

# THE PAPAR PROJECT

## Inception, Parameters and Purpose

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The 'papar' Project started with a Day Conference in St. Andrews, in February 2001, the Fifth St. Andrews Dark-Age Conference. The theme of the Conference ('The *papar* in the North Atlantic: Environment and History') focussed on the remote Atlantic fringes of Scotland, and on an obscure phenomenon of the Celtic ecclesiastical world-the places in the Northern and Western Isles, and Iceland, where names containing the word *papar* (priests or monks) occurred. As is usual with these St. Andrews Conferences speakers were drawn from different disciplines, for this is an early medieval topic where historical, archaeological and toponymic (place-name) sources have to be brought together and considered in an attempt to gain a better understanding of a subject which is poorly documented. The papers ranged over a wide area and discussed multifarious sources, covering the actual names themselves; archaeological excavations on Papa Stronsay (Orkney), Papa Stour (Shetland) and Papey in Iceland: the sculptural evidence for early Christian sites in Scotland and Iceland; scientific soil analysis at some 'papar' places; and finally a consideration of the early medieval spirituality of the monks and hermits who inhabited remote and isolated places in the North Atlantic. These papers were published as a book, which is still available.<sup>i</sup>

This gathering of interested people, the papers delivered, and the discussion which ensued showed how the subject suffered from a lack of detailed knowledge of the sites associated with the 'papar', and of the circumstances of the communities of early Christian clerics who would appear to have lived in, or been associated with, these sites. Here was a topic of diverse proportions which needed to be researched further, and which needed a better understanding of the geographical parameters based around the place-name evidence, as a foundation for pursuing further work on the scientific, archaeological and toponymic material. Hence the development of the 'papar' project which has been awarded two grants by The Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland (2001 and 2003). The report published below (**A. The Northern Isles and Caithness**) is the first stage in making available the results of that first grant.<sup>ii</sup>

### **1. Purposes of the Project**<sup>iii</sup>

The grants were awarded to pursue these historical and scientific objectives:

#### **To acquire a better understanding of GEOGRAPHICAL, ENVIRONMENTAL AND CULTURAL FACTORS underlying Papay/Pabbay/ Papil/Payble locations.**

- Do the islands and other places with the 'papar' name in the Northern Isles differ from those in the Western Isles? What is the geographical relationship of the Papay/Pabbay islands with neighbouring islands or coastal communities? Do the Papil/Bayble locations have any distinctive features?

#### **the nature of the presumed ECCLESIASTICAL ESTABLISHMENTS of Celtic priests or monks in these places**

-Were they monastic communities of a coenobitic type (i.e.living communally), on the best land and most favourable situations? Or were they primarily individual hermit retreats in remote locations and on isolated rock stacks? Or was there a combination of the two?

#### **What was the nature of the NORSE IMPACT on the 'papar'?**

- Can the survival of these names reveal anything about the Vikings' attitude towards the Celtic ecclesiastical communities in particular and the Christian religion in general?

**The ENVIRONMENTAL ASPECTS of this Research Programme include Continuation of Investigations** into the origin, formation and function of anthropogenic, raised, soils pursued by the University of Stirling in the Northern Isles (Simpson, 1997, Simpson, et al. 1998a and b, Simpson and Guttman, 2002) **The long-term objective is to understand better** transitions in arable land manuring strategies from prehistoric

systems with their emphasis on human manures and domestic wastage (as analysed at Tofts Ness, Sanday), to medieval domestic animal manure-based systems evident in West Mainland Orkney and on Papa Stour, Shetland with transitions occurring during the late Iron Age.

- Could the ecclesiastical/monastic element provided by the 'papar' communities give an explanation for transitions in manuring systems?

- Do we find these anthropogenic soils associated particularly with 'papar' sites? And if so can they be dated to the historical period of the 'papar' communities?

**The second phase of the project will include a comparison of some HEBRIDEAN and NORTHERN ISLES PABBAY/PAYBLE ANTHROPOGENIC SOIL STRUCTURES with those already examined in the NORTHERN ISLES.**

- were they different, as a result of natural conditions, chronological gaps or system management, or are there similarities in soil properties and in the datable changes of manuring strategies?

## 2. The First phase

This was completed in the year 2001-2002. It consisted of:

i) The collection of historical and archaeological evidence relevant to every 'papar' place-name location in the North and West of Scotland.<sup>1</sup>

ii) A compilation of place-names recorded in Pabbay islands and around Payble locations in the Hebrides.<sup>2</sup> This aspect of the research programme was confined to the Hebrides because there had been no linguistic surveys done in any of these specific locations previously. Compared with the Northern Isles there was a great dearth of studies of the Norse place-names of the Western Isles, explained primarily by the problematical linguistic complexities arising from a two-language situation.<sup>3</sup>

iii) Field survey of two 'papar' locations in the Outer Hebrides, Paible on Taransay and Pabbay in the Sound of Harris, where test borings were taken to assess the deep-soil formations near the main church sites in the two places.

### 2.1. Place-name evidence

A map of the distribution of the 'papar' names in the Northern and Western Isles gives the best impression of the scale of the task and the geographical nature of the problem (Fig.Intro.1). This is an extensive maritime zone (360 miles from north to south) and we struggle to emulate the Vikings, and indeed the 'papar' themselves, who ranged over this maritime world and left a tangible record of their presence in the place-names. It is indeed a place-name driven project and it is the names which are our main body of 'historical' evidence. How these names are interpreted is therefore all-important for an understanding of the historical situation. But place-names are not easy historical evidence to work with, and the questions we ask of them and the conclusions we draw out of them have to be carefully constructed. Moreover the issues we are raising are very big ones in the early history of the Celtic and Scandinavian worlds.

The 'papar' name underlies the island names Papay (Pabbay in the Hebrides) = 'island of the priests', and the district or local names Papil (Payble in the Hebrides) = 'settlement of the priests'. What do these names indicate about the nature of the Celtic religious communities in the islands? We would also like to learn something from these names about the meeting of Scandinavian pagans with the Christian Celtic west, for the names were given by the Norse-speaking invaders. These are very difficult questions to pose of toponymic evidence and we should not expect to get immediate historical information or certain results from our study of the names.

The simple fact of looking at the totality of these names, and the places where they have survived throughout the Scottish islands (and on the north mainland) is achieving something which has not been attempted before. Too often academic studies of the Vikings and the history of the Norse impact on north Britain focus on either the Western Isles, or, more frequently, on the Northern Isles. The history of the two groups of islands diverges in the late Viking period, and throughout later medieval and modern history, when the Hebrides were part of the Gaelic world of west Scotland and Ireland. There are problems about taking a holistic view of the whole insular 'thalassocracy' in the early Viking Age. We need to break the mind-set which looks at *either* the Northern Isles *or* the Western Isles, and we have to learn to encompass the insular world from Papil (Unst) in the north of Shetland to Pabbay (Barra) in the Outer Hebrides, and Papadil (Rum) in the Inner Hebrides.

## 2.2 Historical Evidence

There are later sources which mention the 'papar' in Orkney and Iceland, showing that they were remembered in north Atlantic tradition, although not without strange legendary accretions. The first is from the *Historia Norvegiae* (History of Norway), one of the earliest Norwegian chronicles, which however survives only in a late medieval copy in Scotland.<sup>4</sup> Despite recent modern editions it is still not clear what the cultural environment of this text was, where it was written or where the author had got his information from.<sup>5</sup> The extract below is from Chapter VI (*De Orcadibus Insulis* 'Concerning the Orkney Islands') and relates what was known or remembered in the 12th century of the pre-Norse inhabitants of Orkney (and, of course, Shetland, although Shetland is not mentioned), the Picts and the Papar (*Peti* and *Papae*).

These islands were at first inhabited by the Picts (*Peti*) and Papae. Of these, the one race, the Picts, little exceeded pigmies in stature; they did marvels, in the morning and in the evening, in building [walled] towns, but at mid-day they entirely lost all their strength, and lurked, through fear, in little underground houses. But at that time [the islands] were not called Orchades, but Pictland (*terra Petorum*) . . . And the Papae have been named from their white robes, which they wore like priests; whence priests are all called *papae* in the Teutonic tongue (*Papae vero propter albas, quibus ut clerici induebantur, vocati sunt, unde in Theutonica lingua omnes clerici papae dicuntur*). An island is still called, after them, *Papey* (*Adhuc quaedam insula Papey ab illis denominatur*). But, as is observed from their habit and the writings of their books abandoned there, they were Africans, adhering to Judaism (*Sed ut per habitum et apices librorum eorum ibidem derelictorum notatur, Africani fuerunt, judaismo adhaerentes*). In the days of Harold Fairhair, King of Norway, certain pirates, of the family of the most vigorous prince Ronald, set out with a great fleet, and crossed the Solundic sea; and stripped these races of their ancient settlements, destroyed them wholly, and subdued the islands to themselves.<sup>6</sup>

It should be stressed that this is the *only* information that we have about the Picts and the Papar in the Northern Isles from the medieval period, which most likely came from local insular tradition, telling us how the previous inhabitants were remembered in 12th-century Orkney.

Better known is the information in *Íslendingabók* and *Landnamabók*, two of the most famous medieval accounts of the settlement of Iceland, about the 'papar' in Iceland (dating slightly earlier than *Historia Norvegiae*):

### *Íslendingabók*

Iceland was first settled from Norway in the days of Harold Fairhair... At that time Iceland was wooded between the mountains and the coast. At that time, Christian men were here, whom the Norwegians call *papar*; but they departed afterwards, because they would not be here with heathen men; and they left behind them Irish books, and bells, and croziers. Therefore one could perceive that they were Irish men' (Anderson 1922, I, 337-40; and cf. 338 n.4. Icelandic text in Benediktsson 1968, 3-28, at 4-5).

### *Landnamabók*

But before Iceland was settled from Norway there were other people there, called *Papar* by the Norwegians. They were Christians and were thought to have come overseas from the west, because people found Irish books, bells, croziers, and lots of other things, so it was clear they must have been Irish (Pálsson and Edwards 1972, 15. Their translation is based on the standard edition of the *Sturlubók* text of *Landnámabók* by Benediktsson, 1968, 31-397, at 31-2).

In later texts the information is given about two places named after the 'papar' in eastern Iceland, Papey and Papyli.

These two very different documentary sources appear to provide independent evidence corroborating the existence of Celtic monastic communities, or ecclesiastical settlement of some kind in very different parts of the north Atlantic world. However, recently there are theories being voiced which suggest that these sources are sharing 'elements of a common tradition' (historical or literary), i.e. a learned tradition circulating in Norse-speaking ecclesiastical circles in the 12th century. In a paper published from the 'papar' Conference held in St. Andrews in 2001 Aidan MacDonald interprets the information about Irish books, bells and croziers left behind when the 'papar' are supposed to have fled on the arrival of the Norse in Iceland as a 'learned elaboration'. He suggests that 'we may...have in these details, evidence of a learned (and so partly literary?) knowledge of the Irish church of (probably) the later tenth, eleventh or early twelfth centuries...rather than an essentially uninformed and purely oral tradition stemming from the ninth or early tenth centuries'.<sup>7</sup> Indeed there may be both, as Aidan MacDonald continues: 'some elements may be

broadly traditional but elaborated eventually in a learned milieu'. We can note that there is some independence in these two traditions (Orcadian/Icelandic), in that the former mentions that the writings were Jewish, while the latter stresses the Irish character of the ecclesiastical impedimenta.

What sort of 'learned milieu' might it have been in which this traditional information was elaborated? Mortensen, in his recent discussion of the date and transmission of the text of *Historia Norvegiae* favoured a centre in eastern Norway rather than the west coast (2003, 22-3). He suggests that the author could have spent time in Iceland or Orkney, which would explain his access to Icelandic sources and his interest in the islands (there are sections describing not only Orkney but also Faeroe and Iceland). If the *Historia* was conceived as a consequence of the creation of Norway's own archbishopric in 1152-3 then it was likely to have been produced in an ecclesiastical or royal scriptorium: indeed, it can hardly have been produced anywhere else. The mid-12th century was a time when there was much contact between literate clerics of the episcopal establishments in Norway and the islands. Somewhere in this maritime world the author of the *Historia* had heard about the previous inhabitants of the Orkney islands, and we can be sure that it must have been in Orkney or from an Orcadian, possibly a cleric like Bishop William. This 'first' bishop of the Orkneys had a long episcopacy (1102 -1168) (Crawford, 1996, 9-10), throughout the period when the archbishopric of Nidaros was created and when the *Historia* may have been compiled. He would have been the first person to whom an author of such a work would have referred for information about his island see. He would also have been present at the events surrounding the creation of the archdiocese by Cardinal Nicholas Breakspear, in Trondheim in 1152-3,<sup>8</sup> and there are one or two references in *Orkneyinga Saga* to him visiting Norway, although they are quite unspecific as to exactly where he went.

So this 'historical' evidence is late and provides only the 12<sup>th</sup>-century traditions about the 'papar' which are rather misleading in their details if taken at face value. The place names are our main body of evidence for the establishment of the 'papar' in the Northern and Hebrides, and have been assumed to be a contemporary record of their existence and the impact which they made on the incoming Vikings. However the dating of place-names is an imperfect science and their contemporaneity has also been questioned recently.

### 2.3 Linguistic Evidence

The ON term *papi* /*papar* which is the basis of the place-names, and which is used as a name for the pre-Norse clerics in the islands is usually understood as a borrowing from Irish *pápa*, itself borrowed from Latin. Aidan MacDonald's discussion (2002,15) cites the Irish uses of the term, which are not very numerous but seem to be associated with ecclesiastics of a monastic or anchoritic calling, although it could perhaps be used in secular contexts too - as an honorific term. We should note the comment in the *Historia* that 'all priests are called papae in the Teutonic tongue' which points to a Germanic context for the term.<sup>9</sup>

If we turn to the place-names which incorporate this term *papi* we have to acknowledge the fact that this was a term which the Norse encountered when they moved into the coasts and islands around north Britain, and which they then took up and incorporated into their names for some of these islands. These are linguistically names in the Old Norse language, and they were coined by speakers of Old Norse: 'They reflect directly the interests and activities of Norsemen and only indirectly the activities of Celtic ecclesiastics' (MacDonald, 2002, 21). This is a cautionary note for those involved in the *papar* project and pursuing the research objectives already outlined. A body of toponymic evidence is directing our research parameters, and what that evidence means, and how it is interpreted, is of vital significance for the right direction of the research programme. We will now have a closer look at that toponymic evidence:

The range of forms is very limited, and this standardisation in the use of the element *papi* must be telling us something about the Norse use of the term although it is difficult to know exactly what. There are the non-habitative names, referring to topographical features of which the most prominent is **Papa**, (N. Isles) **Pab(b)ay** (W. Isles)– *\*Papa-ey*, 'island of papar'; but there are also a few others, such as **Papdale**, **Papadil** – *\*Papa-dalr*, 'valley of papar'; **Papa Geo and Papigoe** (probably) – *\*Papa-gjá*, - *gjó*, 'ravine of papar'; **Pabanish** (W. Isles)– *\*Papa-nes*, 'promontory of papar'.

Then there is the problematical habitative name **Papi(e)l**, **Paple(a)y** (N. Isles), **Paible (Bayble)** (W. Isles) which appears to refer to a specific settlement rather than a generalised geographical area in some ways associated with the *papar*:

It is taken to be the same as the Icelandic *Papyli*, which has been derived from an original *\*Papa-byli*, or *\*Papa-bœli*, '? settlement of papar' (e.g., Marwick 1923, 262-3; Jakobsen 1936, 172-3; Wainwright 1962, 100). *Byli* seems more likely as an original second element than the *by*-form *bœli*. Hermann Pálsson has, however, objected, with Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, that *\*Papabyli* is unlikely to give *Papyli*; and that *Papyli* is in fact the original form

(1955, 118). Benediktsson's *Papbyli* (1968, 32 n. 2) may have been intended to try to resolve this problem (-pb- > -pp- > -p-). Whatever the connotation(s) generally of this place-name, however, it seems that it could be a district name embracing other named places: the *Hauksbók* version of *Landnámabók* mentions Breidabólstadir and Hof in *Papyli* in Iceland (Pálsson 1955, 115)

(MacDonald, 2002, 20)

These names still appear on the maps of today and are the current names for the places, but the earliest recorded forms are from both the *Historia Norvegiae* (12th century) and *Hauksbok* version of *Landnamabók* (early 14th century). The island called *Papey* referred to in the section on the Orkney Islands in the *Historia* might be the same as the Papey in *Landnamabók*, that is the Papey in S.E.Iceland. One would assume that it is one of the Orkney Papays, but the fact that the *Historia* says that there is *an* island named after the *papar* (when there is clearly more than one in both Orkney and Shetland) suggests that he might have been thinking of the single Papey in Iceland.

There are eight main 'papar' place-names in Shetland, (see Section A below), five (or six) in Orkney, (See Section A below), eight in the Hebrides, with a few extra topographical ones throughout this zone, including Caithness.<sup>10</sup> Their significance lies in their geographical extent and topographical location. The name of an island signifies that the whole island was so closely connected with the 'papar' that their presence was the most remarkable feature about it, but whether that signifies an actual community of 'papar' residing on the land, or small numbers of anchorites on the outer coastal fringes is quite unclear. We cannot even be sure that it might not indicate merely ownership of the island rather than actual presence, although it seems unlikely that the Norse would bestow a name as a record of land ownership.

Perhaps there is more potential for illumination in the Papil/Payble form. This is a locational name, that is it seems to refer to an actual settlement on the ground, but what is the connotation of the *-byli* element? Its meaning in Old Norse is defined in the Cleasby-Vigfusson *Icelandic-English Dictionary* simply as 'abode', but in the Norn dialect of Shetland the first meaning associates it with animals-a 'resting-place', 'sheep-fold' or 'enclosure' (Jakobsen 1928, sub *bøll*). The very specific and standard use of this term (in both Scotland and Iceland) indicates that the settlement was of a different order from a normal secular farming unit, for which there were many different elements such as *-by*, *-staðir*, *-tun*.. If we could achieve a better understanding of this element it might have some potential for increasing our knowledge of what an actual 'papar' community was. Does it suggest a non-agricultural settlement, i.e.a community of monks or priests which did not till the ground or earn their own bread, but were supported by the secular communities around them?<sup>11</sup>

It must be of some significance that there are Papil/Payble place-names on islands which in other respects might have been called Papay/Pabbay (such as Yell or Taransay). Perhaps the Papil/Payble settlements were tenanted farms specialising in animal husbandry for provision of meat to the 'papar' communities on the Papa/Pabbay islands. Or were they sub-groups of clerics from a larger community on the islands, which were established in the Papil/Payble places to minister to the nearby secular population? It is questions like this which have to be asked before we have a closer look at the geographical, archaeological and historical evidence for these places, which hopefully may help to provide some answers.

### 3. Norse Attitudes and Dating Problems

If we turn to the other element of the research project, we have to ask more questions. What do these names reveal about exploration and settlement of the north Atlantic in the Viking Age? Do they reflect the 'actual historical experience of encounters between Norsemen and insular ecclesiastics... during the early phases of Norse expansion'?(Macdonald, 2002, 21). We have contemporary evidence from Dicuil the Geographer about Celtic ascetics in the North Atlantic islands and this 'provides us with a certainty' (Dumville, 2002, 128) that they were living there c.800 and had been (probably in the Faeroes) for about a century before that.

So can we use these 'papar' names as evidence of Norse tolerance of such Christian ecclesiastical communities or individuals, or perhaps indeed reverence of them, as a result of which they enshrined the 'papar' in the toponymy which they gave? Why otherwise would they bestow such names?<sup>12</sup> As indicated above the suspicion has been voiced that the whole batch of information about the 'papar' in the medieval written sources may derive from a later period than that of the early Viking encounter. Moreover, it is also being suggested that the place-names themselves may have been given at a later date, which is certainly a novel suggestion, and a rather devastating one. If a tradition develops then perhaps the names could also have been 'coined and applied retrospectively'. The 'unspecific nature of the names'and 'the restricted range of forms common to all areas' might suggest this was a process of retrospective naming (MacDonald, 2002, 21).

How can we know at what date such names were given in the Northern and Western Isles? The previous chronologies of habitative (or settlement) names have been much loosened in recent discussions (Crawford, 1987, 108; Thomson, 2001, 51-4). How do the 'papar' names fit into this structure? Island names, like the Pabbays and Papays, are usually considered to be of early coining, but the Papil/Payble names with the *byli* element defy any attempts to date them according to current understanding. This linguistic aspect has been analysed further in a recent contribution to the debate on 'papar' names by the Danish philologist Peder Gammeltoft who argues that the names themselves 'seem in some way or other [to] reflect reality in the namer's mind' (2004, 43). They cannot however reveal whether the 'papar' were real or imaginary, whether they were present at the time of naming, or whether they had vanished. Compared with names referring to the Picts, which are very few, it is striking that the 'papar' made a much bigger impact on the namers. The conclusion is made that the incoming Scandinavians 'found *Papar* at the *Pap*- localities and lived alongside them long enough for the *Pap*- names to be coined and to become established' (ibid. 44, and see my discussion of the same issue 1987, 166). What this might or might not be telling us about the readiness of the incoming Vikings to be influenced by the Christianity of the 'papar' is the big question arising from this sort of conclusion. At least the contemporaneity of the names with those Vikings coming into the islands is being reasserted (Gammeltoft, 2004, 45).

### 3.1. Archaeological evidence

The situation on the ground is confused of course by the fact that the majority, if not all of the pre-Norse church sites were eventually re-occupied after the Norse populations were converted and a parish structure developed. This pattern of re-occupation is being appreciated more and more as excavation proves that medieval churches were built on top of Celtic ecclesiastical sites-St Ninian's Isle in Shetland being the best-known and most dramatic example (Crawford, 1987, 166 and ref. to recent excavations).<sup>13</sup> The excavation of the site of St. Nicholas church in Papa Stronsay (see Site O1 below) has also revealed that it is sitting right on top of the buildings of an earlier pre-Norse community, although whether that community was a religious one is not yet proven. There is much need of further examination of available church sites in the Northern and Western Isles to try and draw some general conclusions about this aspect, which has been termed a 'continuity of resort' (Goudie, 1904, 57).<sup>14</sup>

As well as the actual church sites there is the body of early Christian sculptural evidence which is so important for the visual images which it provides of the cross, clerics, Pictish symbols and sometimes inscriptions. Some of this evidence is certainly associated with important 'papar' sites (see Sites O1.O2.O5.S8.S9. below), telling us clearly that there had been early Christian activity in these places. But there are also plenty of early Christian memorial stones in locations without 'papar' names, as Ian Fisher's map of 'papar' sites and early Christian sculpture in the Hebrides shows (Fisher, 2002, fig.3.1). The survival of these wondrous pieces of Christian art is so random that we can hardly rely on the known evidence for providing a hard and fast indicator of 'papar' sites. But when the sculpture is of prime quality, as at Papil in Burra (S9), then we can be assured that this 'papar' place was a major early Christian community.

In the Report Section (below) all Iron Age and Medieval archaeological evidence is described under the individual Papay and Papil sites. This is with the intent of gathering all evidence for the settlement of these places in the late Iron Age/early Christian period to gain a better understanding of the distribution of population, and whether that population was of a secular or religious nature.

Any evidence for Norse graves has been looked for, and absence noted, as this is a potential indicator of early Norse settlement, or the absence of early Norse settlement, which may be significant.

### 3.2. Situation in the Hebrides

It is a very curious and possibly significant fact that the 'papar' names in the west are confined to the Hebrides north of Ardnamurchan Point (see Intro. Map), although, as is well-known, the greatest centre of Celtic ecclesiastical activity was located in Iona. Why did the Norse not apply 'papar' names (contemporaneously *or* retrospectively) in the southern Hebrides?

Is it a simple reflection of the greater density of Norse names in the north Hebrides? Those working on place-names in the S. Hebrides would be able to answer that question, but the impression is that recent work on the toponymy of the Inner Hebrides is beginning to show that there is not such a great distinction in this respect as has been postulated in the past.

Or does the answer lie in the pre-Norse political/ecclesiastical situation? A simplistic suggestion might be that the 'papar' names reflect a Pictish ecclesiastical pattern, in the northern Hebrides (and of course in the Northern Isles), as opposed to the Columban Church zone in the southern Hebrides, where the 'papar' did not operate, or the term was inappropriate.

The differentiation may also reflect a difference in the Norse impact on the church, so that the greater destruction in the north Hebrides meant the need to name islands where Celtic priests had once been dominant, whereas the survival factor of religious communities in the southern Hebrides resulted in less need to record former church lands or possessions.

Or, if we go for retrospective naming does it reflect a greater number of devastated church sites in the northern Hebrides and Northern Isles? whereas there was less disruption in the southern Hebrides and therefore fewer abandoned church sites. All these postulated distinctions will have to be tested.

Another possible hypothesis looks to the political situation in the late 10th century when there may have been some links developing between the Northern Isles and north Hebrides. This is the period when Earl Sigurd II of Orkney was expanding his power to the Hebrides (Crawford, 1987, 66 and forthcoming) at a time when Christianity was becoming accepted among the earls of Orkney, and Sigurd was forcibly converted to Christianity by Olaf Tryggveson in 995. Can we look to him and his sons as being responsible for the implementation of the 'papar' names throughout the area under their control?

These are some of the multi-disciplinary problems which face us in a project which is trying to throw light on a murky historical situation by means of slippery toponymic evidence.

#### **4. Geographical and other relevant material**

It is essential that geographical factors are encompassed in the search for common denominators among all these places which have been given names incorporating the 'papar' element, as well as the material evidence.

i) it is important to look at the 'papar' locations on the ground to see if they have common features of locality which are significant in any way, and what sort of agricultural potential they might have had.<sup>15</sup>

ii) it is necessary to bring together surviving sculptural remains and archaeological evidence, including church sites, currently in use or abandoned or remembered only in tradition.

iii) it is especially significant to record any pagan Norse graves on the islands or in the locality of Papil/Payble places which are evidence for early Norse settlement

We need to illuminate the potential living circumstances of the monastic communities, or indeed of the single anchorite living in an isolated location on a headland or rockstack.<sup>16</sup>

The material which has been collected together, and is published here, relates to every 'papar' location in the Northern Isles and Caithness and provides us with a large amount of historical evidence and many details of the monuments which can still be associated with these places. It is hoped that by collecting this together we will be able to draw some conclusions about the nature of the 'papar' places, and that this will hopefully increase our understanding of why these places were chosen for settlement by the Celtic priests, and when they were abandoned to the Norse. The purpose of this part of the 'papar' project has been to provide what evidence there is as a basis for future research, and for developing a strategic plan for future archaeological and scientific examination of sites and soils. The editor has, however, made some preliminary observations at the end of each entry assessing the nature of the site or island based on the evidence collated. These are only preparatory comments. Wider conclusions will have to wait until the 'papar' places in the Hebridean part of the study area have been fully researched.

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<sup>1</sup> This desk-based survey was carried out by Dr. Janet Hooper and Lorna Johnston

<sup>2</sup> This collection of toponymic material was carried out by Kristjan Ahronson and Dr. Anke-Beate Stahl

<sup>3</sup> A recent exception to this is the doctoral study 'Place-names of Barra in the Outer Hebrides' completed by Anke-Beate Stahl (Unpublished ph.D. thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1999), and also D.Olsen, 'Norse Settlement in the Hebrides. An interdisciplinary Study' (unpublished master's thesis, University of Oslo, 1983)

<sup>4</sup> Edinburgh, National Archives of Scotland, Dalhousie Muniments, GD45/31/1 - II

<sup>5</sup> *Historia Norvegiae* edd. I. Ekrem and L.B. Mortensen (2003), where it is dated to the time of the erection of the archdiocese of Trondheim (1152-3) by Ekrem, and to the decades after that event by Mortensen (1160-75).

<sup>6</sup> The translation used here is from A.O. Anderson, *Early Sources of Scottish History*, vol. I, 330-2. There is also a new translation by Devra Kunin in an edition by C. Phelpstead, published by the Viking Society for Northern Research (*A History of Norway and the Passion and Miracles of the Blessed Óláfr*, 2001). The translation by Christenson in the Ekrem and Mortensen edition (2003) has unfortunately translated the latin 'Peti' (Picts) as 'Pents'.

<sup>7</sup> A. MacDonald, 'The *papar* and some problems. A Brief Review', in *The papar in the North Atlantic. Environment and History*, ed. B.E. Crawford, 19. This was the considered view of Aidan MacDonald in his published paper although he did not take this definite line at the Conference itself.

<sup>8</sup> Between 1103 and 1152-3 the diocese of Orkney would in theory have been subject to Lund which Bishop William might therefore have visited. Lund is a place which has been suggested as 'a strong Danish candidate' for the compilation of the *Historia*, being 'a leading centre of learning in the Nordic countries during this period' (Mortensen, 2003, 19). However there is absolutely no evidence for any connection between Orkney and Lund at this time and it is considered most unlikely that the dioceses of Orkney or Man were ever part of the Lund province (Crawford, 1996, 3, quoting Jørgensen, 1992)

<sup>9</sup> Phelpstead's comment

<sup>10</sup> see MacDonald's list in the Appendix to his chapter in Crawford, ed. (2002), 26-29

<sup>11</sup> In discussion with Brian Smith and W.P. Thompson the possibilities have been expressed that the use of this term by Norse-speakers might suggest a connotation of denigration.

<sup>12</sup> Questions posed in *Scandinavian Scotland*, p. 166

<sup>13</sup> this important evidence comes from a site without a 'papar' name, although the name St. Ninian's Isle is thought to be a late medieval replacement of an earlier name.

<sup>14</sup> The Viking and Early Settlement Archaeological Research Project (VESARP) led by Professor Christopher Morris in the north isles of Shetland has made a very good start in examining the evidence on



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the ground. See the Survey reports produced by GUARD (Brady and Morris, 1997, 1998, 1999, 1999-2000, 2000)

<sup>15</sup> This environmental element will be pursued by Professor Ian Simpson, during the second phase of the Carnegie Research Grant

<sup>16</sup> This element is not the main focus of the ground work of the current project; see Raymond Lamb (1973, 1976) on the monastic promontory sites

