
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Alt Christeal	G (The Stream) or N (Dalr, from Stahl 2000: 107)	Spindle whorls	Mountainous, pastureland, coastal
Tigh Talamhanta	G (the earth house)	Worked soapstone; pottery	Inland, valley, grassland w/ limited agricultural potential
Baille Risary	G Baille: Town N: Risary (ON: Ærgi, or shieling)	Spindle whorls Rivets	Inland, forested (modern), pastureland
Grimsay	Ærgi (ON: Shieling)	Spindle whorls Pottery Whetstone	Pastureland Small, tidal island Coastal
Geirisnis (Smiddy)	G “the big smithy”	Soapstone lamp, various finds (knives, antler debris, etc).	Machair plain, agricultural
Garry Iochdrach	N “Gerreadh” G “Down/lower”	Worked soapstone Pottery, ringed-pin	Coastal Pastureland

Table 6: wheelhouse sites in the area of study that produced Norse-period evidence.

There are 6 sites that can be classified as wheelhouses that produced evidence of Norse occupation. Of the 6 sites, just one can be classified as a modern, scientific excavation (Alt Christel). The 5 other sites were identified as having a Norse phase after antiquarian, early or amateur excavations had already taken place. The placenames of the finds show a mix of

Gaelic and Old Norse, with only two sites lacking any Old Norse placename components. The finds include soapstone spindle whorls and Norse pottery, both ethno-cultural signifiers of activity in the Norse period. Other objects identified as Norse include a purple schist whetstone of century Swedish origin, as well as a copper alloy ringed-pin. The landscape shows a predominance of siting in the outfield, with just one site on arable land, the machair plain (Geirisnis). The following sections will examine each wheelhouse site in its landscape context.

11.11.4 The artefact finds of wheelhouse sites

Overall, the finds are rather sparse. Only one of these sites was excavated by modern recordation and documentation methods (Alt Christeal), and the finds were a handful of spindle whorls. The author believes the low number of objects is significant to the function of these sites as shieling sites, and is discussed more below.

11.11.5 The Placename evidence

The placename evidence of these sites is somewhat difficult to assess, because they can have a multitude of different names. The Gaelic names are later and may not be useful for any meaningful interpretations. For instance, at Geirisnis, the wheelhouse is called “The Big Smiddy” (smithy)”, while at Tigh Talamhanta, the name means “earth house”, a common moniker for a wheelhouse, but could also reference the souterrain found nearby. The site at Grimsay appears to be known by two names, one entirely Gaelic, which means the “The bay of the plover”, while the other name has the ON *Ærgi* included. Alt Christeal is either entirely Gaelic or possesses the Norse topographical designation “*Dalr*” (dale) (Stahl, 1999, p. 108). This data is in lieu of the general difficulties of placename data: and many sites can have multiple names with different interpretations.

Out of the 6 sites, 2 of the sites can be associated with a name that is suggestive of a shieling, particularly the *Ærgi* name. *Ærgi* sites have been identified by Foster as being a Gaelic word translated into Old Norse (2017). The most convincing explanation for the author is that *Ærgi* sites must have differed from *Sætr* sites, since both of these sites are found in areas of Norse settlement, and there would be no reason for the Norse to use a Gaelic word for something

they were already familiar with. *Ærgi* placenames have been found in other areas of Norse colonization, particularly in Northwest England, Orkney, Shetland, and the Faroes (Foster, 2017, pp. 116-117). Foster, using soil analysis, has demonstrated that the *Ærgi* sites tend to be suited as grazing lands for dairy cattle, and *Sætr* able to support beef cattle. *Ærgi* sites therefore appear to support dairy farming. Considering *Ærgi* is a Gaelic word in origin, it is by no means a stretch to associate this area with Gaelic settlement, either indigenous Gaelic speakers or (more likely, in the opinion of Foster) imported Gaelic (Irish or Scottish) speakers (Foster, 2017).

The corpus of this data has two wheelhouse sites that can be archaeologically dated to the Norse period that have this *Ærgi* word in an associated placename. These are at Baille Risary and Grimsay. In both cases, Norse-period finds that can be associated with shieling sites, particularly spindle whorls, have been found. In the case of Baille Risary, there are a series of undated structures that have been interpreted as shieling sites. Furthermore, both are in landscapes that can be constituted as outfield, as both sites are in the moorland. One possible interpretation is that these sites represent shieling sites populated by Gaelic-speakers, or at least, had been at the time of Norse arrival, and one function of these sites may have been pastures for dairy cattle.

11.11.6 The landscape

The wheelhouse sites show a variety of different landscape contexts, from moorland, to mountainous, to islets, pastureland and outfield sites with limited agricultural potential.

Grimsay, Allasdale, and Risary are moorland sites. However, the wheelhouse on Grimsay occurs on a tidal island that possesses a harbour, that may be contemporary with the wheelhouse site. Allasdale on the other hand is ca. 2km inland in a valley, placed in a swampy, but somewhat cultivatable area. Baille Risary was placed some 700m inland in what is today a forested area.

Garry Iochdrach and Eilean Maliet were built in the moorland, but are coastal, both less than 10m from the Sound of Vallay. Both of these sites are still within 1000m of agricultural land (machair in both cases).

Geirinis on the other hand is clearly within an area of agricultural potential (4.1) located in the machair plain, where the area is cultivated for crops today. It is less than 200m of the excavated Norse longhouse at Drimore. The wheelhouse itself may have been used as an outbuilding or tertiary settlement site, with the main focus of permanent settlement at the longhouse some ca. 200m to the southwest.

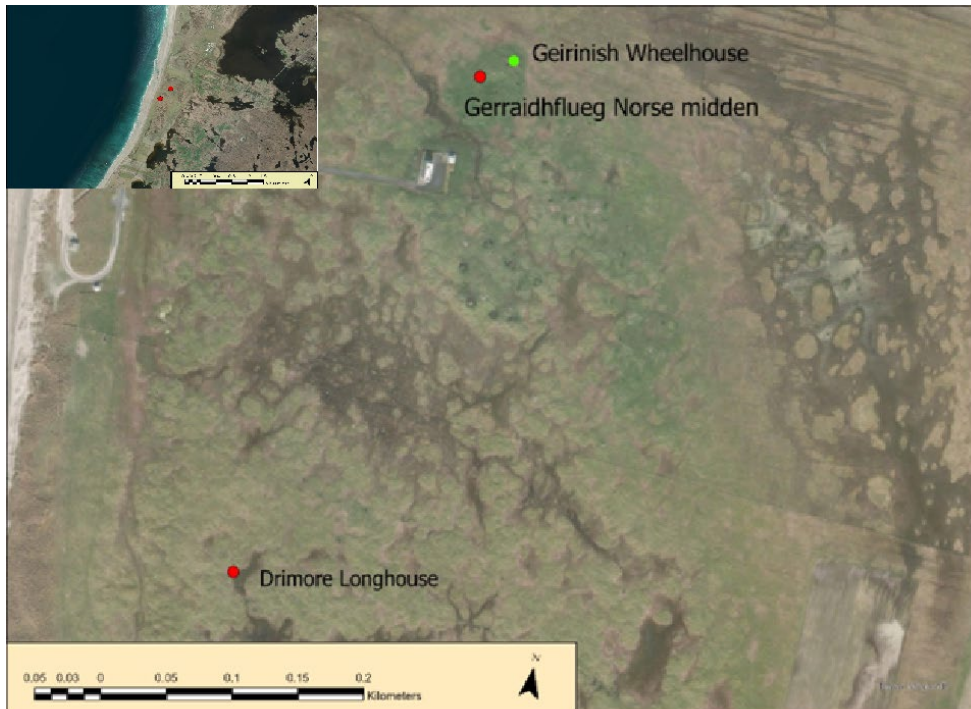


Figure 204: Geirinis and Drimore.

The site at Eilean Maliet is the only site recorded with Norse activity on an islet. The islet itself could be classified as moorland, but it is rocky and likely too small to be of much value in terms of pasturing. The adjacent mainland is classified as moorland; however, lands of higher agricultural potential, i.e. machair, is not far from the site. The islet is ca. 1km south of Vallay, 1km east of Sollas, and 1km southwest of Griminis all containing machair plains with higher levels of agricultural potential.

11.11.7 Norse use of wheelhouse sites?



Figure 205: Aerial photography of Alt Christal. Sub-rectangular structure identified as Norse marked by a circle. Image: Canmore.

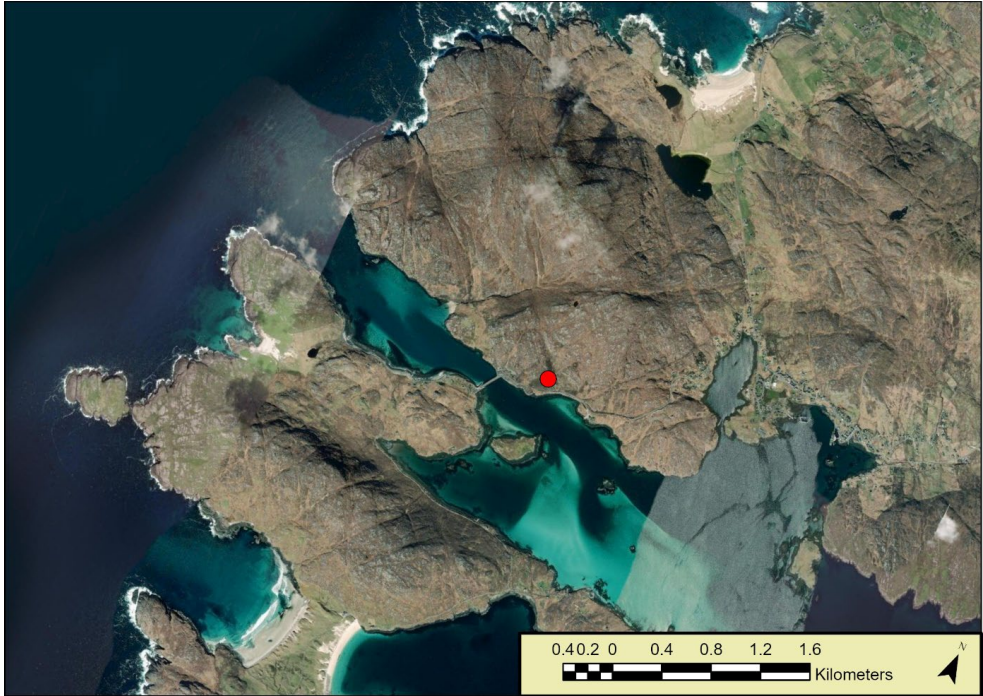


Figure 206: Alt Christel in its landscape setting.



Figure 207: Grimsay wheelhouse after excavation and re-assembly by an untrained local. Structure III (MacKenzie, 2005) circled. Aerial photo @Canmore.

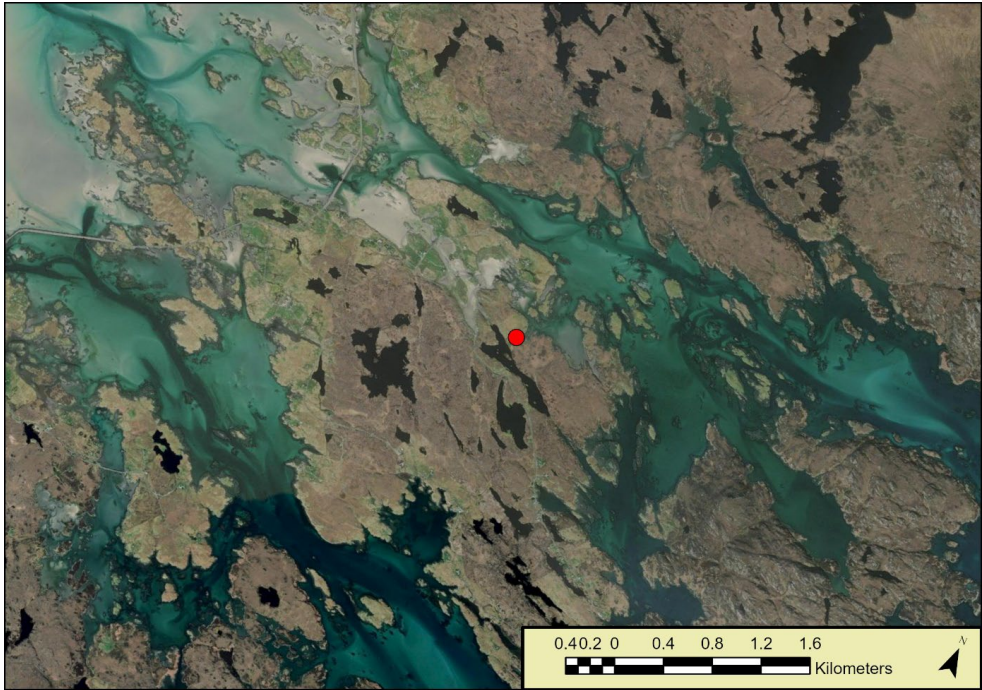


Figure 208: Grimsay wheelhouse in its landscape setting.

Three wheelhouse sites that have produced Norse evidence possess sub rectangular structures, from roughly 7-10m by 2m, built onto the northwest side of the wheelhouse. One of these structures produced Norse soapstone spindle whorls (Alt Christal) while another is suspected to have produced Norse finds but the finds were not attributed to any particular area of the site (Grimsay wheelhouse, structure III). In the case of Garry Iochdrach and Allasdale, a sub-rectangular structure produced Norse finds nearby, while Geirsnis had a post-IA level that produced the Norse finds. Foster appears to have noticed the similarities between the sub-rectangular structure built into the wheelhouses at Alt Christal and Allasdale as being similar in structure (1996). Eilean Maliet and Baille Risary were too poorly recorded to assess the forms of the structures.

In all cases, the structures are diminutive if they are present, no longer than 7m. The finds assemblage tends to be limited, and is suggestive of domestic occupation and/or some small industrial activity. The lack of identified middens as well as the lack of large assemblages is suggestive of secondary or tertiary settlement sites. The small

finds assemblages, particularly containing spindle whorls, is highly suggestive of shieling activity and has parallels in Norway, the Faroes, and Iceland.

Given the landscape, and to a lesser extent, the nature of the artifacts recovered, it is likely that these wheelhouse sites represent either secondary or tertiary settlement sites, or shieling sites in the outfield. Some are these sites likely shieling sites, particularly Alt Christeal, Risary, Grimsay, and Allasdale, on the basis of placement in the landscape and placename evidence. Others are probably structures used for activities that take place outside the main farm, at Garry Iochdrach, Eilean Maliet, and Geirisnis.

While these sites lack exact chronology, there are some patterns that emerge. What is interesting about these sites is that it does not seem that the Norse reoccupied the wheelhouses. In the cases of Grimsay and Alt Christeal, the houses were built incorporating one of the walls of the wheelhouses. This may be the case at Allasdale as well (Lane, 1983, p. 302), but there is an additional structure some 20m southeast of the house at Allasdale that produced Norse pottery, similar to the structure at Garry Iochdrach. At Geirisnis, Norse period structures seem to have been built directly over the wheelhouse, which may have been a mound or midden at the time of Norse occupation. As mentioned earlier, the excavation reports for Eilean Maliet and Baille Risary are difficult to assess, and it is unknown if Norse finds came from structures that overlayed the wheelhouses, were adjacent to the wheelhouses, or if the finds came from the wheelhouse itself. Overall, the Norse either built sub-rectangular structures at the wheelhouses, or built sub-rectangular structures near (within 20m) of abandoned wheelhouse structures, some of which may have looked like mounds during Norse occupation.

11.11.8 Outfield site summary

While some shieling sites were re-used sites, such as wheelhouses or brochs, other shieling sites were newly-built structures in the Norse period. This is suggestive that there was likely a lack of ideology in deciding to re-occupy certain sites. Rather, it appears the Norse carefully chose sites based on landscape preference in the outfield that fit into their settlement pattern and functional needs. When needed, the Norse would build new sites in areas previously unoccupied. Brochs, wheelhouses, and Atlantic roundhouses were re-used if they fit into a familiar landscape settlement pattern for the Norse. Metalworking sites were likely placed in

the outfield, particularly for ironworking. Other structures were abandoned or not re-used, at least as far as it has been seen archaeologically, if they did not fit the agricultural-pastoral needs of the Norse. This will be later discussed in the discussion section (12.6).

Chapter 12: Discussion

12.1 Landscape comparisons to other areas of Norse settlement

12.1.2 The Southern Hebrides and the western coast of Scotland

The Southern Hebrides have been historically separated by the Ardnamurchan peninsula. This region would be the most comparable region to Skye and the Western Isles for geographical proximity, comparable landscapes, linguistic, and historical ethnic situations. At the time of this thesis, very few Norse-period settlement sites have been discovered in the Southern Hebrides, with just a handful on Coll (Rusk, 2016, p. 30), and others known on both Coll and Tiree from the presence of Norse pottery (Lane, 1983; 2007). Placename evidence however is indicative of colonization, similar to the Northern Hebrides, such as on Coll and Tiree (Johnston, 1995), Tiree (Holliday, 2016), and Islay (Macniven, 2013; 2015). Two South Hebridean Isles possess the same Norse pottery style tradition as the Northern Hebrides, Tiree and Coll (Lane, 2007), and Lane has suggested that Tiree and Coll form a cultural sub-region within the Norse world along with the Northern Hebrides due to this pottery tradition.

Due to a lack of archaeological sources, a comprehensive comparison of the South Hebrides to the North Hebrides is difficult and will likely remain until more archaeological evidence is recorded. However, the author has identified multiple Norse-settlement sites relatively unknown hitherto this thesis in the Outer Hebrides. The archaeological record should therefore be re-examined in the same way that the archaeological record for the Norse-period was re-examined for this thesis. Without a comparable corpus of settlement sites at present time, it is not easy to compare these two regions.

Viking-period burials are known from the region from antiquity to modern times. The author estimates there is a total of 22 Norse-period, furnished burials from a preliminary survey. A paper comparing the Viking-period burials from the North to South Hebrides will be published in the near future by the author (Ryder *forthcoming*).

12.1.3 The western coast of Scotland

There does not appear to be any archaeologically identifiable settlement sites on the western coast of Scotland at the present knowledge of archaeological research. Only one Viking-period burial is known: the furnished Norse boat burial on the Ardnamurchan peninsula (Harris et al., 2017). Norse-placenames along the west coast are indicative of settlement and may warrant further study (Jennings & Kruse, 2009), but there is no comparable corpus of settlement data archaeologically at the present time.

12.1.4 Faroe Islands

The Faroes were colonized by Scandinavians by 800 AD (Edwards et al., 2005, p. 63), though there is evidence of farming on the Faroes dating to as far back as 300 AD (Church et al., 2013). The Faroe Islands is a volcanic archipelago with limited arable land (Edwards et al., 2005, p. 77). According to paleoenvironmental and zooarchaeological data, the first Norse settlers imported a “farming package” to the islands with an additional emphasis on marine bird resources, but subsequent generations put an emphasis on hunting marine fowl and whaling alongside intensive farming (Edward et al., 2005, p. 63).

The majority of settlements on the Faroe Islands occur on arable land with a place to land a boat (Edward et al., 2005, p. 68). Small argued that the Faroes (along with Shetland) display a clear landscape geographical pattern: a single farmstead on arable land with a landing-place for a boat (Small, 1969). This settlement pattern is very similar to the Norse settlement pattern of Skye and the Western Isles. Similar to the Hebrides, the majority of arable land occurs on coastal margins where inlets and bays allow for the landing of boats (Edward et al., 2005, 78). This likely would account for the similar settlement pattern and landscape usage, even if the Hebrides, consisting of larger, more economically viable islands seem to have had much larger farms and halls such as Bornais on South Uist.

Similarities to the landscape of the western Isles are apparent in the Faroe Islands. Both regions are archipelagos, but the Hebrides has much larger islands. The Faroes are much less potential for agriculture than the Hebrides and the settlers on the Faroes, but Edward et al warn against environmental determinism when comparing regions colonized by the Norse (2005, p. 77). The Faroese maintained the “Norse farming package” despite the landscape not as well-suited for a mixed farming economy as efficiently as their homeland in Norway (Edward et al., 2005, p. 77). Environmental factors are still limiting, and it is likely that pigs were not able to be efficiently kept due to a lack of suitable vegetation for rooting, which is similar in the Outer Hebrides and much of the Inner Hebrides (Serjeantson, 2013, p. 96).

The Faroes further possess an interesting link to the Hebrides in two separate but perhaps linked ways. The first is that the Faroes, unlike Iceland and Norway, had locally made ceramics (Lane 2007: 16). As far as the author knows, only three colonies in the western Scandinavian world produced ceramics: Bornholm, the Faroes, and the Hebrides. The second striking similarity to the Hebrides is the placename Ærgi in the Faroese landscape. As argued by Foster, this placename is evidence of Gaelic-speaking peoples (Foster, 2017, pp.116-117). The simplest theory to explain both the Norse-period pottery and the Ærgi placename is that Gaelic speaking people were present during the Norse colonization of the Faroes. Whether or not this was through slavery, an underclass, or as equals, and postulating where in the Gaelic-speaking world these people came from is beyond the scope of this thesis. What this does suggest is that the Norse on both the Hebrides and the Faroes had a similar outfield system where Gaelic-speakers were involved, producing dairy products at specialized shieling, and both diverged from their aceramic homelands to have pottery produced for cookery and other vessels. Moreover, it is possible to reach the Faroes by wind drift passage from the Western Isles of Scotland (Dugmore et al., 2010, p. 8). There is thus a potentiality for a maritime link between the two archipelagos, though a journey from the Faroes to the Western Isles is much more difficult due to the sea-drift traveling north (Dugmore et al., 2010, p. 8-9). The Faroes and the Hebrides are two regions that warrant a deeper comparison, particularly in regard to ceramic production and potential placename evidence.

12.1.5 The Northern Isles

Both archipelagos are directly comparable to the Hebrides for a number of geographical, topographical, cultural, archaeological, and historical reasons. Firstly, both Orkney and

Shetland seem to have undergone the same linguistic transformation that the Hebrides has, namely that there are very few pre-Norse placenames in the region, leading some scholars to believe that the Norse ethnically cleansed the two archipelagos along with the Hebrides (e.g., Smith, 2001). One difference is that there is no Gaelic period of Orkney and Shetland: English replaced Norn in the 18th-19th centuries. Orkney and Shetland however are similarly reliant on marine resources and fish trade as the Hebrides, and it seems that the Norse introduced deep-sea fishing to both the Northern and Western coasts of Scotland at the same time (Barrett, 2003).

12.1.5.1 Orkney

Orkney is more agriculturally viable than the Hebrides (Crawford, 2005). Orkney, according to the historical sources, was the centre of Norse power at least until the Kingdom of the Isles in Norse Scotland, with the Hebrides falling under the jurisdiction of the Jarldom of Orkney (McDonald, 2007). Archaeologically, the Hebrides seems to fall closer under the sphere of influence of Mainland Britain by the latter part of the Norse period, before the islands are formally granted to the crown of Scotland.

The Norse settlement landscape has been studied both at a site level, such as at Quoygrew (Barrett & Richards, 2004), as well as in a larger scale in terms of settlement (Griffiths & Harrison, 2011; Leonard, 2011; Harrison, 2013a,c,b). Barrett and Richards (2004) argue that Quoygrew is suggestive of a specialized fishing site, where fish was exported. Moreover, they argue that the power and wealth of Orkney relates to so-called pirate bases located along the coast. No comparable sites in the Hebrides can be said to be specialized, though the author suspects that some of the unexcavated coastal settlement mounds may be fishing stations, but this is speculation without further archaeological inquiry.

Harrison has argued that the Norse drew upon the power of the indigenous Picts to legitimize their landownership claims in Orkney, by placing Norse longhouses on top of settlement mounds that had by the Norse period existed for millennia (Harrison, 2013a). Harrison & Griffiths posit that, while there are practical reasons to re-use pre-Norse settlement sites on Orkney, there is also a political and ritual function that legitimizes Norse authority (Griffiths and Harrison, 2011, p. 133). The Norse settlement in Orkney and the Hebrides is directly comparative in this regard.

Sharples has stated that when comparing archaeological assemblages, the assemblage of the Norse-period of Bornais is far richer than anything excavated from Orkney thus far (Sharples, 2019, pp. 595-596), and House 2 of mound 2 at Bornais is larger than any identified hall on either Orkney or Shetland (Sharples, 2019, p.596). He has compared the complex of Bornais to Birsay on Orkney, where clusters of longhouses suggest elite centres (2020, pp. 600-601). The obvious difference is topographical, with Birsay is situated on a small tidal islet, whereas Bornais is located centred on a flat agricultural plain. Interestingly, both sites contain the placename element *borg*, which Macniven has suggested possibly designates an administrative division (2015, pp. 100-101). Overall, Orkney and the Hebrides are certainly comparable and warrant a more detailed study.

12.1.5.2 Shetland

Shetland is perhaps the most comparable topographically to the Hebrides, but there are much fewer archaeological dated sites to the Norse period in the archipelago than in the Hebrides at the present state of knowledge. The excavated sites, Underhoull, Hamar, Sandwick, Jarlshof and Belmont are all single farmsteads in a rural landscape (Sharples, 2019, p. 596). The islands of Shetland tend to have less fertile soil, smaller farms, and a greater reliance on marine resources than Orkney (Crawford, 2005). Small has argued that, along with the Faroe Islands, the Norse had a clear settlement pattern in Shetland: a relatively flat arable area with well-draining soil, a place to land a boat, and access to grazelands (Small, 1969), reiterated by Turner and Simpson that further argued that the two longhouses at Hamar were placed deliberately to command views over the Baltasound (Turner & I, 2016, p. 28). Preston, Sanderson, Kinnaird et al argue that the Norse settlements of Shetland are in direct relation to maritime routes (Preston et al., 2020, p. 154) Overall, Shetland is a region that warrants a deeper archaeological comparison to the Hebrides.

Shetland however may have some of the earliest dates of Norse settlement, at the very start or even before the 9th century (Smith, 2007). Griffiths has recently criticized these early dates and proposes that the Norse arrived in the Northern Isles in the late 9th, early 10th century, because he argues that there is no evidence that western Norwegians sailed westward to the Northern Islands, but rather sailed northward from the Irish Sea (Griffiths, 2020). It is worth to note that there is a lack of secure early Viking (pre-900 AD) dates for the Norse in the Hebrides as well, with artefact typology placing some of the earliest dates to around 850 AD.

However, to explore the early dates of Shetland and its potential significance for Norse colonization in Skye and the Western Isles is beyond the scope of this thesis.

12.1.6 The Isle of Man

Similar to Islay, the Isle of Man is known for its furnished Norse-period burials, some certainly rich (Steinforth, 2015a), as well as Norse-period placenames, but no verifiable Norse settlement sites are known with the exception a 12th century structure on St. Patrick's island, and two unexcavated longhouses structure at the Braaid (Wilson, 2008, pp. 92-94). Settlement landscape comparisons to the Hebrides are therefore difficult; however, the longhouses at the Braaid are directly adjacent to an Iron Age longhouse (Wilson, 2008, p. 96) This has been suggested as evidence of two societies living concurrently, one local and one Norse (Steinforth, 2015b, 115-140). Both structures are unexcavated, and the author is therefore sceptical of this interpretation.

Norse activity on Man also marked by a high density of stone sculpture, some showing a mixture of Scandinavian and Celtic motifs (Gardela & Larrington, 2014). There is only one example of Norse monumental art in the area of study, and that is the runestone from Barra, which similarly shows both a Norse (runic inscription) and Celtic (Celtic cross) motif (Fisher 2002). Barra is more southerly than most of the islands in the area of study, and thus closer to Man, but to suggest that as the reason for a stone representing a mixture of Norse and Celtic motifs is far too simplistic. Moreover, the stones from Man are much more complicatedly detailed and tend to exhibit scenes from Norse mythology, absent from the Barra runestone.

The Isle of Man was likely the base of power in the Hebrides after the establishment of the Kingdom of the Isles in 1087 (Caldwell, 2014). Investigations of the landscape of settlement of Man are currently however regulated to placenames and considerations of burials and other Norse diasporic ethnic signifiers. It is difficult then at the present time to compare the Norse settlement of Man to the Northern Hebrides.

12.1.7 Summary

The landscape of the Norse settlement of other archipelagos is strikingly similar, at least on a general level. The average person in the North Atlantic likely lived on a rural farmstead

centred on a longhouse in the infield, with reasonable access to a landing-place suitable for a vessel and therefore, access to the sea, and ultimately a major travel and trade route that interconnected the greater Norse world. A mixed farming economy was attempted beginning with a “Norse farm package”, with some augmentations depending on the limitations of local topographies. The infield/outfield system was imported and a system of landownership, with various degrees of status was imposed. The Norse largely retained their identities through a shared language and material culture (Gräslund, 2009; Jesch, 2016), though the degree of ethnic mixing, or the eventual disappearance of Norse culture, varies from place to place due to many factors such as proximity to other ethnic groups or shifting political allegiances.

Comparative studies would increase our understanding of Norse colonization and settlement. In particular, comparisons of the Norse landscape of the Hebrides to Orkney and Shetland are not only the most obvious choice for comparisons, but the knowledge and corpus of archaeological data is now full enough in the area of study to allow for more detailed regional comparisons to Orkney and Shetland. The Faroes and Iceland would also be comparable, with shared settlement and colonization history and perhaps these two regions having been partially settled by Gaelic speakers. Ultimately, this thesis hopes to provide a dataset and new interpretations to allow for a greater understanding of the Norse settlement landscape in the North Atlantic, and the author is positive that comparisons will allow for useful interpretations in the future.

12.2.1 Settlements and places to land a boat

The Norse settlers, as the pre-Norse and post-Norse populations, were reliant on boats for sustenance, travel, and trade. In Skye and the Western Isles, the re-orientation from the coast to inland routes was a direct result of the onset of the automobile and roadways, as well as the construction of bridges and causeways in the 20th-21st centuries. Understanding the relationship between the sea and Norse settlements is pivotal for interpreting the Norse settlement landscape.

The settlement landscape is distinctly coastal, and oriented toward natural places in the landscape to land a boat or ship. This is not surprising, and is supported by faunal evidence excavated from Bornish, Cille Pheadair, Barvas, and Bostadh, which all

show an exploitation of marine resources, mainly fish, but also shellfish, along with sea mammals (Cowie & Macleod Rivett, 2010; Neighbour & Burgess, 1997; Parker Pearson, 2018; Sharples, 2019, 2020; Thoms, 2005). Deep-sea fishing, at least on a larger scale, seems to have been introduced to the region by the Norse period, suggesting a change in diet brought about by Norse immigration (Barrett, 2003). The importance of fishing cannot be underestimated. In Northern Norway, there have been multiple settlement mounds which seem to have been primarily used for fishing in both the Viking Age and Middle Ages (Wickler & Narmo, 2014), and Lofoten, an elite, magnate farmstead, was harvesting and drying cod for trade during the Scandinavian Iron Age and Medieval era (Storli, 2016, p. 229).

In the area of study, there are multiple indications of the importance of fishing. From a placename perspective, *lax-*, from Old Norse for salmon, can be seen in placenames such as Lewis and Skye, indicating salmon fishing. There are also quite a few names indicating ling fishing (such as *Seidinish*, MacBain, 1922), including a midden that produced a 10th century Anglo-Saxon coin on Vallay (*site 49*), while the settlement site at Galson (*site 8*) is located just southeast of the Laxdale river. Archaeologically, there is evidence of Norse activity near areas of fisheries. On the Valtos peninsula, where a Viking Age cemetery has been excavated, the Valtos river that is “one of the best trout-fishing lochs in all of Scotland, and perhaps Europe” (Crawford, 2005). Hougharry, the site of an extensive multi-period midden, is considered “the finest fishery in North Uist” by Crawford. Unexcavated settlement sites such as Hougharry, North Uist, and several coastal sites western coast of Lewis, thus could be seen to have been oriented toward the exploitation of maritime resources, at least as one of their primary functions. Bostadh, which was likely a secondary settlement site, may have had fishing as a primary function (Thoms, 2004). It is also likely that one of the reasons why the Norse were attracted to St. Kilda was a hub for fishing, particularly for deep-sea fishing. Bornais, oriented toward the Atlantic, may have processed and dried herring (Sharples, 2005, pp. 193-194). Finally, Northern Lewis, particularly the area of Ness, was renowned for its fishing industry in the 19th century (Barrowman, 2015, p. 284), and the Norse settlement sites found along the west coast have all been coastal, usually within 200m of the sea. The settlement landscape was likely placed partially in relationship toward the exploitation of fish, with perhaps areas of access to the *best* fisheries under the control of elites or magnates, such as at Bornish and the Udal.

12.3 The maritime landscape and hierarchy



Figure 209: The Udal and the settlement sites around Valley Sound.

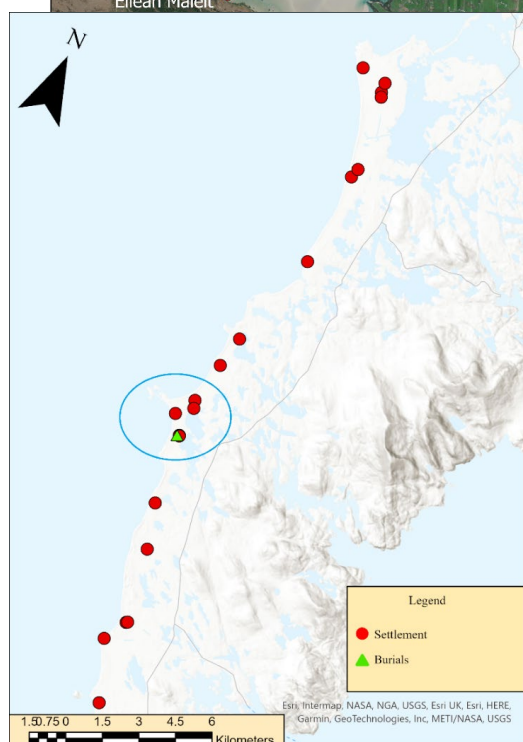


Figure 210: Bornais as a central place in South Uist.

The maritime landscape furthermore

indicates a hierarchy. For example, the need for wool for sails alone could not come from a society without a central control of resources (Bender Jørgensen, 2012, p. 179). A centre-periphery model is common in Viking Age and Medieval archaeology, though this model has been somewhat challenged in recent years (Lund & Sindbæk, 2021; Borake, 2019, discussed further in 4.2). Recent research into the social structure of the Viking Age is increasingly showing the period as hierarchical, with local elites managing resources (Ystgaard, 2019). Dependent or subsidiary farmsteads have been proposed

throughout Scandinavia, with a notable example

being the excavated site at Vik, Trøndelag, which Ystgaard argues is the site of a lower status farm that is dependent on a higher status farm (Ystgaard, 2019, p. 396).

As mentioned in previous chapters, a hierarchy has been proposed for South Uist, with the centre being at Bornish, and farmsteads of varying status evenly spaced out throughout the machair plain of the west coast (Sharples & Parker, 1999; Parker Pearson, 2012). These territories likely expanded beyond the infield or agricultural settlement, and extended into the sea, and included control over its resources, such as fish. This is the suggested model for the sites of the Udal and the Vallay Sound (*fig. 137*) with the Udal being the central site, two agricultural settlement sites on the island of Vallay of likely lower status, and three outfield sites, probably of the lowest status, on the western side of Vallay Sound. These sites are all found at harbours, yet the Udal, its position on a peninsula in the Harris Sound, relation to a double harbour suggest that it is the central and most elite site, from a purely landscape perspective and regardless of its artifact assemblage and structural features.

Sites in relation to landing-places, harbours, inlets, bays, and anchorages seem to correlate with the control over the seascape. These landing-places functioned as safe havens for travellers, providing crucial shelter or resting places, along with the ability to stock up on supplies for expeditions, such as the freshwater or food. Areas with the best shelter and resources, or deep anchorages, were likely under control by elites, and this can be seen particularly at Bornish and the Udal, where elite settlement sites are found at crucial nodes in the seascape. The three Viking Age elite graves at Kildonnan, Eigg, along the Little Minch has been proposed as an indication of control of the sea-route by elites (Graham-Campbell & Batey, 1998, p. 82; Gammeltoft, 2018; Crawford, 2018, p. 582; Steinhofth 2019), and this thesis posits a similar argument for not only the burials at Eigg, but Viking Age burials in the area of study in general.

It is likely that the Norse settlers largely enjoyed a degree of independence, as seen through the spatial and territorial nature of the Norse settlement landscape, as argued by Raven for South Uist in the Late Norse period (2005, p. 102). The settlement pattern does, however, still suggest a demonstratable hierarchy, something long thought to have existed in Viking-period Norway (i.e., Solberg, 2003, p. 261; Sindbæk, 2011, p. 100). The burial record, explored later in this thesis, as well as the indication of multiple, simultaneous elite settlement sites within the region show a degree of competing or co-existing elites, perhaps with their own territories separated by straits or on islands. The likelihood from this may be in part due to the topographical landscape of Skye and the Western Isles. The abundance of natural, sheltered inlets, in combination with large stretches of water that are dangerous to sailors, probably led to a situation where the settlers could have some degree of autonomy and independence.

12.5 The Re-use of pre-Norse sites in the Norse period

Of 49 settlement sites, 25 settlement sites are direct re-uses of pre-Norse settlement sites (see **chapter 7**). That means that the sites were imposed, or the interior of the structures were re-used. Over half of Norse settlement sites can be said to be re-used, pre-Norse settlement sites.

For association, the evidence is less clear. This is partially due to the difficulty in dating sites in the area of study. Of the 49 sites, 6 can be said to be in relation to Iron Age settlement sites within 200m (adjacent), and 3 within 500m (probable). However, nearly every site has undated sites within 200-1000m, from settlements, to middens, to potential early Christian sites, to burial sites, and Neolithic/Bronze Age monuments. The only exception of this is the Norse-period shieling site at Bheinn Gunnaraigh Barra, which has no sites within a 1000m radius, but is in a mountainous area. 14 sites remaining cannot be said to be in association with any dated sites, meaning the sites could be post-Norse. However, a majority of Norse settlement sites were neither excavated nor systematically surveyed, and many of these sites may represent multiperiod settlement where pre-Norse layers have yet to be identified.

This represents a high amount of overall re-use of settlement sites, with 32 out of 49 sites that can be said to be either in direct association or adjacent to pre-Norse settlement sites.

On one hand, it would have been natural for settlers to settle in lands with signs of existence. From a practical standpoint, previous structures would have offered building material, at least in the form of drystone blocks. If structures were still standing and were dwelled in shortly before arrival, material for roofing, tools, and other objects needed to operate a farm would have been available. If these farms were very recently abandoned, or directly taken over by the Norse, they could have had

crops, animals, and people as available resources. In addition, the majority of sites are on arable land, and often were on flat, natural terraces, the latter of which would have been attractive to Norse settlers, as seen on Orkney (Harrison, 2013a,b,c).

On the other hand, there may have been reasons other than necessities or practicality for choosing where to settle. To settle on a previous structure, or existing midden, may have had similar symbolism to the abandonment and restructuring of houses in the Scandinavian

homeland. It may also have symbolized conquest or dominion over the conquered in a colonial sense, or perhaps, a way to place themselves into the landscape and its history, as proposed for the Norse in Orkney (Harrison, 2013a,b,c; Macleod, 2015b). These are all possibilities, and it is not possible to take these ideas further without more excavation in the area.

There are clear signs of abandonment in the landscape, however. For instance, the Broch of Beirgh was abandoned by the early 9th century, and Norse settlement in the area seems to have shifted toward the coast (Armit, 1994). The broch of Dun Vulcan was not occupied in the Viking Age despite being close to Norse environs of Bornais (Sharples, 2005). Other brochs, however, produced evidence of Norse activity, particularly at Dun Beag, Dun Carloway, and Dun Cuier (11.7). It then does seem that the Norse chose not to settle in areas that did not fit into a Norse settlement pattern.

Moreover, while there is continuation at both Bornais and Frobost on South Uist, the nature of both the Iron Age and Norse sites are different. In the Iron Age, Frobost was the largest settlement site on South Uist (Parker Pearson, 2012, p. 418). By contrast, in the Norse period, Bornais is the largest and likely centre of administration (Sharples 2019, p. 596). The placename Frobost (*Frø's bostadr*, Gammeltoft 2001) is suggestive of a secondary settlement site, whereas Bornais is a likely a site named early in the Viking Age due to its topographical name (Marwick, 1952, p. 248). This shows a shift in centres of power, even if there is a high amount of re-use of pre-existing settlement sites. The shift is more oriented toward the coast, particularly the strategic points in the seascape. Bornais, being one of two harbours on the west coast, is where the highest status Norse settlement site of South Uist, whereas Frobost, further inland and without close access to a harbour, was likely a secondary settlement site, despite its higher status in the pre-Norse period. This is suggestive that the Norse did not prioritize continuing centres of power, and rather reoriented their settlement pattern to reflect the maritime landscape instead.

Re-use of Iron Age structures could still have given the Norse legitimacy in the landscape, and the multiperiod middens suggest a continuation of the past through the build-up of waste and debris. While settlement patterns oriented toward natural resources would give a clear pattern based on agricultural resources and result in anthropogenic midden build-up, i.e. at the settlement sites of Reynistaður, Stóra-Seyla, and Syðra Skörðugil in Iceland (Sawyer, 2016). This would have given Norse elites prestige, as argued by Harrison for a similar process in

Orkney (Harrison, 2013a,b,c; Harrison & Griffiths, 2011). Barvas and Cille Pheadair may have had no settlement predecessors, and they were settled much later, at a time when the Norse may not have had to legitimize themselves through ancestors. By the mid-10th century, legitimization of landownership and prestige may have been expressed through their familial connections to the rest of the Norse world, or possibly through the church which may have been establishing itself in the Hebrides from the mid-10th century onward. This also could be due to a heightened importance on fishing in which access to harbours for fishing boats would be crucial in the Norse period, compared to the Late Iron Age (Harland et al., 2016; Sharples, 2019, p. 57). The control of maritime resources may have been linked to power centres, so the two above arguments are not necessarily separate.

Nevertheless, in all cases, the sample sizes are low. This dataset is limited in number and may represent a lack of dating of settlement sites. Other settlement sites may have been lost due to coastal erosion (suggested as a possibility for a potential Iron Age site lost near Cille Pheadair in Parker Pearson, 2018), or not yet discovered or recorded. Many sites that can be said to be re-used Norse settlement sites are also within 500m of Iron Age monuments such as brochs or duns, but it appears that the mound, particularly the IA settlement mound, was more important for siting Norse settlements. This is likely because mounds were already a component in Norse legal and cosmological viewpoints, as well as found in the agricultural landscape, whereas brochs tend to be found in the outfield.

There is thus a strong correlation between Norse settlement sites and pre-Norse settlement sites. If a Norse settlement site is not overlain onto a pre-Norse settlement site, it is usually within 500m of an Iron Age settlement site. Some patterns can be inferred from the data. The Norse tended to site Norse settlement sites over pre-Norse settlement sites, and they appear to have preferred Iron Age settlement sites. Some of

these Iron Age settlement sites, however, are multiperiod, and the Iron Age settlement layer would have been the topmost layer and thus the most visible and recent. Suggestions of a continuation in the landscape on South Uist from the LIA to the Norse-period are possible but likely more nuanced than previously thought (Sharples & Pearson, 1999; Parker Pearson, 2012), with clear shifts in the significance of certain settlement sites.

Without more precise dating, it is still impossible to know if these Iron Age settlement sites were inhabited or recently abandoned at the time of Norse settlement. It is likely not

coincidental that Norse settlement sites tend to be overlain or adjacent to Iron Age settlement sites. It can then be said that the Norse intentionally re-used Late Iron Age settlement sites for their own settlement sites, the significance of certain sites shifting in a new settlement hierarchy that reflected the Norse administrative system.

12.6 Outfield sites and some neglected Norse-period sites

12.6.1 Wheelhouses Discussion

The Norse re-use of wheelhouse sites in the outfield show a distinct type of re-use. Nearly all of the sites occur away from the main settlement areas; the exception is Geirisnis (*site 81*), which will be discussed more below. The wheelhouse sites show a similar array of finds: pottery, soapstone spindle whorls, worked soapstone including potential debris, whetstones, personal objects, and potentially knives. Missing from the assemblage is the midden – shells, bone, turf, and other built-up waste characteristic of sites on the machair. The finds are consistent with typical finds from excavated Norse-period shielings from Norway, Northwest England, Iceland, the Faroes, and Greenland (Foster 2021), that is, seasonal or limited usage with just a few occupants.

The landscape of these sites, as mentioned above, varies. The majority occur in what could be seen as the outfield. Even sites such as Garry Iochdrach and Eilean Maliet, which occur somewhat close to the machair, are located in the outfield, and still ca. 1km away from agricultural land. Allasdale and Baille Risary are over 2km from the nearest agricultural land, but none of these sites are so far away from where the main settlements were likely to have been to warrant being classified as a typical Norse shieling in Norway, where they can be several days journey from the infield and therefore the permanent residence of the Norse farmstead.

The overall landscape analysis shows that the Norse organized the landscape on the basis of the infield-outfield system, but with specific functions and likely specialized or semi-specialized areas, as evidenced in sections **11.7**, **11.8**, **11.9**, **11.10**, and **11.11**. This may have included a Gaelic-speaking class that occupied shieling sites that were specialized for dairy

cattle (with at least one *Ærgi* site on Skye containing *sheep milk* in the name, Foster 2017). Wheelhouse sites were sometimes re-used for shieling activity, or perhaps specialized working stations near permanently settled sites. The function and shape of these structures, however, was still sub-rectangular, and the artifact assemblage shows Norse material culture, particularly in the form of soapstone spindle whorls which has allowed for this designation to begin with. This suggests to the author that while Gaelic speakers were undoubtedly present and probably working at these *Ærgi* sites, it seems Norse culture, being the prestige culture, may have been emulated by the Gaelic speakers. The landscape organization also heavily points toward a magnate or aristocratic landscape, with likely freemen, tenants, and a slave or underclass level of organization argued generally for the rest of the Norse world (i.e. Crawford, 1987, p. 140; Sindbæk, 2011; Dommasnes & Hommedal, 2016).

12.6.2 Landscape of the brochs

The broch sites provide some interesting evidence of Norse period usage of rural and broch sites. Dun Vulcan provided no evidence of Norse activity, despite being situated within 1km of a major, high status, multi-period, expansive Norse site (Sharples & Smith, 2009). As mentioned above, two broch sites excavated in the last few decades did not show evidence of Norse activity, despite being situated in landscapes of extensive Viking-Late Norse elite activity, and both being occupied in the LIA.

On the other hand, the three broch sites that have produced Norse-period artifacts share a similar landscape:

1. Inland sites, all over 1km away from the coast, but still with viewsheds of the sea
2. Located on prominent natural hillocks or hills
3. Located at the boundary between the infield and outfield

Similar to the Norse evidence from wheelhouse sites, without a greater chronology it is difficult to interpret the purpose and intention of the occupation of these sites. Were these sites occupied by Norse at the onset of the Viking Age, before longhouses were built? Were they occupied by people who were of mixed Norse-Pictish descent who worked primarily in the pastures? Were they occupied seasonally during the summer months? Were they

important because of their viewsheds over the coast? Finally, were they occupied at the end of the Norse era, during the so-called Gaelic Renaissance, as a form of re-occupation of brochs, duns, and crannogs practiced in the Later Medieval period?

The interpretation of the author is that these broch sites, as opposed to other excavated examples of Dun Vulcan and Dun Na Berie, were chosen due to their viewsheds of the coast combined with possible rural or summer pasture functions. Dun Vulcan, located on the coast on the machair plain, may have not been used due its location on the notoriously unsafe Western coast of South Uist, while Dun Na Berie may have been abandoned since it is located at an inland loch, with limited visibility to the coast. Dun Carloway for example, lies on the coastal route of Western Lewis, enroute to a Thing site (Sanmark, 2017), as well as further north to the arable farmsteads of Barvas and Ness (11.7.3).

It does not appear that brochs were used as burial sites in the area of study as they were in Orkney, Shetland, and Caithness. Firstly, with the exception of some metalwork from Dun Beag, none of the finds correlate to artifacts associated with Viking Age burials. Pottery was not deposited in any of the excavated graves at the Cnip cemetery, for example. Furthermore, the artifacts were excavated from the interior of the brochs, while many broch sites in other areas of Scotland had burials placed outside the main structure, such as at Gurness, Orkney. This shows a different use of brochs in Skye and the Western Isles that relates to domestic activity, along with possibly smithing.

The answer to why these three sites were occupied when other broch were not likely lie in the placement of the landscape of the brochs. The answer may be that Dun Cuier, Dun Beag potentially linked to outfield, or shieling activity. In the case of Dun Beag, a Viking and potentially Late Norse smithy is likely.

12.7 Viking burials

12.5.1 The Maritime landscape, landing-places, and sea-routes: the grave sites

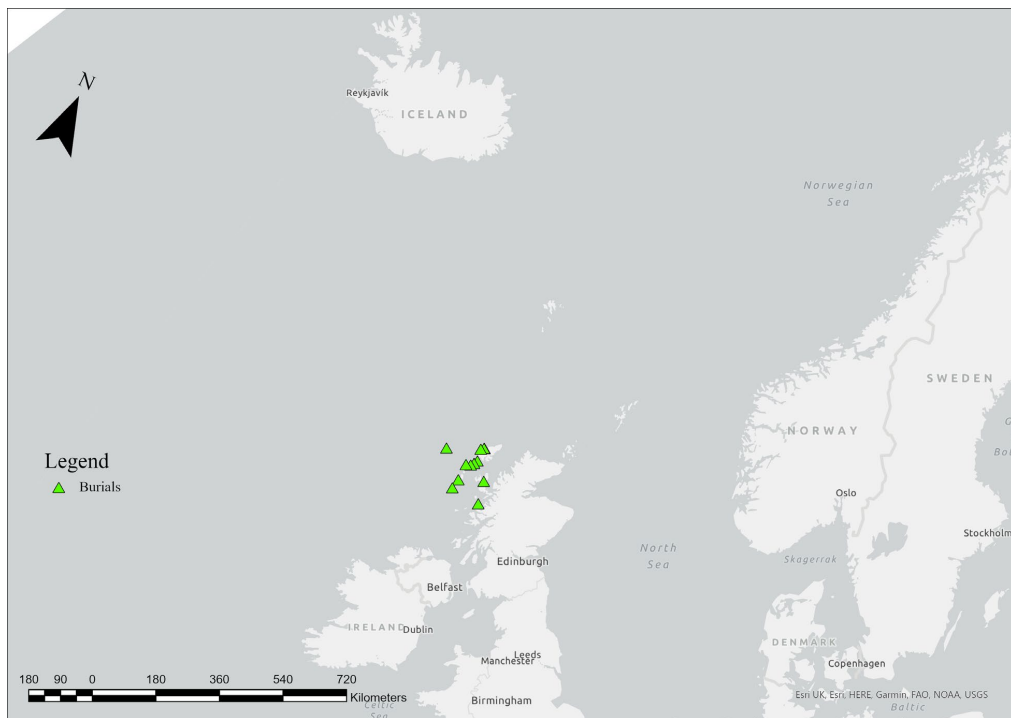


Figure 211: the burials of Skye and the Western Isles in their North Atlantic context.

The maritime location of the graves is suggestive of placements at prominent nodes on the seascape. In other cases, 7 of the burials were found on smaller islands, sometimes at the only landing-place or harbour of that island. Burials also appear on or in relation to sounds (4). The Sound of Harris for instance has a concentration of burial sites (5). The Sound of Vallay has another burial site, while the Otternish burials are just south (50-100m) of the Sound of Berneray.

The landscape of the burials shows a high affinity with sea-routes. The concentration of burials at Loch Roag is indicative of the control over a historically important harbour as well as on a sea-route to Iceland, and has been noted by past researchers. Loch Roag is known as the safest harbour on Western Lewis (Lawrence, 2017), and was an important harbour for travel further west, to St. Kilda and beyond to Iceland or the Faroes (*fig. 25*).

The concentration of elite Viking Age burials at Village Bay, St. Kilda, is likely linked with the harbour, being a stopover from the Hebrides to and from Iceland and the Faroes (*fig. 213*).

There is furthermore a concentration of burials around the Sound of Harris, which would have been a major sea-route on the way to the elite Viking-Late Norse settlement site of the Udal.

The only burial sites that do not appear to be on a major sea-route is the site at Tote, Skye, which is in the inner-region of Loch Snizort. It is however located in an area of pre-Norse, Norse, and post-Norse elite activity (Sanmark, 2017, p. 287), including the seat of the archbishop of Nidaros in the Late Norse/Early Medieval period (Thomas, 2015), and the loch is a natural, sheltered harbour and anchorage.

1 burial site could not be associated with a landing-place, and that is the oval brooch fragment find at Sligachean, South Uist. This may not represent the findspot of a burial but rather a settlement/stray find. The findspot is within 200m of Loch Donnain, which could have been linked by canal to other lochs, giving it a maritime association if the findspot can be taken as an indication of a burial site.

Clusters of elite activity, including elite settlement sites and Viking-period burials, can be directly linked with sea-routes that transcend the area of study, and link to other areas of Viking-period activity in the North Atlantic (*fig.212*). This is illustrated in *fig.213*, where the sea-routes and two areas of elite settlement in the area of study, the Udal and Bornais, can be seen as nodes along the sea-route, also coinciding with areas of elite Viking-Age burial placement.

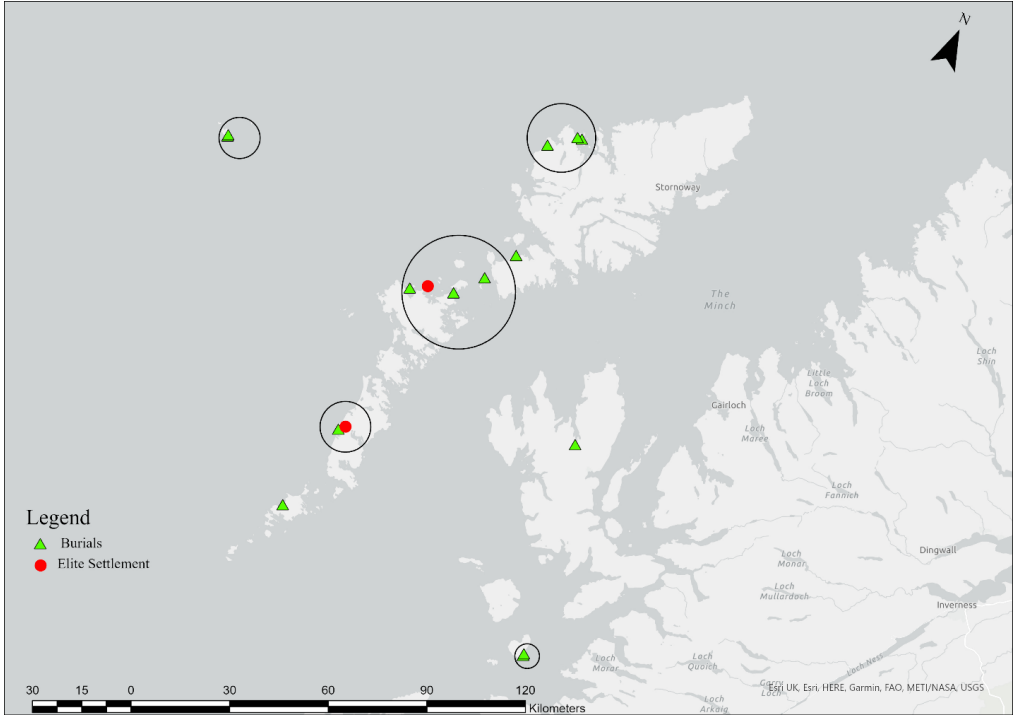


Figure 212: clusters of elite activity (more than 1 site).

1920). The author finds that the Norse re-used cairns and mounds that fit into their system of land ownership and signifying to other Norse, such as identifiable mounds and cairns, for *Odelsrett*.

These monuments must have also fit into a Norse maritime outlook: they were at important harbours and on sea routes. It must be said that the period of Pictish square cairn building may have ended before the arrival of the Norse, and the indigenous peoples themselves may have not had a cultural connection to the square cairns any more than they did to the various Neolithic and Bronze Age monuments that are found throughout the landscape. Nevertheless, it shows that the Norse reused burial sites that fit into their ideas of property, boundaries, and likely cosmology, while the Pictish or pre-Norse views of these aspects of society were not taken into consideration.

12.5.3 Burials and settlements

Each burial site occurs on arable land, and no burials could be associated with the outfield. The burials could all thus be said to be associated with the infield, though several of the burials occur just at the border between the beach and arable land (Mangersta, Nisabost, and likely Valtos school), while the burial at Tote occurs on a rocky shelf overlooking the harbour.

Three burial sites can be associated spatially with a settlement site designated by Norse settlement material. The Otternish burials are within 200m of the Norse settlement site of Sheabie on Berneray, separated by the Sound of Berneray (*fig. 120*), the Vallay burial(s) can be said to be within 1000m of two Norse settlement sites (*fig. 121*) and the Nisabost burial is within 200m of the Nisabost excavated Norse settlement site (*fig. 125*). Whether or not the burials and settlements are contemporary is difficult to say, due to lack of systematic excavation (at Otternish and Vallay) or more precise dating (Nisabost).

12.6 Borders and landownership

Swords or oval brooches from small, but agriculturally viable islands such as Eriskay, Benbecula, Vallay, and islands of the Harris Sound are suggestive of elite farmers that own land, potentially demarcating territory by natural boundaries of water, such as islands. The spread of elite and rich burial goods throughout the area of the study suggests a great deal of wealth widespread throughout the islands. While exact chronology is lacking for these burials, this shows that there were a spread of separate elites, possibly different families, displaying their wealth in different areas of the region. The cemetery at Cnip is just 2km from the burial at Valtos school; both of these sites contain rich female grave goods (**table 3**). Why one elite woman was buried in a cemetery, and the other 2km away, could be explained by elite families controlling their farmsteads and also likely harbours, and the resources that come with both. This may have been spurred on by competition, especially in a “colonial” or settler landscape where land would have been claimed and divided possibly on the arrival of the settlers. This requires further analysis which should not be separated from the settlement and other analysis, and will be discussed further in the thesis.

12.6.2 Burials and borders

The pattern of burials is suggestive of a dispersed, semi-independent elite that owned land and controlled harbours and resources along sea routes. The burials customs and traditions vary, though some common landscape patterns can be discerned. While it has been shown that there are very few generalizations to be made about Viking burial traditions (Svanberg, 2003; Brink & Price, 2008), the level of diversity shown within the area of study is striking. There does not appear to be just one set tradition, both inhumations and cremations are known, single burials and cemeteries, and a variety of relationships to pre-Norse structures. Unlike Orkney (Leonard, 2011), just one burial appears to be a re-used Iron Age settlement site, and unlike Northern Scotland in general, there does not appear to be a burial tradition of re-using broch or broch mounds. The use re-use of standing stones, in the case of the burial at Barra, has comparisons to a burial on Islay (Ritchie, 1993, p. 17; Macleod Rivett, 2016, p. 302) and is known, though rare, from Sogne og Fjordane and Sogndal in Norway (Williams et al., 2015). There appears to be both the direct re-use of a pre-Norse mound or cairn, as well as burials placed around or adjacent to other cairns (site 1). Above-ground cairns and cists are known, but as appears to be flat graves (in the case of a child burial at Cnip). The author finds this to be indicative of a remarkable amount of differing traditions for a small area of study, and is

likely indicative of independent and localized elites. The interpretation of Abrams who compared the late pagan burial at Cnip to the Christian runestone on Barra, which she argues are both contemporary (2007), may be added to the complexity and locality of burial traditions in the area of study. The burial evidence will be further analysed along with the settlement and other evidence later in this thesis.

12.6.2 Hoards and borders

Of the hoards, two are coinless, and two are mixed coins and coinless. There is no coin mint known in the Viking Age of the Hebrides. The presence of coinless hoards in Scandinavian Scotland has been linked to a heightened amount of wealth for local rulers (Williams, 2007, pp. 202-203). The presence of a somewhat Late Viking Age hoard, at Lews Castle, suggests that bullion remained the means of exchange. The lack of coins in the Jarldom of Orkney has been suggested to indicate that Orkney had its own distinctive identity, separate from the Scandinavian homelands which move towards coinage by the 11th century (Griffiths, 2015, p. 232). The Scandinavian rulers of Skye and the Western Isles likely participated in a bullion silver economy, and perhaps the locations of hoards represent borders between individual elite estates or holdings.

12.7 Discussion of Stray finds

The overall number of stray finds in the area of study is low (11 sites in total). Many objects which were listed as stray finds have been shown to later be associated with a Norse settlement (i.e., the horse-harness mount from Galson *site 8*, and various objects from South Uist). There is an overall lack of metal detecting in the area of study, at least compared to other regions such as England or Denmark where metal detectors are much more active, and this may account for the overall low number of stray finds. The stray finds in the area of study do not occur in enough numbers to display any patterns, other than there appear to be a lot more sites dated to the Norse period that is yet to be further understood.

Metalwork tends to turn up near harbours or the coast (all metal objects in the corpus), while the only artefacts not found near the coast have been non-metal, such as the finds of bog butter and the find of a wooden dish, both deposited in a bog. Only 4 finds out of 11 could be

considered to have come from the outfield: the gilded bronze brooch from Skye, the bog butter and wooden dish from Lewis, and the glass bead from Canna.

Ringed pins are one of the most common Norse-period objects in the area of study, found in settlements (Bornais, Cille Pheadair, The Udal, Cul Na Muice, Garry Iochdrach, Boreray), burials (two burials from Cnip, Barra, and a non-provenanced burial from Eigg site), and stray finds (Heisker, Canna, non-provenanced finds from Lewis and Eigg site). Two of the ringed pins, interestingly enough, come from chapel sites, though one may be a purely modern church/chapel (Church of Scotland, Canna **10.2.2**). Ringed pins originated in pre-Viking Dublin where they were used as cloak pins (Fanning et al., 1994). During the Viking Age, they spread from Dublin, where they were likely manufactured, though they were manufactured elsewhere, including possibly in the Hebrides (Maldonado, 2021, p. 204). Ringed pins rapidly become the dominant Viking-period accessory in the Scandinavian world by the mid-late 10th century (Fanning et al., 1994). The area of study does have a high number of ringed pins from a variety of contexts, and is indicative of the general fashion trends throughout the Viking world. Whether or not these trends are different from elsewhere is beyond the scope of this thesis.

Interestingly, Maldonado has noted the high number of ringed pins from the northern coast of North Uist, which amount to half the total amount of ringed pins found in Scotland (Maldonado, 2021, p. 205). This is an unusually high quantity of one particular artefact, and the presence of ringed pins found in such a quantity may suggest that ringed pins were manufactured in the region. The author does not believe that these artefacts would represent a beach market as argued by Maldonado (2021, p. 205), because there is no concentration of ringed-pins in any given area of North Uist.

Many of the stray finds display evidence of elite activity, because they are part of an elite form of Norse dress. This is particularly true of the Chaipavel brooch, which may have been gilded, and was attached to fabric with a herringbone weave. The whalebone plaque fragment is indicative of elite activity as well, perhaps of a specific elite family, the Håløyg family of North Norway (Storli, 2006, p. 176). In the cases of Chaipavel, Harris, and Berneray, Harris Sound, there is the likelihood that both of these sub-regions contained elite settlements rich burials. However, without further archaeological evidence, this is difficult to analyse further.

Furthermore, there are stray finds that are found in areas that can be considered the outfield, particularly, finds from bogs. Metalwork being deposited in the outfield and bogs has been argued to be evidence of ritual votive deposits (Fabeck & Näsman, 2013). The deposition of metal objects in bogs or other watery places has been the subject of a long debate in academia over whether or not it was intentional, and what this intentionality could mean. Without further examples, this is difficult to interpret, though the author finds the explanation of the original report of the gilded Skye brooch to be “probably lost while it was found, digging peat” (Simpson, 1955, p. 195), to be simplistic, especially since gilded brooches were objects that were likely part of a high-status presentation of an individual.

Adrian Maldonado has stated that many of the metalworking finds from Lewis and the Uists may be the result of otherwise unknown beach markets (Maldonado, 2021, p. 205).

Maldonado did not specify which artefacts or which beaches he believes may have been used as beach markets, but one likely region was referring to would have been Traigh Na Beirgh at Cnip, where several stray finds of ringed-pins have been found, and the islands and peninsulas of the Harris Sound, where a half dozen examples of copper alloy ringed pins are known. While this interpretation is interesting, and beach markets likely existed in the area of study, the author finds that there is a lack of archaeological tangible examples, i.e., clear clusters of metalwork on a beach, to support this interpretation.

Many of the stray finds in the area of study have been linked to burials by previous authors. James Graham-Campbell & Batey lists the ringed pin at Heisker as being from a Christian Norse burial, as in a pin used for a shroud (1998, p. 74), and Harrison includes this site as a probable burial in his appendix (2008, p. 488). The author finds that this is just as likely to have come from a settlement. Harrison has argued convincingly that there is a tendency for Viking-period burials in the British Isles to be found in church sites, or what would later become church sites (Harrison, 2008, p. 239). A similar find of a ringed pin from the Church of Scotland, Canna, is not considered a burial, though it appears to fit into a Viking-period burial landscape pattern. In the opinion of the author, objects more likely to be from a burial are the

whalebone plaque fragment and the Chaipavel trefoil brooch, but without further archaeological context, they are considered stray finds for this analysis.

Overall, while the stray finds occur in low number, there does seem to be a general spread of elite activity, particularly at certain points in the landscape, such as on islands (i.e. Heisker *site 59*), sheltered inlets (Vendel brooch *site 43*), and headlands (Chaipavel *site 21*).

12.8 Bornais

Bornais summarized

The excavations of the Bornais are fully published and represents the largest collection of Norse-period structures and artefacts from the area of study. The site itself was high-status in the Early Norse period, though activity may have begun earlier in the 9th century, and remained a high-status site until a short disruption in the 12th century, and its abandonment in the 14th or 15th centuries AD.

The site is located geographically central on South Uist, 1.6 km from one of two anchorages on the west coast of the island. The site itself has been interpreted as the most high-status and rich complex on South Uist, representing a likely administrative centre of the island, and perhaps the entire Hebrides. This is due to the size of the main structure throughout its phases, the richness in its assemblages, and evidence of bone and antler working, as well as possibly a herring processing component, all for export. The presence of certain high-status objects also lends credence to this argument. Comparisons to the site are difficult, with only the Norse complex at Birsay, Orkney perhaps providing a similar layout and status (Sharples, 2019, pp. 600-601). However, Bornais has a much larger hall and richer assemblage than any contemporary Norse-period sites thus excavated so far in Scotland. The author believes that one possible comparison may be Avaldsnes on Karmøy in Rogaland, Norway, a likely seat of West Norwegian kings (e.g. Skre, 2018), but this comparison is beyond the scope of this thesis.

Bornais has some ramifications for investigating Norse-period landscape and settlement on Skye and the Western Isles. Firstly, it appears structurally unique in terms of excavated settlement sites. There are perhaps some comparisons, but the first, earliest excavated structure, House I on Mound 2, was built of turf and timber. The other excavated structures (Udal, Cille Pheadair, Barvas, and Drimore) possessed stone-built foundations, though the foundation of the Norse-period house at Bostadh appears to be built with turf and wood as well.

Bornais is clearly high-status and remains so throughout its sequencing with the exception of a transition period at the beginning of the 12th century. The presence of the structures on Mound 1 is also indicative of its status, though these structures are undated and not well understood. Bornais occupying the anchorage at Ardvule is also significant, and can be at least linked to the increased exploitation of herring shoals throughout the Norse period. Loch Eynort is east of the site, and while there is no evidence of canals or portages from Eynort to the inland freshwater loch Bornais, the placename is indicative of a portage (*Eid*), and the placename Hafn (*Havn*) is perhaps indicative of its importance in the seascape. Other sites that may be comparable to Bornais in status are speculative. There are two sites with richly-furnished burials in the area, at Cnip, Lewis, and Kildonan, Eigg, where the author would argue the richness of the grave goods of individual burials is comparable in status to Bornais, but neither of these sites can be linked to a settlement site and thus are not comparable. Placenames, geographical location, and access to resources can be used to determine high-status settlement sites, such as on Skye, but without archaeological evidence, no methodology of comparisons can be formulated, and it remains speculative.

The complex of Bornais appears to be unique thus far excavated in the Hebrides. Cille Pheadair never had a complex of houses, with one house being the foci of habitation throughout most of its lifespan, and this appears to be the case for Drimore, the Udal, and Barvas as well. The site at Bostadh was revealed by a storm and it is not possible to discuss if more Norse sites were present in the area due to the destructive nature of the storm. However, the placename Bostadh is highly suggestive of a secondary settlement, and therefore, it is unlikely that Bostadh would have been comparable to Bornais. Galson, Lewis may represent a high-status complex, but the site has only undergone keynote excavation to date the site. Other sites dated to the Norse period are not comparable, representing poorly understood settlement mounds or middens. Some of these mounds have been excavated and did not produce Norse settlement structures such as Nisabost and Northon on Harris, and Rosinish on Benbecula, and offer no viable comparisons.

The chronology of Bornais is also striking, showing a clear gap in the archaeological record based around the late 8th to early 10th centuries. Cille Pheadair and Barvas appear to have been founded later in the first half of the 10th century. The Udal, on the basis of artefact typology, may date earlier than Bornais but is not published as of 2022. The only information that the author has access to is a belt strap-end published by Graham-Campbell, which appears to be 9th-10th century and mentioned earlier in this segment (Graham-Campbell,

1974). For a regional comparison, the grave goods in the Hebrides can predate the earliest settlement at Bornais, with some grave goods likely clustering around the late 9th, early 10th century, perhaps at the tail-end of the raiding period. A find of a fragment of an oval brooch on the machair at Sliganeach (*site 63*) is conspicuous: no similar fragments were found in the assemblages at Bornais or from other settlement sites, and the only other oval brooch examples are from graves (usually interpreted as belonging to women) in the region. These brooches appear to go out of fashion in Scandinavia and England by the early 10th century (Kershaw, 2013, p. 156), and may represent some earlier activity on South Uist in the Viking Age that is not yet identified or understood, along with the find of what was likely a Viking-period grave in a cist located somewhere on the island (see *table 1*).

Bornais represents nearly all changes that occurred from the Late Iron Age to the Norse period. Norse-period structures, similar to Norse structures around Norway and the North Atlantic, are built on an already-established Late Iron Age farmstead. The artefact assemblage represents Norse dietary needs through the forms of pottery and dress attire, and an increased emphasis on deep-sea fishing is present in the zoological record. There appears to be a chronological gap in the 9th century, and Norse-style longhouses are built long after they cease to be built in Scandinavia around the beginning of the 11th century, and elite centres seem to occupy the same geographical area until the later medieval era.

12.8 The settlement landscape of the Norse period: ethnicity, power and summary

The landscape of the re-used settlement sites shows that the Norse favoured a particular type of landscape for their sites, particularly for their permanently settled sites, and likely, especially elite sites such as at Bornais. Pre-Norse, Iron Age elite sites were either appropriated if they fit into a Norse settlement pattern, or abandoned, as shown by the abandonment of the broch at Beirgh. The highest status settlement site of the pre-Norse period of South Uist was Frobost, but at Bornais in the Norse period, due to the size of the mounds (Parker Pearson, 2012). The Udal seems to have retained its status, probably because its landscape favoured a raiding party or pirate base (Sharples & Smith, 2009, p. 107; Raffield, 2013, p. 10). Bosta, a primary LIA settlement site, was likely a secondary Norse settlement site after its abandonment in the LIA, similar to Frobost. The Norse do seem to have preferred

to settle in the Iron Age landscape, but their settlement pattern, probably due to the strategic nodes on the seascape such as access to trade routes and maritime resources, stayed similar to that of the rest of the Norse world, particularly Orkney.

One difficulty in assessing the data is that the second highest number of Norse settlement sites have no known association with pre-Norse settlement sites, neither overlaying earlier sites, nor within a 500m radius. As mentioned above, there are some problems with this data, but for this particular dataset, two sites are excavated, and the excavators have not found evidence of pre-Norse sites.

- Most sites are not excavated. These sites have produced evidence of Norse settlement activity through erosion, ploughing, wind damage, or animal burrowing. It is possible that there are pre-Norse sites located underneath the Norse levels yet to be discovered.
- The two sites that were excavated and were shown not to overlay pre-Norse sites are of lower status than the other excavated sites, particularly the Barvas and Cille Pheadair (Cowie & Macleod Rivett, 2010). Bornais and the Udal are also likely earlier in date than these two sites. Barvas and Cille Pheadair can be dated to the earliest 930-950 AD.

Sharples has argued that the first two phases of Cille Pheadair represent a house, but whether this is an Iron Age or an earlier Norse structure is not discernible. Only one of the houses at Barvas was fully explored; the other house was not excavated (Cowie & Macleod Rivett, 2010). Macleod Rivett argues that this house is a byre. The author would argue that there is no evidence of byres in the Viking Age, and that the common interpretation is that the byre is attached to the house in its own “compartment” (Croix, 2014). Sharples has argued that the weather was never cold enough in the Hebrides to warrant keeping animals indoors, from the Bronze Age to the 21st century, including the Norse periods (Sharples, 2005). The author finds the argument that this structure is a byre unlikely, but since it was not excavated and was subsequently

destroyed by quarrying, it is not possible to know the function of this structure, or if any pre-Norse structures were beneath it.

If the Norse utilized the past landscape to legitimize themselves in the new land, as argued by Harrison (2013a,b), this could likely be seen at Bornais, the Udal, and Bostadh, and less clearly but also likely at Galson, along with other multiperiod settlement mounds. Through

this interpretation, the Norse utilized the past to consolidate their own power and authority by building “tell-like” longhouses on previously existing mounds. The past as a means of establishing political power during the Norse period could be seen in Viking-period Denmark (Dobat, 2015), and elsewhere. At high-status places of elite residency, incoming elites would draw upon the past by rebuilding halls, for example, at Järrestad, Tissø, and Jelling, Denmark (Dobat, 2015, p. 84). The build-up of anthropogenic mounds as “seats” of longhouses for elites to utilize the past has been well-argued for at similar Norse-period sites on Orkney (Harrison 2013c). These longhouses-on-mounds would have been visually dominating, raised off the ground even in lower-lying landscapes such as sandy hooks and harbours of Orkney (Harrison 2013a,b). The necessity of food, water, shelter, and other practical elements of house siting does not necessarily exclude ritual or ideological reasons (Hem Eriksen, 2019: p. 42). An interpretation that suggests continuity of placement and power centres, rather than dominance, could also invoke these multiperiod settlement sites as evidence. However, the issue of sites that are not re-used can be explained.

If the two sites in question can be taken as being not re-using previous settlement sites, then the latter dates of Barvas and Cille Pheadair may suggest that there was a change in ideology after the first generation of Norse settlers. If the Norse had uncontested control over the Hebrides, then there may have been little need to show dominance over the past (alternatively, the pre-Norse people would not need to assert themselves through the continuation of their centres of power), there may not have been a need to keep asserting that dominance. Another interpretation is that these sites can be classified as lower-status than the centres of power at the Udal and Bornais, where legitimization may have been much more important. It may have been much more important for an elite to possess a magnate farm with a history of usage as a means of legitimization, rather than a lower-status landowner, or tenant farmer, who did not need to legitimize themselves through this type of practice.

The Norse settlement, as argued in a previous article by the author (2021), did not seem to include the needs or traditions of the pre-Norse peoples in the form of siting farms and the re-use of settlements. The landscape presented is that of an incoming elite, that while did prefer to settle in or near Iron Age settlement sites, had specific landscape preferences that outweighed tradition or historic areas of elite settlement.

The lack of Norse settlement near areas of Early Christian sculpture seems to conform this. There have been arguments that the Norse respected or avoided areas of Early Christian

settlement and the two societies lived in harmony (Crawford, 2005). The author finds these arguments unconvincing because there have not been archaeologically dated pre-Norse monastic or other ecclesiastical settlements in the area of study, and the present dataset relies on placename, as well as dedications (such as dedications to early Celtic saints) to date ecclesiastical sites. This dating still gives a long potentiality of centuries, and it is unknown whether or not an Early Christian site had been abandoned for centuries before Norse arrival, recently abandoned, or was actually contemporary. Moreover, in the area of study, Lewis has no currently identified Early Christian sculpture, and Harris just has two, on Taransay (Fischer, 2002). The dates by Fischer for early Christian crosses cluster between the 6th-8th centuries, with only one sculpture that could be dated to contemporary with the Norse period (Kildonan, Eigg). It does seem that there was then a disruption of Early Christian activity brought upon by the arrival of the Norse in the Viking Age. This is not surprising, especially if the first wave of activity was a “pirate” phase, where monastic communities would have been targeted for attack due to the belief that these communities had portable riches, as Iona had been raided multiple times in the late 8th-early 9th centuries. Similarly, Pictish stones as well as Pictish square cairns disappear too around the same time, signalling a widespread cultural disruption that must have affected the monastic communities.

Norse settlement sites show a degree of continuity of the landscape. However, in what was perhaps a colonial, or aristocratic landscape, this likely took a different dimension than what it meant in the Scandinavian homeland, i.e., at Hopperstad, Norway, where the past does not seem to have been a part of the ideology of the aristocrats who were concerned with controlling power and people (Dommasnes & Hommedal, 2016, p. 163). The use of the landscape for aristocratic establishment through control of people and resources has been argued elsewhere in the Viking-period world, for example, at Järrestad, Denmark (Dobát 2015: 84). In the opinion of the author, this likely reflects convenience or dominance of the landscape and the re-use of the past to fit the

incoming emigrant narrative. In addition, there is the possibility that the pre-Norse, or other non-Norse, were used as servants or slaves as argued for at Bornais (Sharples, 2020, p. 465), at least some of the time, and worked in specialized settlement sites

related to outfield activities, such as at shielings, likely owned by elites but operated by lower-class individuals or slaves (Sindbæk, 2011, p. 104). While it is tempting to say that the re-use of some of the brochs and wheelhouses reflects a sense of identity for non-Norse Picts or

Gaels, such as argued for the aftermath of the Treaty of Perth (Raven, 2015; Macleod Rivett, 2016), the sites display a distinct sense of Norse artifacts, from Norse-style pottery to soapstone spindle whorls, and Norse dress objects. Finally, the brochs used seem to adhere to a specific landscape necessity that may explain why some brochs were re-used and some not – the needs or identity of the non-Norse peoples do not seem to have been considered.

Chapter 13: Conclusions

13.1.1 Settlement patterns

Using a centre-periphery model (4.2), this thesis expanded on ideas by Parker Pearson (2012) to explore the settlement pattern of South Uist, the author has utilized this concept and applied it to the rest of the area of study in a macro-scale, broad-period analysis.

The author found that the idea of a centre-periphery model to show a clear settlement pattern, when combined with both archaeological and placename data. The settlement pattern suggests a system with a high-status building on arable land, placed in a pivotal or strategic place in the maritime landscape. This is suggestive of an organization of resources and industry by elites, particularly elite families, as suggested by the artefactual assemblage at Bornais (Sharples, 2019; 2020). These elites controlled multifunctional farmsteads with a variety of resources. One important resource may have been the harbour along a sea-route, where taxes for passage could be levied, heavily suggested in the Late Norse period. The archaeological evidence for chronology is also suggestive that the most elite farms were likely the earliest, though the archaeological evidence is not entirely secure, with the Udal and Bornais being a generation or more earlier than the “middle status” farmsteads at Cille Pheadair and Barvas. The suggestion by Crawford that the Inner Hebrides were targeted for settlement first due to being along the Inner Minch sea-route whereas settlement along the western seaboard was later may have some weight to it (Crawford, 2018).

The centre-periphery of the Norse period seems to be organized on the basis of the infield and outfield, with outfield resources managed by the shieling system identified archaeologically (Sindbæk, 2011, p. 114-115) as well as by placenames which suggest different types of shielings for separate functions.

Placename scholars have long suggested a generational expansion of settlement throughout the area of study, with *setr*, *byr*, *sætr*, and *sted* first, followed by *bostadr* and then finally *gerraidh* (see Kruse & Jennings, 2009). At the current level of archaeological knowledge, there is difficulty in attaching this chronology to archaeological data. However, given that the first placenames were topographical (Kruse & Jennings, 2009) and these would have been settled earliest, the presence of somewhat earlier placenames (such as *Bornais*) in conjunction with some early archaeological evidence in the Viking Age, may suggest this pattern can be seen archaeologically.

The burial pattern is suggestive of a great deal of wealth in the area of study, and as stated in the chapter on the burial record, there are some concentrations (Kildonan, Cnip Peninsula, and the Sound of Harris), but burial sites have turned up outside of these concentrations as well. It is highly likely that the burial record suggests a society where numerous separate elites can be associated with territories, as noted by Norstein (2020, p. 43). In the case smaller but agriculturally viable islands such as Benbecula and Eriskay, a single elite family may have owned the island, suggested by wealthy Viking Age burials present on these islands. In the case of the Cnip peninsula, taking into consideration nearby Mangersta (*site 3*), there may have been separate elite farms in relative proximity to each other that all expressed their wealth through burials. Some of these burials were monumental (such as at Barra), others were likely associated heavily with pre-Norse burial places (such as at Cnip), or both (i.e., Tote house, Kildonan, Eigg).

With the burials placed in the Norse landscape, the overall settlement pattern is suggestive of multiple elite centres. There was likely a hierarchal settlement pattern that was based on wealth, that could be derived from a multitude of different factors,

such as at pivotal points in the maritime landscape and access to trade markets, to production of crops, fisheries, hunting-grounds or other resources such as driftwood, manufacture of prestige goods such as combs, military capabilities (Griffiths, 2020), an appropriation of ancestral burial grounds, or a combination of all of the above or more.

The elite centres that can be shown archaeologically are:

Lewis:

Possibly centred around Carloway due to placename evidence (Cox, 1989; Jesch, 2016) but possibly also further northeast at Galson (site 8), or in southeast in Uig, with the harbour of Cnip a likely destination for seacraft traveling from the Faroes or Iceland (*fig. 25*). This could explain why Uig would possess several high-status Viking-period burials despite being historically economically poor and possessing little arable land.

North Uist/Sound of Harris:

The Udal was likely the administrative centre of the Sound of Harris, with a concentration of elite activity around both sides of the Sound, as well as on the islands.

South Uist

Bornais, which likely was the administrative centre of South Uist if not the entirety of the Hebrides throughout much of the period (i.e., Sharples, 2005; Parker Pearson, 2012).

Eigg:

Kildonan, Eigg, where the three high-status, Viking-period burials, all containing swords and other high-status objects, were placed along one the sea-routes between North Scotland and the Irish Sea region is a likely place of early Viking Age power.

Skye:

Tote, Skye, where a cremation burial and later Norse archbishop seat was placed.

St. Kilda

St. Kilda, with three, possibly four elite Viking-period burials were located, suggesting a cemetery. In addition, St. Kilda was likely a stop-over or strategic point between the Hebrides

and Iceland that attracted elite establishment over the control of this sea-route. To call it a seat of power would be misleading, and the evidence is not nearly as well-established as Bornais or the Udal. Furthermore, it is unlikely to have had a magnate hall such as at Bornais.

The Hebrides are mentioned in historical sources as having seats at the Manx thing, hinting toward some kind of political autonomy for the region (Sharples, 2019, p. 598). It thus likely that elites had seats of power in the Hebrides. The abovementioned elite centres are what can be shown archaeologically, with placenames a distinctive addition. This was however likely more power-centres due to placenames, topography and historical importance (Fraser, 1995b; Ryder, 2021). These are at: Stornoway, Lewis; Harris, Rodel; Castlebay, Barra. Uig, Portree, Dunvegan, Broadford/Ashaig, Dun Torsbaig, all on Skye. Other potential places of important settlement may have been places where placenames survived of the Papar-variety, such as Pabbay islands which may have been concurrent with Norse settlement (Crawford, 2005). However, without archaeological evidence or investigation, it is not possible with the present amount of research to suggest for certain; placenames, topography, and historical sources and traditions such as rents may provide more insight in the future.

The concept of multiple elite centres is not a unusual for this area of study. In historical sources, multiple magnate elites are mentioned as “jarls” (kings’ saga) in the Viking Age, and “petty kings” in the *Historica Norvegia*, the latter composed in the 12th century and thus contemporary with Norse settlement, albeit Late Norse. In the Late Norse period, two separate dynasties are mentioned in historical sources, the Scotto-Norse MacSorleys that controlled the Uists and Barra, and the Hiberno-Norse Croven dynasty that controlled Skye, Lewis and Harris (Foster 2017). There are further “hints” in the historical record of different elites controlling different islands. The 13th century *Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar* speaks of Óláfr, a likely local elite,

who attempted to extract a tax from Icelanders who landed at the harbour of Sanday (island to the southeast of Canna) (Jesch, 2016, p. 234). This is suggestive that individual elites could own or control islands at pivotal points in the seascape. While

this thesis did not use historical sources, the archaeological sources heavily suggest a localized landscape dominated by dispersed elites, though likely still under a hierarchy.

The presence of multiple elites was likely higher in the early settlement stages, with elites from West Norway or elsewhere claiming the most important and strategic plots of land,

displaying their wealth to signify ownership, and gradually expanding settlement throughout the centuries. This is suggestive of an organized landscape, with permanent boundaries. As suggested by Sharples & Pearson, 1999 & Parker Pearson, 2012, pp. 7-8, a pre-Norse landscape may have provided a template for Norse settlers. Pre-established farms with clear boundaries may have eased tensions and disputes, a problem that seems to have occurred enough in Iceland that it is mentioned often in the Icelandic sagas. Elite families may have originated in different places of the Norse world. If it is possible to connect whalebone plaques to a particular North Norwegian dynasty (Storli, 2006, p. 176), then it is not illogical to suggest that the whalebone plaque fragment may be a symbol of the status of this family on North Uist, particularly on Berneray. Yet to the north on Lewis, Skye, and at the Udal, the presence of Hiberno-Norse personal ornaments can be inferred, and the presence of brooches of likely Swedish manufacture from burial A at Cnip may also suggest, at least partially, a point of origin. This is not to suggest that these objects signify ethnicity or cannot have been acquired through trade or any means, and there is more research needed in this area to explore this further. A picture of elites drawing upon either the power of being a foreigner in a different place (Dobat, 2015), or expressing a cross-continent wide sense of *Norseness* through material culture (Gräslund, 2009), or harnessing the prestige of the ancestral past (Maher & Bond, 2019; Leonard 2011), or perhaps, a combination of all of the above is a likely scenario of the both the Viking and Late Norse periods.

The placement of settlements and burials in the landscape as well as the placenames are suggestive that the system was likely highly organized. Key-points in the maritime landscape were likely targeted by elites early in Norse settlement history, such as at Bornais and Kildonan, and ownership and power were expressed through a display of wealth in the form of magnate halls such as Bornais, and above-ground burials at pivotal point in the seascape.

Pre-Norse centres of power were appropriated if they fit into an administrative pattern (such as at Bornais and the Udal) or were left abandoned if they did not (such as at Beirgh, Lewis). The Norse likely had practical reasons for re-occupying pre-Norse settlement sites: they were already located on favourable land, were placed in areas of relative physical stability, particularly on the machair plain or in sand-dune systems, and may have already come with borders, on-site building material, and perhaps people and animals if there was any sort of continuation between pre-Norse and Norse settlement. There may have also been some ideological reasons: destroying the home of an elite and building a new home in its stead, which is likely what happened at Bornais mound 2 and the Udal would have sent a clear

message of power. This message of power would have been even more exacerbated if the structure was entirely different in shape and size, such as the longhouse to the Atlantic roundhouse, and even more so if the building material was mostly timber, which would have displayed the personal wealth of an elite to build a house from timber when ample drystone would have been readily and easily available, as was the case at Bornais, and possibly Bostadh (Church et al., 2002, p. 65). Similarly, the display of rich pagan weapon and brooch burials would have signified both a new religion and culture (Macleod, 2015). Where exactly then did the pre-Norse peoples fit into all of this?

13.2 “Survival of the Picts”: negative evidence?

This thesis did not focus on ethnicity and the relationship between the pre-Norse peoples or other non-Norse ethnic groups in the region (the Picts, Gaels, and possibly Irish monks or others), nor did it focus on the archaeological evidence of mixed identities, such as Scotto-Norse, Norse-Gael, Picto-Norse, or Hiberno-Norse, all terms used by scholars to describe various potential groupings of these people in the area of study in recent years. As mentioned earlier in the thesis, there has been a focus on the question of the fate of the Picts in the area and in Northern Scotland in general. The author does not believe the archaeological data presented and interpreted could add anything new or different to the debate. Questions of continuity are still difficult to quantify due to an overall lack of excavated and published material. In addition, questions of survival of pre-Norse populations postulated at places such as Christian ecclesiastical sites are unanswerable without clear archaeological evidence that they

were in existence at the onset of Norse colonization, or continued throughout the Norse period, of which there appears to be none.

Despite the above, the author finds the conclusion that he reached in his article (Ryder, 2021, pp. 248-249) to be most relevant: no matter what happened to the Picts, they do

not seem to have been too involved in the process of Norse colonization, and Norse society seems to have been set-up as if it were a virgin landscape. This shows a high likelihood that the ethnic shift from Pict to Norse was violent in nature, and perhaps the islands went through a systematic, planned depopulation as Macniven argued happened on Islay (2013; 2015) and

by Wilson on Man (2008, p. 36). The author finds the arguments made by Smith (2001) and Jennings & Kruse (2005) to be the most convincing, with Sharples (2020, p. 463) alluding to the survival of Picts and/or Gaels remaining as a slave or underclass, also argued for by Andersen (1991) and Crawford (1987). The pattern of settlement and manner of burial rites all suggest the Picts, Gaels, and Irish monks (if any) that populated the islands had little or no power in Norse society. As time went on, Norse remained the prestige language throughout the centuries, likely until the formal change of power from Norwegian to Scottish in 1266 (Macleod Rivett, 2016). Survivals in pottery production, building customs textile production, the creation of ritual pits, and other indicators of uniquely Iron Age practices surviving after Norse colonization of South Uist (Sharples, 2020, p. 463), as well as the use of human bone for spindle whorls in Orkney and Shetland, an indigenous practice (Shapland & Armit, 2012), is suggestive that some survival must have occurred, but these all seem low-status and is suggestive of the argument of Andersen that the Picts may have survived as an underclass (1991, p. 130). What happened in the Viking Age is murkier, though the placename evidence alone is suggestive that the Norse during the Norse-period did not share power with a non-Norse people. However, it must be stressed more excavated and published material is needed to explore these thoughts further beyond this preliminary interpretation, and even then, this question may still remain unanswerable.

13.3 Harbours, landing-places, and sea-routes

This thesis made much use of the importance of harbours, landing-places, and sea-routes. The author overall found this to be difficult. The majority of data for harbours, landing-places and sea-routes is modern. One pitfall is that modern boating is based on safety, and as people tend to not always follow safety regulations in the modern day, it is not a stretch to imagine that what could be considered a landing-place during the Norse-period would not be considered one in the 20th or 21st centuries. A current (as of 2023) project headed by Alexandra Sanmark has been launched to alleviate this issue by reconstructing the Norse use of harbours by targeted excavation, geophysical survey and local knowledge and traditions. An absence of a study like this made it difficult to assess the harbours, landing-places and sea-routes by using a variety of modern sources. However, a great deal of the natural, sheltered harbours and

landing-places today would have been used during the Norse-period as such; the placename evidence alone shows that.

Strategic points in the maritime landscape may allow otherwise poor regions to prosper as elite centres. This could explain why the Cnip peninsula was the final resting place for at least two elite Viking Age women, since the peninsula was to the west of a haven from storms along as well as enroute to a nearby anchorage.

Nevertheless, a pattern has emerged of the importance of the maritime landscape. Norse settlement was oriented toward the sea, as farmer-fishermen that depended on the sea for sustenance, communication links, trade, and more complicatedly, power and authority.

Elite settlements were placed at strategic points in the maritime landscape. Dockrill & Bond argue that the Norse take over at already established Pictish sites designate estates that controlled land resources and significant areas of the maritime landscape at Swandro (Orkney) and Old Scatness (Shetland) (Dockrill & Bond, 2023). Elite burials were placed at important harbours or overlooking sea-routes in order to signify to others who owned and controlled them (Jesch, 2016, p. 234). This may indeed explain why St. Kilda which is otherwise unimportant and liminal would have had three elite burials on the island: its harbour would have been a haven for seacraft traveling between the Hebrides and Iceland. The Viking-period burial record is suggestive of a control of the waterways and ownership of pivotal points of the maritime landscape, and was expressed visually, perhaps drawing upon the power of the ancestors, e.g., *Odelsrett* to solidify authority. How this was expressed after the Viking Age is trickier; if the episode of *Olaf* on Sanday of Canna is any indication, local elites could extract taxes for passage or to use safe-harbours.

13.4 Skye and the Western Isles: a microcosm for what caused the Scandinavian Expansion?

The area of study could be seen as a «pull» factor in the push-pull factors for migration. Norse migration and settlement in Skye and the Western Isles was organized, and likely expensive and logistically challenging. Houses and even halls were built, resources were harvested, and managed, administrative centres were upheld, burial rites and traditions were enforced. From

excavation reports of Bornais, Bostadh, Cille Pheadair, and Barvas, it is clear that offshore fish were exploited. Agricultural land, while not as viable in the area of study as elsewhere in the Norse Scottish world such as Orkney, must also have been in need. Maritime routes and harbours may have been tightly controlled and taxes levied in certain places. The nodal argument may have weight here (summarized mostly recently by Horne, 2021) located along the route between Orkney and the Irish Sea, the Hebrides would have been sought after as a nodal to control trade and passage.

However, the nodal argument somewhat takes the focus away from the area of study as its own separate unit. The elite, magnate farm of Bornais had a larger hall and a richer assemblage than any comparable sites found thus far in Orkney (Sharples, 2019, p. 600). While the physical position of the islands as a crossroads is undeniable, the area of study offered much more than just a node in a network of otherwise more important places.

Elites likely targeted large, substantial tracks of land that could support a manorial or magnate, and these were likely some of the earliest forms of settlement. This has been argued by Steinberg et al for Iceland (2016). As Steinberg et al states: “whatever the cases or causes, if the Viking-Age settlers knew that the advantages to being first were so substantial, then that would go a long way toward explaining the rapid colonization of the island and the character of the subsequent medieval manorial state” (Steinberg et al., 2016, p. 404). Keller argues that Norse colonizers had an economic mindset in the role of exploring and exploiting resources for luxury items such as furs, which eventually led to the colonization of non-Norse territories (Keller, 2010). With regards to the resources of Skye and the Western Isles, such as stockfish or the control of sea-routes, an economic pull factor can be argued as a catalyst for colonization, similar to that as argued by Keller.

Likely, the area of study offered space for people to live, particularly elites to set up almost entirely as they had in their homelands. Borders may have already been established, easing tension between elites or neighbours, or used bodies of water such as lakes or rivers (i.e., Lund, 2008). The peoples of the islands, in both the Hebrides and Northern Islands, were not politically powerful or unified enough to halt the advance of Scandinavian colonisation, or contest Scandinavian power like in south England or Ireland or mainland Scotland in the later Norse period. The Norse settlers would have likely had a relatively peaceful existence compared to elsewhere in areas of Norse colonisation with more powerful polities that could challenge them. If arable land was a major factor in “pushing” Norwegian settlers out of

Norway, then there would have been arable land “pulling” them into Skye and the Western Isles. Perhaps uncomfortably, there may not have been much resistance to settling, and the land may have been settled in a manner similar to that of Iceland, a landscape uninhabited by people.

Nevertheless, the history of the pre-Norse peoples would still have been socially important, with a high rate of re-use of burial monuments for pagan Norse burials (Harrison, 2008; McLeod, 2015b; *table 3* of this thesis). Some of the pre-Norse period farms may have been recently abandoned, or even still in usage at the time of Norse colonisation, offering an easy transition to a new life. Perhaps one resource itself attracting Norse colonisation was the fact that people were there, particularly, an underclass of unfree or slaves to work the farms, particularly in the outfield, as suggested by Crawford (1987). If a lack of marriable women was a factor in “pushing” elite Norwegian men out of Norway (Raffield et al., 2017) then perhaps a pool of unmarried Pictish/Gaelic or Irish women would have been a pull factor in the new homeland, as suggested by Sharples (2019, p. 623), and alluded to through mtDNA analysis of the modern Hebridean populations (3.1.6).

13.5 Future research

Future integration of archaeology and placename studies

This study has taken a step toward integrating archaeological and placename data, but by no means was this the focus of the thesis. This would require more placename research in the area, as well as collaboration between archaeologists and placename scholars. One hurdle faced with placename data is that there are not many placename researchers, and overall, the discipline is small and there is a lack of funding and interest at a university level (Brink, 2019). The author found the placename data for the Hebrides to be difficult: studies tended to be decades old, with entire regions or islands lacking recent data or analysis, and without much overall integration. A step forward could be for archaeologists and placename scholars interested in the Hebrides to work together closely.

This area of this thesis included the Outer Hebrides and Skye and the Western Isles, and included all currently known Norse-period sites that could be confirmed by the author. As

archaeological evidence is always expanding, the author intends to include further evidence that will undoubtedly turn up Skye and the Western Isles in its database.

13.5.1 Expanding to the Inner Hebrides and the West Coast of Scotland

The area of study included the entirety of the entirety of the Outer Hebrides, and from the Inner Hebrides, Skye and the Small Isles. It did not include the rest of the Inner Hebrides (including Coll, Tiree, Orosay, Mull, Islay, and so forth), nor did it include the western seaboard of Scotland, such as Lochalsh or Argyll. Further research could re-evaluate the evidence from these areas. It would in particular be worthwhile to see how the rest of the Hebrides compares to this area of study.

13.5.2 Comparisons: other colonies, or West Norway

This study offered a landscape methodological approach to the Norse-period of Skye and the Western Isles, and incorporated a variety of data to do so. Targeted areas of Norse colonization of Scotland such as Orkney, Shetland, Caithness, or on Man, Northwest England, or Ireland could also benefit from a similar study. Moreover, the data of Skye and the Western Isles would benefit from being compared to Western and Northern Norway, where the majority of Scandinavian-speaking settlers to the Hebrides would have originated.

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APPENDIX

A1 Non-provenanced sites

Name	Place	Artefacts	Notes	Reference
Skye hoard	Skye, "mound".	Silver chain, bronze chain, silver "ring money"	Poor record. Unknown number of artefacts in the NMAS.	HER: MHG55552
Skye gaming pieces	Skye – Loch Chalum Chille	Ivory "chessmen"	18th century report, in private possession. Poor record.	HER: MHG5784
Fludda ring	Fludda, somewhere in peat	Gold ring (twisted rods)	In NMAS. Found while digging peat.	HER: MHG4101
Gold ring	Possibly found near MacLeod's tables	Gold ring (twisted rods)	In NMAS. 19th century report, no further record.	HER: MHG55554
Shiant Isles pottery	Unlocated	Pottery sherd	Likely from an eroding settlement. In private collection.	Lane, 1983
Berneray pins	"Middens"	2 copper-alloy ringed-pins	From unlocated middens. In the NMAS.	NMAS
North Uist whetstone w/fitting.	North Uist	Whetstone (schist?) with copper-alloy fitting for suspension	In the NMAS. No further record.	NMAS

Table 7: list of non-provenanced sites.

A2 Possible Norse sites

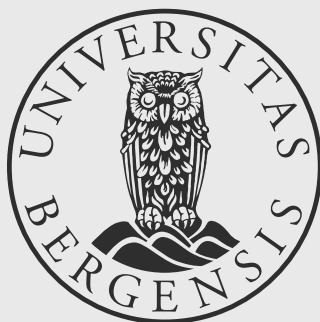
Name	Place	Artefacts	Notes	Reference
Toa, Crobeg	Lewis	Stone-built wall enclosing two landing-places, two turf-build rectangular houses.	Interpreted by Burgess as a Norse fortified harbour. Interpreted by Murphy as potential D-shaped fort. The author conducted drone survey at the site and the results were inconclusive.	Canmore ID: 336038
Aird Sithaig	Lewis	Turf rectangular house occupying a small headland.	Interpreted by Burgess as a Norse fortified harbour. The author conducted drone survey at the site and the results were inconclusive.	Canmore ID: 336243
Beirgh structures	Lewis	Two large turf-built rectangular structures	Interpreted by Macleod Rivett as Norse longhouses or halls.	(Macleod Rivett, 2021)
Aird Nan Eireach	Skye	Stone-built rectangular structure.	Interpreted as a Norse house and harbour by Miket et al 1990. The author conducted drone survey at the site and the	Canmore ID: 69596

			results were inconclusive	
Alt a'Ghlinne	Skye	Stone-built boat-shaped structure	Interpreted as a potential Norse longhouse by Wildgoose	Wildgoose pers. commen.2020.

Table 8: list of possible Norse sites.



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