

## Landnam and Landscape in Viking Orkney

David Griffiths

The Viking heritage of Orkney and Shetland is widely and justifiably celebrated. Norse place-names abound in the landscapes and seascapes of the Northern Isles, to the virtual exclusion of other linguistic origins. Saints' dedications and other local traditions hark back to the islands' Norse earldom association with Scandinavia, prior to their transfer to Scotland in 1468-71. *Orkneyinga Saga*, composed in Iceland around 1200, gives the origin of the Earldom of Orkney as happening in the reign of Harald Fairhair of Norway, around AD 870, although there are grounds for suspecting the 870 date to be a retrospective claim. The saga describes Harald's expedition to rid the islands of plundering Vikings (ethnicity unspecified) who had become a problem for Norway (Pálsson and Edwards 1978, 26). However, its coverage of events only becomes fully-fledged from the time of Earl Sigurd II (960-1014), and there were political reasons in the context of 1200 for the advocates of Norwegian rule in the North Atlantic to 'back-date' its claim (Griffiths 2019, 2020). As argued below, the imprint of Scandinavian influence on the landscape of the Northern Isles may be a somewhat later development than traditionally supposed.

Eighteenth and nineteenth-century antiquarians excavated in and around prehistoric monuments, and were not unaware of the legacy of the 'Danes' (Graham-Campbell 2004), but the Viking era in the Northern Isles was not a significant academic concern for excavation until more recently. *Orkneyinga Saga* was first translated into English as late as 1873 (Goudie et al. 1873), but it took yet longer for a search for the Viking presence to enter archaeological consciousness in a systematic way. An upsurge of nationalist-minded Viking scholarship in Scandinavia, particularly in Norway after its independence from Sweden was achieved in 1905, was undoubtedly influential, yielding the *Viking Antiquities in Great Britain and Ireland* series of volumes largely researched in the 1920s and published in 1940. Home-grown scholars of that era, notably J. Storer Clouston, and later Hugh Marwick, focused their attentions on documenting the physical and toponymic legacy of Norse rule. To Marwick, the Viking arrival was as bloody and complete as his scholarly Norwegian counterparts would have wished to hear: truly an ethnic cataclysm (Smith 2003, 145-46). The period of 'Culture History' in early to mid-twentieth century archaeological scholarship emphasised invasion and conquest and the movements and migrations of peoples as explanations for culture change. This has been an enduringly powerful framework for academic research. It has produced an emphasis on the Viking Age as a total or near-complete break with the past, a re-cast or even supplanted society, and a 'colonial' presence introducing Scandinavian practices to virtually every sphere of life and death.

Despite there being no tangible evidence for early Viking raids in Orkney or Shetland (Griffiths 2019; 2020, 320-21), in common with the dates of early raiding which are historically attested elsewhere in Britain, there was for long a widespread acceptance that the critical moment of transition in the Northern Isles occurred with violent Viking raids or invasions around AD 800 followed by relatively synchronous Viking settlement (the 'Landnam' - the taking or naming of land); from then on Scandinavian dominance has been perceived to be profound. When *Vikings in Scotland, An Archaeological Survey* was published, these concepts and dates remained mainstream, although the beginnings of revisionist thought were appearing (Graham-Campbell and Batey 1998, 54; see also Buteux 1997, 261-4, and Barrett et al. 2000). Twenty years on, there are yet greater grounds for questioning the continuing hold of the 'colonial invasion' concept. Was the early Viking arrival really

such a dramatic and sudden watershed? - the “Big Bang” theory described by Barbara Crawford (1995, 139) - changing everything within a few years? (and need this idea necessarily be opposed to a universal counter-theory of peaceful assimilation?). Could it instead have been more of a slow, ragged process, perhaps involving undocumented episodes of violence on a local scale and some negotiation, with, in its early phase, more cultural convergence between pre-Viking and Viking populations? Moreover, rather than the ‘landnam’ happening largely at the start of the Viking presence, could episodes of political take-over, major societal change and immigration have occurred somewhat later, well within what we understand to be the Norse period? Could it therefore have taken a much longer and more incremental self-generating process for the landscape and culture we recognise today as ‘Scandinavian’ to take shape?

### **Continuity, change, and the early Viking presence in Orkney and Shetland**

*Vikings in Scotland, An Archaeological Survey* lays out the means by which we document and understand the Viking presence. ‘The Norwegian Background’ sets the scene for regional surveys in Scotland, followed by pagan Norse graves, settlements, the economy, hoards, runic inscriptions, sculpture, and influences on the church. The Northern Isles loom large throughout the book’s coverage. Architecturally, much attention has been given to the differences between the rounded building forms of the pre-Viking era, notably Iron Age brochs, wheelhouses and ‘cellular’ Pictish buildings, and the rectilinear longhouse style of domestic building commonly associated with the Viking presence. Pictish inhabitations underwent modifications of use, style, and material culture which archaeologists have associated with the arrival of Scandinavian settlers, but then there is then often seen a hiatus in locus and time before more substantial longhouse-based settlement forms emerge, from the later tenth century onwards. In some cases, this activity takes place on (most often peripheral) parts of mounded sites which had been previously occupied, whereas in others it occurs on new sites, situated away from previous occupation. *Contiguity* of placement does not necessarily equate to *continuity* of occupation. Furnished pagan burial plays a particular role in these transitions, as will be discussed below.

Over the past fifty years, the most influential excavation for charting the transition from Pictish to Viking eras in Orkney has been the site of Buckquoy (Fig. 1), near the end of the peninsula forming the northern extent of Birsay Bay, on Orkney’s West Mainland. This was excavated as a rescue project by Anna Ritchie in 1970-71 (Ritchie 1977). A settlement mound then perched on the edge of an eroding cliff-face, its physical position is now gone, but the influence of its published findings remains, and its interpretation was subject to a reappraisal by Ritchie and others in 2003 (Brundle et al. 2003). In the primary report of 1977, a relative scheme of phasing was developed, where Ritchie outlined five phases of occupation, two in association with cellular-type buildings, and three subsequently with buildings of a more rectilinear plan. An orthodoxy emerged, which is conveyed in *Vikings in Scotland*, (Graham-Campbell and Batey 1998, 160-61) that the latter three phases of occupation were indicative of a Norse occupation of the site. The 2003 reappraisal began to cast this interpretation in a more ambiguous light, quoting examples such as the Howe, near Stromness, where Iron Age and Pictish buildings displayed rectilinear traits, and conversely where more rounded features have been observed in diagnostically Norse buildings, notably those on the neighbouring Brough of Birsay (Brundle et al. 2003, 96). The majority of the finds from Buckquoy were Pictish or

Insular in type, and the later settlement phases did not produce a haul of typical bone pins, combs, beads and steatite such as might now be expected from a Viking settlement site in the Northern Isles, casting further doubt on the Norse attribution of the later phases. The authors of the 2003 reappraisal restated their belief that the later occupation phases were Norse, but their words convey a more equivocal tone than did the 1977 site report. Anna Ritchie has confirmed to the author that in the light of yet another generation of scholarship on early medieval Scotland having occurred in the interim, she now readily accepts the likelihood of a Pictish attribution for all of the occupation phases marked by both cellular and rectilinear buildings at Buckquoy (Ritchie, pers comm. January 2021).

In the most recent post-occupation phase (6) at Buckquoy, of a furnished burial of pagan type of a mature male above the remains of House 3. This included a cut halfpenny of Eadmund of Wessex (940-46), a date which must surely be the *terminus post-quem* of date of the burial deposit, despite a confusingly early radiocarbon date of the mid-first millennium AD, taken from human remains which were thought to be associated with the burial, but which may have come from an intrusive bone from an earlier deposit (Barrett 2003, 103). The furnished burial's mid-tenth century date chimes with other burials inserted in pre-Viking settlement mounds, which were then not subject to further Norse activity (see below).

The Brough of Birsay, a prominent tidal island a short distance off the western end of the Buckquoy Peninsula, was described by Graham-Campbell and Batey as "an embryonic [Pictish] power base which was taken over by the Vikings" (Graham-Campbell and Batey 1998, 11). On its eastern, landward-facing side, the roofless stone shell of the church known as the Norse earldom's first 'cathedral' of the early twelfth century stands amid an extensive spread of Norse domestic and industrial structures, which overlie more structurally-fleeting Pictish deposits containing important pre-Viking metalworking evidence. A cracked but complete Type II Pictish-style symbol stone was unearthed during excavations in the 1935. There are signs in Birsay's long history of archaeological activity that the area's political later importance as a centre of the earldom may have affected interpretations of its central or unusual status in the preceding Pictish and early Viking periods, producing a caveat offered by Anne Brundle who discussed what she saw as its 'unimportance' in the Pictish era (Brundle 2005). A final publication by Christopher Morris of excavations on the Brough from 1954 onwards has recently appeared (Morris 2021). Commenting on her reappraisal of radiocarbon dates from Morris's excavations, with regard to the Pictish-Viking transition Zoë Outram states: "the earliest period of occupation was recorded on the Brough of Birsay in Sites I, III, IV North and South and in Room 5. The dates for the remains assessed within these areas spanned cal AD 665 to cal AD 1210, which was refined to span *cal AD 735 to cal AD 1190* following the production of modelled estimates. This could be used to suggest that the initial Scandinavian occupation in Birsay occurred at the earliest within the *eighth century* but as late as the *twelfth century*." (Outram 2021, 560). The likelihood is somewhere in the middle of this range.

At the southern end of Birsay Bay, a large but badly-deflated sandy settlement mound known as Saevar Howe was ineptly dug into in 1862, when a long-cist cemetery was identified along with pre-Viking artefacts, and was subjected to a smaller but more orderly rescue excavation in 1977, which identified walls and finds which were interpreted as denoting Norse and pre-Norse phases of occupation, but no trace of the cemetery was found (Hedges 1983). The date and precise nature of

the transition between the phases, and whether they were consecutive or separated by a hiatus was uncertain, although a silver penny of Burgred of Mercia (866-868) was found, associated with the earliest part of the trend towards a rectilinear building style.

At Pool, on Sanday, a large multi-period settlement mound excavated by John Hunter between 1983 and 1988, there was also some apparent evidence of settlement continuity from the Pictish to Viking periods, towards the end of a long occupation sequence which begins in the Neolithic (Hunter 2007). Hunter's chapter 5, on the critical phase 7 ('Interface and Scandinavian Settlement') is prefaced with a quotation from George Mackay Brown giving lyrical expression to a violent invasion by blond Scandinavians. The early part of Phase 7 (7.1) is still Iron Age or Pictish in character, with compact, rounded buildings, but the succeeding sub-phase (7.2) saw the creation of longer, more sub-rectilinear buildings in two discrete areas on the north-eastern and southern peripheries of the main prehistoric settlement mound (Structures 25-28). The foundations of (Phase 7.2) Structure 25, a timber building, rest on part of the rounded, Iron Age-style Structure 18, from Phase 7.1, indicating that Structure 18 had gone out of use. Nevertheless Hunter postulated that there was an overlap in occupation between phases 7.1 and 7.2. Although preservation and therefore interpretation for Phase 7.2 were compromised by plough damage, Hunter was confident in drawing the conclusion that it marked the onset of Scandinavian occupation at the site, stating that Structure 25 "differed fundamentally from associated or earlier local styles", representing "a fundamental change in cultural ethos" (ibid., 123). The possibility of endogenous change explaining the Phase 7.2 building types at Pool was apparently not considered or favoured as an interpretation, perhaps showing the enduring power of the culture-historical paradigm in the minds of excavators. The onset of critical cultural change at Pool was argued, on the basis of five radiocarbon dates (Hunter 2007, 140), to the critically early date of the late eighth to early ninth century, despite calibration problems being referred to, and the materials dated not being mentioned in the report (thus preventing a view being taken on whether longevity of use, or the marine reservoir effect, might have skewed this chronology earlier than the time they might truly represent). A key element in Hunter's interpretation was the introduction of artefacts including steatite whorls and bone pins, together with flax and iron working evidence which are generally accepted to be more characteristic of Norse settlements, although the cultural signals from Phase 7 were mixed. The subsequent (and last) phase at Pool, Phase 8, did see a shift and reordering of the site towards a more pronounced Scandinavian cultural signature, with a well-preserved longhouse (Structure 29), a 'Late Norse' phase whose onset Hunter suggested had occurred in the "late tenth or early eleventh century" (ibid., 147). Phase 8 does not appear to be integrated in any way with Phase 7, suggesting rather than Hunter's preferred term 'reorganisation' (implying ongoing activity), a re-use of the site following a hiatus may in fact have taken place.

'Transitional' phases between Pictish and Norse identified at Buckquoy and Pool are also evident on comparable sites in Shetland. At Old Scatness, an extensive multi-period site near the southern tip of Mainland, with an Iron Age broch and other structures, modifications to existing architecture and material culture, associated by their excavators with an early Norse presence, were initially imposed within the structure of pre-Viking wheelhouses, Structures 6 and 11. Internal space was reordered, hearths were modified, ironworking activity was detected and flagged floors introduced, leading their excavators to state that "The Viking settlement at Old Scatness was well-established by the beginning of the 10th century AD and probably by the late 9th century" (Bond and Dockrill 2016, 11).

A fragmentary longhouse (Structure 4) appeared on part of the existing settlement mound, parts of the substantial Iron Age structures, including a broch, were apparently altered to some extent, and there was a spread of fish middens of a type recognisable at Late Norse settlements elsewhere (Dockrill et al. 2010, 88-92). The authors of the 2010 Old Scatness report linked the onset of Norse occupation to the nearby and previously excavated site at Jarlshof (*ibid.*, 95-97).

A similar site to Old Scatness in many respects, but with more pronounced Norse and later occupation (Fig. 2), Jarlshof was extensively excavated before and after the second world war, and promptly published in the 1950s (Hamilton 1956). At the end of the wheelhouse era, a number of small, simple sub-rectilinear buildings emerged which were located upon, but acentral to, the large prehistoric settlement mound (Phase I), whereas the succeeding Phase II saw much larger and more identifiably Norse-style longhouse construction, the two phases forming a remarkable parallel to Pool's phases 7 and 8. J.R.C. Hamilton, the author of the comprehensive and well-crafted 1956 report, dated the start of Phase I as around the familiar (see above) historical watershed of AD 800, but lacking the facility of radiocarbon dating or statistical modelling, the site's phasing and chronology remain, as noted by Graham-Campbell and Batey in 1998, in need of re-examination. Elsewhere in Shetland, excavations of part of a multi-period settlement site at Norwick, Unst, have produced five radiocarbon determinations which, along with Norwegian-sourced steatite objects, suggest a relatively early phase of Viking occupation, possibly well within the ninth century, although there are some caveats about this possibility expressed in the interim publication (Ballin Smith 2013, 229). Norwick was identified as a Viking settlement on artefactual grounds, although there was also evidence of flagged floors and drains. The building remains were fragmentary but appear to lack some of the attributes of 'classic' longhouse settlements elsewhere in Unst, such as Underhoull, Hamar and Belmont, which are dated to a considerably later phase of the Viking Age (Bond and Dockrill 2016, 8).

The picture which emerges from the multi-period settlement sites briefly outlined above is of an intermediate phase of gradual adoption of architectural and artefactual traits which have been interpreted as Norse introductions, but aspects of which equally-well could be endogenous adaptations. Material culture is portable, and architecture is subject to repeated modification and innovation. No society which is in any way connected to the outside world remains static in these respects. At Pool, Old Scatness and Jarlshof, an intermediate phase where pre-Viking buildings were used as foundations and to some extent remodelled, with a changing economy and material culture, was followed by a more pronounced Norse phase, but the case for direct contiguity between these phases remains uncertain. The spread of Later Norse longhouses on the Brough of Birsay, at Jarlshof, and Phase 8 at Pool, may essentially be new settlements of the mid-tenth century onwards, in these cases taking advantage of abandoned but prominent locations rather than forming a direct evolution of their preceding phases. In the 1997 publication of excavations of undertaken by Peter Gelling in 1963-81 at Skail, Deerness, on Orkney's East Mainland, Simon Buteux stated that the evidence did not suggest much continuity between Pictish and Viking periods, despite the fact that the latest pre-Viking phase of buildings included rectilinear examples (Buteux 1997, quoted in Graham-Campbell and Batey 1998, 170). Although, like Jarlshof, the dating parameters of the site's phases are not supported by radiocarbon or other absolute dating chronologies and therefore subject to doubt and revision, Buteux perceptively divided the character of the Norse occupation into the 'pioneer', 'consolidation' and 'establishment' phases (Buteux 1997, 261-65).

## Marking and establishing the Norse landscape

It is inevitable that many favoured settlement locations will attract repeated settlement over time, but the use by Norse settlers of older sites for occupation or burial does not present a consistent picture, nor was their settlement confined to existing foci. The situation appears to this author appears far more complex, nuanced and varied than a theory of appropriation of positions of existing power by incoming groups may suggest (see e.g. Leonard 2012; McLeod 2015). At Buckquoy, the settlement phase of the mound probably ended before the Phase VI pagan grave was inserted. It represents not a new beginning on that site, but the ending of a story reaching back into the pre-Viking period. Rather than an annexation by incoming peoples, it arguably represents a form of commemorative closure of an abandoned mound.

The Broch of Gurness (or Aikerness), on the Evie shore of Orkney's West Mainland was, prior to excavation in the 1930s, a large amorphous settlement mound accumulated around a well-preserved Iron Age broch. The site evidently had some secondary Pictish and, less convincingly, Norse occupation; a building said to be from each era is reconstructed near its visitor centre, and in 1935 a roughly-incised Class 1 Pictish symbol stone was found on top of a wall flanking the central passageway into the broch. At least two Viking burials were found among the latest deposits at the site, the better preserved of which was in a most prominent position at the outer limit of the entrance passage to the broch. Other broch sites in Orkney such as the Howe, near Stromness, and Lamba Ness on Sanday, have produced secondary Viking burials, as have sites of pre-Viking occupation and middens, such as at Brough Road (south of Red Craig), Birsay, 'Knowe of Moan', Harray, The Knowe of Swandro on Rousay, and Styes of Brough on Sanday (McLeod 2015, 2-4; Morris 1989, 109-42). At Swandro, a Late Norse longhouse settlement is located a short distance away from the (evidently somewhat earlier) Viking burial site, and at Brough Road, midden material accumulated evidently from Viking settlement activity somewhere nearby, but thus far we know of no evidence of such burials being focal foundation deposits for ongoing occupation. This indicates that, as at Buckquoy, such secondary pagan burials can be seen as an 'end event' for pre-Viking or indeed much earlier habitations which remained visible as features in the landscape, perhaps as an act of closure (as suggested by the prominent placement of the Gurness entrance passage burial, for instance), but were not intended to take over these particular locations for the purpose of continued use.

At rarer cemetery sites, such as Moa Ness, Westness, Rousay, furnished Viking burials were inserted among an established spread of unfurnished inhumations. Whether this is an indication of violent conquest or of cultural transition and continuity has been debated (the latter seems more likely), but chronologically, most attention on Westness has been focused on the start of the intrusive phase which is thought to have started in the ninth century. Stable isotope analysis on some of the Westness furnished burials has revealed that those individuals sampled were far from being uniformly Scandinavian in biological origin (Montgomery et al. 2014). The end-dates of Viking burial at Westness have been less remarked upon, but these could be significant in marking the changing cultural landscape. Sometimes, ends can be as important as beginnings. Other prominent Viking burials in Orkney have been dated to long after the putative start of the Viking Age. In the case of the boat burial at Scar, Sanday (Owen and Dalland 1999), radiocarbon dating on human remains in

one case gave a date of Cal AD 980-1260, with the mean of three dates being 1060±40 BP, giving a probable overall date on radiocarbon grounds for the grave deposit in the mid to later tenth century (the artefacts point towards somewhat earlier in the tenth century, but this difference could be explained by these having been in circulation for some time before the burial).

At the Bay of Skail, Sandwick, an eroding, probably prehistoric settlement mound a short distance west of the Neolithic 'village' of Skara Brae, was the site of a single furnished Viking burial, which James Graham-Campbell in a recent reappraisal has dated to no earlier than the first half of the tenth century (Graham-Campbell 2019a). Graham-Campbell also drew attention to a further possible Viking grave in Sandwick, indicated by a find prior to 1851 of a ringed pin from a 'tumulus', the identification of which is uncertain. The location of any pre-tenth century Viking settlement at this prominent bay remains unresolved. A broch at Verron at the northern edge of the bay is a possible candidate for a 'transitional' site, as-yet untested by excavation. Near Verron stands the former parish church of St Peter, from the graveyard of which a Viking bone strap-end decorated in the Borre style was retrieved during grave-digging in the early 1930s (Paterson 2019). The origins of the church site may date back at least to the Viking Age, as suggested by this find, especially if the theory (Lamb 1993) that the 'Peterkirks' of Orkney had a Pictish origin is accepted, but this theory has been challenged in favour of a twelfth-century date (e.g. Clancy 2012). Immediately south of the church is prominent cluster of large sandy settlement mounds, the largest of which is called 'The Castle of Snusgar', a name first attested in the 1795 *Old Statistical Account* but likely to be of Norse origin. The environs of this mound, probably on its eastern flank, were the scene in 1858 of the discovery of the Skail Hoard, which remains the largest identifiably Viking silver hoard in Scotland, the deposition of which has been dated to between AD 960 and 980 (Graham-Campbell 2019b, 296).

The author's own excavations at Snusgar and neighbouring East Mound (Griffiths et al. 2019) exposed two clusters of longhouses, with their main phases of occupation (Phases 2-4) dating to the later tenth to early eleventh centuries. In this case, sixty AMS radiocarbon dates were obtained, giving a strong chronology anchored mostly on carbonised grain samples and refined by Bayesian modelling. In contrast to interpretations of other, previous excavations which tend to have been given long occupation phase durations of a century or more, the duration of these occupation phases was shown to be remarkably short, with major changes coming about within a generation at most. Both Snusgar and East Mound were new sites of longhouse occupation founded on open sandy grassland, in the case of Snusgar beginning contemporaneously with, or very shortly after, the deposition of the hoard. Was the hoard itself a foundation deposit in a new place, for a new phase of settlement?

Both of the Bay of Skail excavations produced artefacts of bone, steatite, glass and amber, together with flax-working, in the case of East Mound accompanied by ferrous metalworking, all of which accord with assemblages interpreted elsewhere (such as at Pool and Scatness) as indicative of Viking settlement. 'Placed deposits' and structured middens were present at the sites (Harrison 2020). There are indications among the comb types, pins and pottery, indeed in the hoard itself, of a more pronounced Irish-Sea flavour to the material culture of the site, rather than a directly-imported Norwegian one. The better-preserved of the two longhouse sequences, on East Mound (Fig. 3), was constructed around a central hall, which not only the earliest structure on the site but was an interior space of some size and distinction, leading to its interpretation as a *skáli*, a tax-gathering

central farmstead, even possibly providing a clue as to the origin of the name of the bay itself. No human burials or even fragmentary remains, with the exception of a child's tooth, were found in these domestic contexts, the implication probably being that burials were located at the nearby church, and therefore that the occupation started later than the end of the pagan period. The (re)conversion to Christianity must surely be a factor in the apparent closure of older sites, and the opening up of new ones, close to churches, and in the re-drawing of the landscape which we see emerging from the mid-tenth century. A comparable picture is observed at Marwick Bay, just north of the Bay of Skail, where floor and metalworking deposits in an eroding settlement mound on the coastline produced two radiocarbon dates in the range Cal AD 770-980, indicating a site of the Pictish to Early Viking period, whereas two *skáli* names, Langskaill and Netherskaill (evidently denoting the division of an original Skail farm), lie between 0.8 and 1km inland, implying a settlement shift and landscape reconfiguration somewhat later in the Viking period (Griffiths et al. 2019, 10; 107).

## Conclusion

The later tenth century seems to have been a significant time of transition and settlement renewal in the Orcadian landscape, and may represent something of a political takeover, long after the one traditionally sought. The period AD 960-980 saw the deposition of the Northern Isles' most extensive silver hoard, a series of furnished burials in abandoned settlement sites, and the beginnings of new forms of occupation and economy, dominated by impressive longhouses. Some of these were founded in new locations close to churches, such as those at the Bay of Skail, whereas others, such as at Pool, are sited in proximity to earlier phases of occupation but not necessarily in unbroken continuity. Prior to this time, changes towards rectilinear forms of building and a more varied material culture had occurred in the architecture and material culture of mounded settlements, but these could, I suggest, be interpreted as much as endogenous changes adapting to new realities and incoming contacts in the ninth century, rather than necessarily being expressive of the stamp of the dominant intruder, as so often stated in the past. In this respect, there is something very subtle and interesting waiting to be teased out of the available evidence, which could reveal new insights as to how the pre-Viking population responded and adapted to external stimuli.

The 'Scandinavianisation' of Orkney and Shetland, with their distinctive patterns of assembly, landholding and nomenclature, surely gained some initial traction in the later tenth century, but it took several more centuries for these traditions to become fully and widely adapted, acculturated and established. The late William P. L. Thomson, Orkney's most revered local historian in the modern age, took issue with the earlier views of Hugh Marwick and others that these attributes could be traced back to the early Viking Age, preferring to see them as taking shape in the twelfth-century (Thomson 2008, 5-24). The growth of Scandinavian influence, now reflected in the islands' celebrated cultural heritage, is not attributable to an 'all at once' event of the early Viking Age, but an incremental process lasting several hundreds of years. This was re-invigorated in the period after AD 1100 when deep-sea cod fishing opened up new markets and contacts, and a new influx of direct Norwegian influence is witnessed at fish-processing sites such as Quoygrew, Westray (Barrett 2012). The era of the developed medieval earldom, rather than the early Viking Age, should therefore be

seen as the principal source of the Scandinavian cultural transformation of the landscapes of the Northern Isles.

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Images.

Figure 1, Excavation at Buckquoy, Birsay, Orkney, from E, with House 4 in the foreground. Reproduced with kind permission of Dr Anna Ritchie.

Please display figures 2 and 3 side-by-side

Figure 2: Norse longhouse at Jarlshof, Shetland (Andrew Jennings)

Figure 3: Longhouse at East Mound, Bay of Skail, Orkney under excavation, from E (author).

Figure 4: Sites discussed in text.

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