ABSTRACTS

2nd International

St Magnus Conference

9th – 12th April 2014

LERWICK, Shetland

Alphabetical List of Presenting Delegates

ABSTRACTS

Aldington, Claire

Capturing the wind; the significance of the labyrinth in the fishing narratives of the Northern islands

How often when we live in islands, Daedalus and Icarus-like, do we want to escape and fly out over the sea? Equally, how often do we want to rest protected within our sea walls, safe from the dangers of 'the Widow Maker'[1]? This paper will explore the symbolic significance of the labyrinth in relation to islands and island living. Shetland has two very recent labyrinths, both connected with schools (Nesting and Uyeasound), whilst Orkney has no permanent labyrinth sites on record. The Nordic countries, however, have around 500 examples of stone labyrinths with Sweden having the greatest proliferation of labyrinths in the world (300 recorded sites). I will focus on the islands within the Swedish Baltic Sea archipelago and, in particular, on Gotland where there are around forty stone labyrinths, the earliest dating from c. 2500 years ago.

It is believed that some of these Northern island labyrinths were created for ritual walking to protect fishermen before going to sea, many of them sharing a common pattern. This pattern is the most ancient of all labyrinth designs, dating from around 3000 – 4000 years ago, and which appears in the majority of continents. The pattern forms a circuit winding to a quiet central point within which evil or harm may be left, Minotaur-like, enabling a safe catch.

This same ancient pattern was found on Cretan coins. I will examine Daedalus' and Icarus' escape by air from their labyrinthine prison on the island of Crete and explore parallels of this narrative to the labyrinth narratives of the Northern islands. What is the significance of this common design, culturally, conceptually, aesthetically, and spiritually, and are there more parallels between labyrinths, islands and island living?

Aldred, Oscar and Turner, Sam and Ashley, Scott (Newcastle University)

On the Swan Road: 'Viking' identities considered from a maritime perspective

Landscape archaeologists have outlined a framework for understanding human-environments entanglements (e.g. Tilley 2010; Bruno & Thomas 2008). Although these frameworks have largely been applied to landscapes, similar approaches should also be

[1] George Mackay Brown, The Sea.

valid (with certain re-configurations) to seascapes. Drawing on our experiences of studying coastal and marine land-/sea-scapes through Historic Seascape Characterisation (HSC), we hope to extend the investigation of human-environment interactions by examining the relationships that coastal communities had with the land and sea. The extra dimensions that come from mapping and characterising such relationships will help to assess how and to what extent they changed over time. In this paper we would like to discuss the human and nonhuman agencies associated with coastal communities and maritime environments in shaping 'fluid' identities through a case-study of Viking Age to Modern Breiðafjörður in West Iceland.

Alexander, Rosie (University of the Highlands and Islands)

Island Narratives: the role of the sea in the construction of higher education and migration choices of young people in Orkney and Shetland

This paper will introduce a research project looking at the narratives of the northern isles and how these impact on the individual career and migration choices of island young people pursuing higher education. Migration patterns of young people in coastal communities have previously been researched by Corbett (2007) in Atlantic Canada. In his research he showed how the structure of the fishing industry created certain career opportunities and labour market conditions that influenced individual young people's decisions to stay or leave the community. Orkney and Shetland in the twenty first century retain a reliance on the sea in terms of traditional industries such as fishing, and newer resource extracting industries such as oil and gas and, recently, renewable energy. In addition, and unlike the community studied by Corbett, Orkney and Shetland are islands, and therefore the sea not only provides a source of income but also acts as a clear boundary between these islands and other communities. This paper will present the findings of recent research that demonstrates the impact of this boundary in the narratives of graduates who have returned to the Orkney islands – with graduates commonly structuring their narratives around the dichotomous terms 'home' and 'south' (Alexander, 2013). Alongside presenting the findings of this previous research project, this paper will also introduce a new research project which aims to identify how living in the Orkney and Shetland Islands prior to higher education impacts on students' narratives of their higher education and subsequent career journeys. The paper will propose that in Orkney and Shetland, the sea impacts on the way young people construct their careers, their choices of higher education and their subsequent migration patterns.

Beaudouin, Audrey (NTNU)

The experiences of the archipelago in 18th-century Shetland

> [Lena Simpson] went on: "I don't think that folk living on the mainland of Shetland realises what it's like living on an isle. I mean they've cut wir ferry runs as well, which has been very disappointing. It's just like they're clearing oot the isles. They're just no caring about the isles at all."[2]

In these few lines published in the Shetland Times in August 2013, one can understand that the archipelago doesn't necessarily function as a whole: various interests are at stake on the different islands that shape the archipelago.

Was it the same situation in the 18th century? To answer this question and try to answer the wider question, "Did it matter, for 18th-century poly-active communities, that Shetland is an archipelago?",[3] I propose to historicise the concepts of "island" and "archipelago" and to replace them in the field of the experiences of the local populations (fishermen-farmers and poly-active women) and not in the field of the perceptions and culture of the élite (merchants-lairds, merchants, justice officials and observers). Thus, in this paper I'll explain: 1) how historians and social scientists studies the islands – and Shetland – and how it affected the understanding of the history of local populations, and 2) how, in historicising the "island" and the "archipelago," historians can seize the variations and changes in the experiences of local populations, and therefore, 3) how, Shetlanders, and especially fishermen-farmers and poly-active women, experienced the archipelago in the 18th century.

Bigelow, Gerald F. (Bates College, Maine)

Economic Patterns in Medieval Shetland: Findings of a Reappraisal of the Sandwick South Site and Other Evidence.

The Sandwick South Site was a small farm that was established on a sand dune on the east coast of Unst around AD 1100. Over the next two centuries the lives of the farm's inhabitants changed dramatically in multiple ways that were recorded in the site's well-preserved architecture, extensive artefacts, and large bioarchaeological collections. This paper reappraises this evidence and its relevance to studies of broader, regional and inter-regional trends in economic, political and environmental change in the medieval period.

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[2] Tallack Malachy, "Anger in Whalsay as ferry jobs go to Yell", *The Shetland Times*, 2 August 2013, http://www.shetlandtimes.co.uk/2013/08/02/anger-in-whalsay-as-ferry-jobs-go-to-yell.

[3] A reinterpretation of the title of: Robert E. Dewar, "Does it matter that Madagascar is an island?", *Human Ecology* 25, n°3 (1997): 481-489.

Bo, Ragnhild

The Seafarers' Saint: Medieval Representations of St Nicholas in the North Sea Area

The cult of St Nicholas was spread in Scandinavia in the last decades of the 11th and the first decades of the 12th centuries. Because the medieval cult of saints was not limited to the liturgy of the saints themselves, but was a wider social phenomenon. Political and dynastic links, as well as cultural and, not least, trading contacts, were also influential, and the cult of St Nicholas rose rapidly. Judging from church dedications, St Nicholas eventually rivalled that of the Virgin Mary in many regions. In this paper, I will look at medieval representations of the seafarer's saint in artefacts made and used in the North Sea area. St Nicholas is depicted in altar frontals, in sculpture and in illuminated manuscripts, and as well as offering an overview of the various representations of the saint, I pretend to offer an outline of the cultic functions the various representations supposedly evoked.

Burns, Kim (University of the Highlands and Islands)

This paper considers the role of press gang folk tales during the 18th-19th centuries. At this time impressment was increasingly impacting on the lives of families from Orkney and Shetland, when there were also many other difficulties faced by the working people on a daily basis, eg poverty, crop failure, poor investment by local lairds, and restricted local employment. Only working men were impressed, particularly those who were supposed to have knowledge of the sea or boats, and as such it was believed the Northern Isles were disproportionately targeted with a significant effect on the livelihood of those men and their families. The paper looks at the folktales from the perspective of function and examines how the retelling of folk tales about press gang escapes was more than just entertainment: they encouraged community resistance to what was felt to be an unjust action, they strengthened the shared identity and pride of the working folk and provided a validation of their culture and beliefs by referring to and adapting older tales. The tales show much similarity with standard folktales of escape, or fighting against a more powerful foe. These press gang tales were preserved locally with the publication of Around the Orkney Peat Fires in 1890, and as such give us a snapshot of the lives of working folk from that period.

Ceolin, Martina

The Roles of the Islands in *Áns saga bogsveigis*

Áns saga bogsveigis recounts the deeds of Án from Hrafnista (modern Ramstad), an island off the coast of Norway and a renowned centre of power during the Middle Ages. The pivotal role that this island plays in the *fornaldarsaga* in question will be investigated along with the functions of the minor isles portrayed in the story, not least of those intangible islands that characterise the saga – as Án's outlawry itself, for example. Despite the narrative circularity of the protagonist's travel back to his place of origin, his development as a character will be analysed along an axis of inclusion-exclusion within the society in which he is cast. The resulting pattern will reinforce the idea that the role of the islands in *Áns saga*, and possibly in other sagas as well, may help us understand some among the concerns of the society in which the saga was actually composed. It will be argued, for instance, that Hrafnista may symbolise Iceland and thus the Icelanders in their relationship with Norway during the fourteenth century, while providing speculative parallelisms to historical events.

Christiansen, Carol A (Shetland Museum and Archives)

Walking in the sea: finishing Shetland's annual vadmal payment

In the medieval and early modern periods, Shetlanders paid their land rentals and taxes in oil, butter, and vadmal. Before the cloth was paid it was fulled, a standard finishing process known in Scotland as 'walking'. In Shetland walking sometimes was done at sites along the shoreline, known as tøvakuddas. These sites have been recently recorded and assessed as to their viability for cloth finishing. This paper will discuss the sites across Shetland, review the process of walking cloth in the sea, and how this use of the shoreline may inform us about the annual payment of vadmal in Shetland.

Clarke, Simon (Shetland College/UHI)

Crossing to the other side at Mavis Grind: A journey through landscape and life in Neolithic Shetland

The isthmus at Mavis Grind joins Northmavine to the rest of Mainland Shetland, and separates the Atlantic from the North Sea. For that reason it has long been an important route through the archipelago, both north south by land and also east west by boat. As recently as the early twentieth century it was common for boats to be dragged across the narrow strip of land to avoid a long voyage round Shetland, via either Yell Sound or Sumburgh Head. Given their prominent location, the Neolithic tomb, house and enclosure at Islesburgh, close to the isthmus, probably had wider regional significance than their relatively modest scales might at first sight suggest. This paper will outline this Neolithic built landscape in relation to its natural setting. This will show that the spatial organisation of the house and tomb closely parallel both each other, and enclosing coastline and hills. Furthermore though separated by less than one hundred metres each monument afforded remarkably different viewsheds of the waters of the Atlantic and North Sea. Following a broadly phenomenographic perspective, the

experience of a Neolithic encounter with this landscape will be explored, and possible meanings, as a metaphor for the journey through life considered.

Deavin, Mark-Kevin (University of Bayreuth)

The swirling sea ? A new perspective on *Iđavǫllr* in Norse myth

In a paper given at the International Saga Conference in Aahrus in August 2012, I argued that the traditionally accepted interpretation of the name Bifrǫst in Norse myth as meaning 'trembling' (ON *bif*) 'ground/path' (ON *rǫst*)' has been misunderstood poetically. Specifically I proposed that Bifrǫst could actually be a poetic allusion to the sea, consistent with numerous kennings describing the sea as a moving land, path or ground.

This paper will examine the proposition that Iđavǫllr -the sacred meeting place of the gods at the beginning and end of the world in *Vǫluspá*– may also be a poetic allusion to the sea, sharing notable semantic and mythical characteristics with Bifrǫst. While the meaning of the name Iđavǫllr has long been disputed based on mainly on differing interpretations of the root *iđa*, there appears to have been a general academic consensus that *vǫllr* refers to ON field, plain or meadow. Iđavǫllr has therefore been consistently perceived as some form of physically wide, flat open area of land.

What appears not to have been considered, however, is the possibility of *vǫllr* actually being a poetic rather than a literal allusion to a plain. It is certainly interesting that *vǫllr* appears frequently in a very large sub-set of sea kennings depicting the sea as ground, plain, land, field or way. Likewise, it also has to be considered that *iđa* is actually listed by Snorri as a sea heiti in the *þulur* , and that ON *iđa* is cognate with English 'eddy' meaning whirlpool or swirling water.

This paper will argue that Iđavǫllr should be translated as 'swirling plain' and that this is likely to be a poetic allusion to the sea. Subsequently , the implications of this thesis for our understanding of the Æsir and the overall cosmology of *Vǫluspá* will be discussed and evaluated.

Egilsdóttir, Ásdís (University of Iceland)

Ships, water, fish and fishing are well known Christian symbols. In medieval Iceland, the sea, fishing and whale and seal hunting was an important aspect of daily life. In addition, the sea and seafaring was part of the Viking roots, as can be seen from sagas and poetry. In my proposed paper, I intend to discuss Icelandic hagiography, written from about 1200 until the mid fourteenth century. The three Icelandic saints were all confessors and bishops. The majority of their miracles tell of healing but the common theme in Icelandic miracles is survival in a harsh country. Many of them are related to the sea. In addition to the miracles of the Icelandic saints, I discuss the preserved Old

Norse miracles of St Magnus. Narratives of two potential saints will be included, the settler and hermit Ásólfr, as told in the *Landnámabók* (Book of settlement) and the 13th century saga of the chieftain, healer and seafarer Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson. In the paper, I examine the symbolic value of the miracles and related tales, and discuss how they reflect the sea as a source of food but also perils that could be overcome by the intervention of the saint.

Farley, Erin. C

The supernatural seascapes of Orkney and Shetland

The nature of the physical landscape in the Northern Isles, in which sea, land and sky are almost always simultaneously visible (along with the high concentration of prehistoric sites) has contributed to a rich and unique body of landscape legends. The sea is as important as the land in creating a sense of place in Orkney and Shetland, and this paper will explore some of the ways in which the sea is represented in the folktales and legends of the Northern Isles.

A distinct 'supernatural seascape' can be identified, which in some ways mirrors the supernatural landscape in its organisation, but is also subject to its own unique logic. Many of the supernatural sea beings, like Finfolk, selkies and mermaids, are concerned with crossing the boundary between land and sea. The interdependence of land and sea is evident in folklore: legends such as the Death of the Fin King and the Muckle Mester Stoorworm describe landscape features being created from the bodies of sea beings.

The legends of Orkney and Shetland show considerable Scandinavian influence, but will also be discussed in the context of a wider traditional worldview characterised by an awareness of ever-present cosmic and elemental forces. The social and cultural functions of these legends, as a way of creating a sense of place and giving history a spatial grounding, will also be discussed.

Ford, Rebecca

George Mackay Brown: the Pentland prophet and the tide of progress.

This paper considers George Mackay Brown's themes of progress and the role of the writer in the context of his home town of Stromness and its relationship with the sea. As a port for fishing, trading, whaling, naval operations, the oil industry, and most recently marine renewable research, Stromness has faced the challenges of progress Brown so often railed against in his writing. This paper suggests that rather than simply rejecting the advance of material progress Brown instead offers important insights. Stromness may be viewed as remote and peripheral, yet the sea which surrounds it is a means of connection with the wider world. The community's apparently isolated physical location has thus also placed it at the centre of world events, and developments in trade, industry and technology. Brown's understanding of this paradox, and his ability to

articulate the local and personal in terms of the universal and mythical, mark his importance as a prophetic voice, pointing out the lessons the past can teach us about the unreflective pursuit of progress and the frailties of human nature. This paper argues that Brown's identification of the importance of the word in the life of his own community offers an important contribution to wider debates about the future of human society, as we come to terms with our increasing interconnectedness and the need to share the finite resources of sea and land.

Gestsson, Þorgrimer

The book **In the Wake of Earls of Orkney (working title)** is about the author's travels in the old Norwegian earldom in Orkney and Shetland, and as well through the Orkneyinga Saga. That is a saga, written in Iceland early in the twelve hundreds and tells about the Norwegian earls that reigned in the islands from the 9th century to the fourteen hundreds. At that time people living in Orkney and Shetland spoke a Nordic language, similar to modern Icelandic and Faroese, which did not disappear till at the end of the 17-hundreds. Still most place names in these territories are mostly Nordic, adjusted to modern Scottish. The author, Thorgrimur Gestsson, a long-time journalist and radio reporter in Iceland, has explored the history site and tied it up with the land and place names. In his travels he met local people, both scholars and public and learned a lot of them about the relation to the past. The outcome of all this is a modern story about an experienced journalist travelling through land and saga – the book will be richly illustrated with photographs and maps of Shetland, Orkney, North-Scotland and the North-Atlantic territories.

Gibson, J. and Gibbon

The maritime setting of Norse castles and churches in Orkney

In this paper we consider 'The maritime setting of Norse castles and churches in Orkney'. We shall examine the extent of views of these highly visible buildings from the sea, and the relationships between seaways , landing places, harbours and the towers. In recent years James Barrett's work on the stack site of the Brough of Deerness has demonstrated the builders responding to a need for both fortification and prominence in relation to the maritime traffic in the Pentland Firth. As with castles the great parish churches can be seen over long distances at sea. Their presence working as sea marks guiding the navigator to secure landings, they may also have usefully served as a reminder of the allied powers of God and Earl.

Goodlad, Laurie

Examining Shetland's collection of line sinkers

This paper will examine the collection of line sinkers from Shetland, it will focus on stray finds (dredged up, therefore known to be sinkers) and compare them to those found in Viking/Norse excavations from sites such as Jarlshof, Sandwick South and Nowick.

The aim is to re-evaluate and examine the sinkers from Viking/Norse contexts and compare them with stray finds to build an understanding of what the characteristics of a 'typical' sinker are and how they evolved and changed during the Norse period. It's often difficult to tell whether an excavated 'weight' is a 'loom-weight' or a 'line sinker'. This research aims to provide an explanation which will help identify excavated weights. Through comparing with stray finds which are known to be fishing weights it is hoped that conclusions can be drawn.

During the Norse period fisheries in Shetland appears to have become a commercial venture. Analysis of middens at Sandwick, Unst shows a great number of larger species fish bones – suggesting commercial fishing. This paper will examine how fishing in the Norse period became commercialised and how Shetland was linked to Faroe and Norway in this trade. Evidence suggests that the tradition of fishing offshore with line sinkers was imported from Norway; this will also be considered. There is an indication that 'kleber' (soapstone) sinkers were being exported to Scandinavia from Shetland – suggesting that this was a marketable commodity.

Through examination of material evidence this paper will explore the cultural significance both within Shetland and in a greater Scandinavian context.

Goodlad, John

The Sea Road - Shetland's fishing links with the Nordic region during the nineteenth century.

During the early part of the nineteenth century a cod fishery from decked boats was developed in Shetland. These vessels would salt their catches on board and would remain at sea for lengthy trips. This was in marked contrast to the haaf fishery for ling by sixerns where vessels remained at sea for one or two days only. Before long Shetland had a fleet of around 60 large smacks which made 10 or 12 week trips to Faroe and Iceland bringing back wet salt cod which were dried on local beaches before being exported to Spain.

This fishery gave rise to some very interesting social, economic and cultural links between Shetland and the Nordic region

- Many Faroese were employed on board the Shetland smacks and the Faroese attribute their success as a modern fishing nation to the fishing skills originally learned on board these Shetland smacks

- There is some evidence that there was a degree of linguistic compatibility between these mixed crews speaking Shetlandic and Faroese

- The Shetlanders engaged in a very large smuggling operation of brandy and tobacco from Faroe to Shetland. The scale of this operation has been identified by recent research in the Faroes

- The Shetlanders discovered an important new fishing ground off north east Iceland which was still referred to by its Shetland name into the 1970's

This distant water cod fishery was unique to Shetland – it did not take place in Scotland. This fishery therefore placed Shetland within a Nordic fisheries context as opposed to a Scottish fisheries context at this time.

This paper is based on research that has been undertaken for a PhD on the Shetland cod fishery. Much of the research has been undertaken in the Faroes where some documents have been reviewed for the first time.

Gourlay, Jonathan (University of Saint Joseph)

How to Fail in Micronesia: Lessons from a Northmavine Captain

This paper is an exploration of two failures in Kitti, Pohnpei. Andrew Cheyne's failure in December of 1842 and the author's 150 years later. How have foreign adventures on Pohnpei changed in the past century and a half? Andrew Cheyne (1817-1866) was the illegitimate son of the laird of Tangwick. He captained many trading ventures from the Shetland Islands to the Pacific islands in the middle of the 19th century. On each voyage he brought with him a certain gullibility and inflexibility that ultimately doomed him to failure and death in Micronesia. When Cheyne anchored *Bull* (his schooner) in "eight fathoms mud" in Kitti harbor, he found a disease-racked populace, duplicitous

foreigners, and parsimonious missionaries. Not much has changed in Kitti Harbor since then.

This interdisciplinary presentation combines historical scholarship, anthropological observation, creative writing, and a deep sense of failure. The paper concentrates on Captain Cheyne's four months in Kitti attempting (and failing) to set up a trading post. The author spent eleven years in Kitti drinking hallucinogenic mud (called *sakau*) and malingering like a 19th-century sailor. The paper explores the local reaction to Shetlander Cheyne and how he may have misread the culture. The author then contrasts Cheyne's experience with his own in an effort to mark all of the ways it is possible for a foreigner to fail in Micronesia. Among the types of failure the author will both embody and comment upon: the failure to recognize your own ignorance, the failure to take magic seriously, and the failure to realize that you are carrying a disease.

Grayburn, Jennifer (University of Virginia)

Constructed Texts and Textual Constructions: Architecture as Literary Device in Orkneyinga saga

Orkneyinga saga incorporates some of the most elaborate and varied descriptions of medieval architecture in the Norse-Icelandic saga corpus. The details and narrative of St. Magnus Cathedral are particularly vivid, giving the sense that the saga is strictly reporting fact. As a result, many architectural historians use the saga as a historical document, searching for architectural facts and historical contexts. Yet, the textual 'reality effect' obscures the heavily constructed and mediated nature of *Orkneyinga saga* as a literary fabrication with early thirteenth-century biases. In this paper, I propose that the architectural references in *Orkneyinga saga* should be examined as literary devices, rather than 'fact,' within an established Nordic literary culture that spanned the North Sea and North Atlantic Ocean. Whether or not they reflected historical reality, these references, or 'textual constructions,' were conveyers of socio-political meaning through their context, terminology, and intertextual allusions. Within this interdisciplinary framework, this paper compares key architectural references in *Orkneyinga saga* with passages from other sagas in order to establish shared patterns of use and signification for different architectural forms. Using cultural memory and sea-basin theories, I then argue that these patterns, which would have circulated in both textual and oral forms, would have both reflected and informed the reception of the medieval buildings themselves. Consequently, the discussion of architectural exchange and adaptation in medieval Orkney needs to be more nuanced than assumptions of stonemason techniques and patron preference. Rather, this exchange was part of a broader cultural process, dependent upon cognitive networks of mutually intelligible forms and ideals represented in and promoted through various creative media.

Harland, Jennifer (University of Otago)

From the fish middens to the herring: Archaeological and historical evidence for later medieval and early modern fishing in the Northern Isles

The heyday of Viking Age and medieval fishing in the Northern Isles can be traced in the huge deposits of fish bones that appear circa AD 1000. This "fish event horizon", as it has come to be known, is a phenomenon now recognised throughout Europe. It can be explained by numerous factors, including Christian fasting, the rise of urbanism, and developing market economies. However, a few hundred years later, fishing in the Northern Isles had taken a dramatic downturn. Small-scale, subsistence fishing in relatively safe coastal waters became the norm. Early modern writers deplored the state of fishing in the islands in the late 18th century, while repeated attempts to develop commercial fisheries floundered due to lack of knowledge and investment. This paper examines archaeological evidence for the decline of fishing, looking at the fish bones from later medieval and early modern sites. Using estimates of fish sizes, species present and historical sources, it reconstructs fishing methods and likely fishing grounds, and asks why there was such a striking decline in fishing fortunes in the Northern Isles. The curious absence of herring bones from the archaeological record will also be discussed, a particularly relevant and perplexing question given that the herring industry became so important to the Northern Isles in recent centuries.

Heide, Eldar

Shetland / Orkney Norn ganfer and Old Norse Beliefs

The Shetland and Orkney Norn word ganfer, from Old Norse *gandferð, refers to a weather phenomenon foreboding accidents and storms. This paper explores the background of this in Old Norse texts and compares it to Norwegian and Icelandic traditions. It turns out that a whole complex of popular beliefs relating to mythology and notions of the soul can be established if we see the different parts of this material in light of each other.

Heiniger Anna Katharina (University of Iceland)

Islands as Liminal Space in the *Íslendingasögur*?

In the (West) European lore, islands have always been regarded as outstanding places and have called for special attention and interest. Throughout the ages, they have been associated with the most different qualities, which are mostly binary opposites. It comes

by no surprise then that islands have always inspired people's minds as literary and artistic motif.

The *mappae mundi,* Scandinavia is mostly depicted as a cluster of islands that are rather randomly located and unclearly named. In addition, the medieval world maps push Northern Europe to the very periphery of the world in the lower left (and 'evil') corner. Being marginalised, the North was thought to be the habitat of monsters and other strange and terrible peoples only.

The *Íslendingasögur*, however, draw a rather different picture than the *mappae mundi* when it comes to the role and meaning of islands both in mainland Scandinavia and in and around Iceland. The discoverers and the first settlers do not seem to have been bothered by the fact that Iceland is an island in the middle of the vast Atlantic Ocean.

In this paper I will investigate how – or whether at all – the self-perception of Iceland/Icelanders in the *Íslendingasögur* (f.ex. *Eyrbyggja saga*, *Grettis saga* and *Egils saga*) reflects the negative stigmatisation attached to the North by the medieval *mappae mundi* or the long-standing tradition of islands as liminal and segregated space primarily dominated by the supernatural.

Hillerdal, Charlotta (University of Aberdeen)

Island identities and the centrality of the peripheral

The earldom of Orkney, which according to the Orkneyinga Saga was established in the mid 9th century, was preceded by Norse settlement of the islands. The nature of these settlements is disputed, interpretations varying from pirate base to peaceful farmers. The concentration of Norse character graves is significant on the Orkneys in comparison to other parts of Scotland. The islands were the centre of the most long lived Norse colony in the west. Orkney's strategic position on the waterway to the west, and the duality of being both at the centre of communication and in the periphery of the Viking Diaspora allowed for a relatively autonomous community to form, and in the tension between the insular microcosm and a widescale Norse context a special Orcadian Norse identity evolved. In this paper the Norse graves will be analysed and discussed as expressions of identity from a settler community trying to establish their own place in a new cultural context in relation – and opposition - to the Norse homeland and their new environment.

Hovland, Edgar and **Haaland, Anders**

The interwar period as a formative period in modern Norwegian fisheries history: Competition across the North Sea, marked share, quality and policy of modernization

[to be confirmed]

Jennings, Andrew (Centre for Nordic Studies/UHI)

Yakkie Cashes and other Inuitiae

The involvement of men from the Northern Isles in the Arctic Whaling is an important aspect of the 19th century history of Orkney and Shetland. Many men visited Greenland, Baffin and the Davis Strait, sometimes many times in their lives. Shetlanders in particular were sought after both as crew and as fiddlers. Close personal connections were established with the Inuit. This included the exchange of goods.

This paper will explore the fragmentary remains of this cultural contact in the Northern Isles today. What memorials survive from those adventurous times, when Orcadians and Shetlanders sailed the Arctic seas.

Lamb, Deborah

Who goes there? Access by sea and changes in settlement focus AD 200-1300

During the period AD 200 to AD 1300 rising sea levels changed the outline of Shetland. These changes were most dramatic in areas of shallow topography; the area around Burra and Trondra on the east side of Shetland is a case in point.

Using the known archaeological record, the location of good agricultural soil and the legacy of Norse place names, it is possible to suggest the likely location of settlements in Burra and Trondra over this period.

From this re-construction it is clear that the pattern and focus of settlement altered in Burra and Trondra. These changes can be seen to reflect the wider trends and events of the later Iron Age and the Norse period, such as the growth of Pictish influence, the coming of Christianity, and the arrival and establishment of the Norse. However this paper suggests that the local geographical situation added an extra dimension to contemporary socio-economic developments.

It was not simply that the shoreline changed as the sea rose. As the prevailing level of marine technology changed, Shetland became more accessible to visitors from further afield. Once arrived in Shetland, the options available to ships and boats were limited

only by the sailors' skill and the depth of water they required to make landfall. As these limits changed, so did the patterns of access.

This paper suggests that within Burra and Trondra it is possible to see the effect of changing accessibility by sea on the fortunes of individual settlements and the relationships between them in the period AD 200-1300.

These conclusions highlight the need to take maritime changes into account when considering the dynamics of settlement in Shetland.

Leslie, Brydon

'Such things as make this land the richer, and we cannot do without'; a celebration of Shetland's Hanseatic past

King Sverre's words are preserved for us today by the writer of *Sverrisaga* and provide us with some early clues as to trade relations between Norway and Shetland. The year was 1186 and the Norwegian king wanted especially to thank all those who had brought 'such things as make this land the richer, and we cannot do without'. Sailing east from Shetland the main port of call was Bergen which by the 1290s had become a major centre of the Hanseatic League. By 1498 business was booming and merchant ships from Hamburg and Bremen were common place in harbours throughout Shetland. Such direct trade with the islanders continued uninterrupted through to the early eighteenth century. This paper will explore the extensive trade which took place between Shetland and the German towns, and give recognition to an often forgotten part of Shetland's rich history.

Lethbridge, Emily (University of Iceland)

Unreal Island: The Whale Road, Sagas and Saga Pilgrimages

"For Europe is absent / This is an island and therefore / unreal", claims W. H. Auden in his poem 'Journey to Iceland', published in the 1937 volume *Letters from Iceland*. In other pieces in the same work, Auden and his fellow traveller and co-author Louis MacNeice draw on the Icelandic sagas for material, often collapsing time and 'encountering' saga characters in the Icelandic landscapes they travel through. In so doing, Auden and MacNeice are part of longer tradition of northern 'saga pilgrimages' and 'saga-site' commentaries that peaked in the second half of the 19th century with visits (and ensuing publications) by figures such as William Morris and William Gershom Collingwood.

In an age before commercial air travel, the sea-voyage over to Iceland (typically by steamer from Scotland, sometimes with stop-overs around Orkney, Shetland and the Faroe Islands where saga connections would be noted) was an important anticipatory

prelude to exploring the saga island itself. This 'journey out' across the Whale Road emphasised the remoteness of the Atlantic-bound island in the minds of the travellers and, as I will explore in my paper, played an important part in their perception and presentation of Iceland as a saga island out of time (see Rainbird 2007:18 on the notion that islands are often seen as repositories of lost time). In order to provide a present-day, comparative perspective, I will draw on my own experiences of approaching Iceland by sea in order to explore saga-sites in 2011, and spending a further month at sea in 2013 on other saga-related voyages around the Hebrides, Orkney, Faroes, and Iceland.[4]

Ljosland, Ragnhild (Centre for Nordic Studies)

The selkie in modern fiction writing of the Northern Isles

The selkie myth is a traditional folk tale about seal shape shifters which is told in Ireland, Scotland, the Northern Isles, the Faroe Islands and Iceland. This paper explores how the traditional folk tale has been adapted in contemporary fiction writing of the Northern Isles, examining texts such as Eric Linklater's *Sealskin Trousers,* George Mackay Brown's *Beside the Ocean of Time* and Amy Sackville's *Orkney*. In such modern adaptations, selkies do not only dance, sing, and make good housewives; they also go to university and take part in modern society – albeit clumsily and awkwardly. They are, however, ultimately determined by the characteristics of their species as defined in the traditional myth.

Morag MacInnes

Margaret Tait's short story The Incomers, in Lane Furniture, is little known and deserves close scrutiny. It tackles the vexed relationship between 'local' and 'incomer' in island life; I can think of no other Northern Isles writer who has found a tidy and coherent way to express the gulf between naivete and worldly wisdom.

She focuses on the role of the boatman. He says little. His silences are even more eloquent that his words. His dialect is hinted at; the linguistic contrast between his speech and the rush of superlatives which define the visitors' utterances is expertly handled. There are parallels here with George Mackay Brown's verbal tricks, and Eric Linklater's attempts to portary 'local ' speech; but I'm led principally to consider the moment of crossing over, from mainlands to islands, in Northern literature.

Those making the crossing - Tait's young couple, for example - think they are voyaging towards simplicity. The barrier of sea has somehow kept the islands pure. Those

[4] Details about my year-long 2011 "Pilgrimage to the Saga-sites of Iceland" are at www.sagasteads.blogspot.com.

facilitating that journey - the Charons- take the coins, and listen to the hopes and dreams; but reserve judgment.

The boatman is a crucial link between two worlds - urban cosmopolitan and rooted rural. He's emblematic, inhabiting as he does the impenetrable world of the fisherman/crofter/ Norwaster, whose knowledge comes from direct interaction with natural forces. There's a sense in which the ferrylouper in our literature is searching for the key to a more heroically simple, honourable life. The truth, however, is that a move ower the watter is a move towards complexity. I'll consider the Betty Mowatt story, Linklater's Sealskin Trousers and novels by Elisabeth Arthur and Amy Sackville in passing, to demonstrate how expertly Tait develops this theme; I'll suggest that it takes years of listening to interpret the language of the boatman.

McLeod, Shane

Norse identity in immigrant populations: The implications of stable isotope analysis from Westness and Cnip.

The long accepted narrative of Norse settlement in the Northern Isles and Hebrides is that Vikings (pirates) from Norway established bases there in the late eighth or ninth centuries, before Norwegian king Harald Fairhair annexed the islands, leading to further settlement from Norway. Although this broad outline of settlement primarily from Norway is likely to be accurate, it is also a simplification of a period of extensive population movement. Stable isotope analysis from Norse cemeteries at Westness, Rousay, Orkney Islands, and Cnip, Uig, Isle of Lewis, shed light on the reality of the multiple migrations of a people who are known to have used the sea as a means to increased mobility. In particular, they demonstrate that some of those buried with typical Norse grave-goods did not spend their childhoods in Norway or their place of burial, raising the possibility that some of the Norse emigrated from other areas of Norse settlement, and were not necessarily genetically 'Norse' at all. This paper will summarize these results before discussing the implications for notions of cultural identity.

Murray, Jenny (Shetland Museum and Archives)

In Aboot da Night wi da Erasmusons: One Family's Beliefs and Lore

Since the coming of the North Sea oil to our shores in the 1970s and the advancement of technology, much has changed within Shetland society. Crofting and fishing are no longer the mainstay of the Island's economy and with their decline the Islands have witnessed a significant change to the traditional way of life; a primeval relationship

between man and his environment that has sustained life in Shetland over millennia. Deeply rooted within these ancient seasonal rhythms of life is a vocabulary of wisdom; customs and rituals that were passionately adhered to, essential for the safekeeping of the folk who inhabited these Northern shores. The waning of traditional life saw the inevitable decrease in language associated with crofting and fishing; these are lexicons now, housed in dictionaries instead of byres and barns. Maturing generations may hold dear the lore of their forefathers but it appears the younger generation, who are becoming far removed from *da auld wyes,* have little need for such language and superstition. Likewise the hold of the Kirk has seen its grip weaken as advancing science offers alternative philosophies, changing the dynamics of life's moral codes.

This paper will investigate some of the old customs and beliefs surrounding the crofting and fishing life and compare them to other fishing communities around the Highlands and Islands to consider if they are unique to Shetland. It will also look at three generations within one family to discover how much these traditional beliefs have diluted with the changes in society over recent years.

Napier, Ian R. (NAFC Marine Centre)

Explaining the *Moder Dy*: Waves, Currents, Tides and the Physical Nature of Shetland's Seas

The sea has had a profound influence on Shetland life, but one that has typically been described only in very general – if not vague – terms. The physical characteristics of Shetland's seas rarely appear to have been considered in detail – or perhaps even understood – by many of those who have studied and written on these islands' history, culture and heritage. Yet the physical characteristics of the oceans in general, and of the seas around Shetland, have been intensively studied, and are well understood, by ocean scientists.

Shetland's seas are influenced by four basic oceanographic phenomena: ocean currents (large-scale, steady movement of water masses); tidal currents (the discontinuous movement of water around headlands and through channels as a result of the rise and fall of the tides), waves (the disturbance of the sea's surface by local winds) and swell (mature waves that have travelled from their area of formation). Shetland's physical setting, surrounded by relatively shallow water but close to the edge of the continental shelf, and much deeper water, is also significant.

Given an understanding of these phenomena, the 'Moder Dy' – the famous but semi-mystical method used by Shetland fishermen to find their way back to land – can be interpreted as the interaction of deep ocean swells with the 'shallow' waters of the continental shelf, which could – in theory – result in a regularly oriented swell pattern to the west of Shetland.

A better understanding of oceanographic phenomena, and the terminology used to describe them, would surely enhance the study – and understanding – of aspects of Shetland's maritime history, culture, and heritage, and could open up fruitful new avenues for collaborative research.

Ogilvie, Astrid. (Stefansson Arctic Institute, Iceland)

"The Iceland Dried Cod is Much Esteemed…": Reflections on Icelandic Fisheries History

The importance of the cod fisheries to Iceland in both the past and the present is well known. However, their success varied through time. Historical sources record that fishing was generally favourable in Iceland from early settlement times to the sixteenth century. However, after that time, the fisheries appear to have failed on numerous occasions, sometimes for several years. Catches during the eighteenth century, in particular, appear to have declined. For example, in the seventeenth century in the south of Iceland, one man would have been expected to catch about 500 cod during the winter fishing season. After the mid-eighteenth century, 300 cod were regarded as the maximum. The number of fish exported in the eighteenth century also fell. Most contemporary writers seem to have noticed this decline and commented upon it. Certainly the poor catches are reflected in the reports of Icelandic officials. Thus, for example, an account for 1722 from the northeast of Iceland states: "The fishing is very poor in the north, and decreases every year". Similar reports came from other regions. The analysis of numerous such accounts suggests that fishing was generally unfavourable from about 1680 to 1760. Explanations for the lack of fish may reflect a variety of socio-ecological factors. When fish disappeared from some fishing grounds, for whatever reason, people who had lived in these areas had to leave their homes and try to find a living elsewhere. When and if the fish returned, the fishing population was depleted. The type of boat available clearly also played a key role. Climatic factors, such as varying ocean temperatures, and the incidence of sea ice off the coasts, were also important. This presentation will consider how a variety of different elements contributed to the success or failure of the all-important Icelandic fisheries in the past.

Okland, Kjell Magnus

Boat trade across the North Sea

For several centuries small boats were traded from Western Norway to the Isles of Shetland and Orkneys. Even today boat terminology strongly shows the connection this boat trade held up across the North Sea. The boats were clinker built and were built both for rowing and sailing. With these boats people on the west side of the North Sea were able to maintain fisheries in rough seas outside the isles. Annually ships were sent

across the Ocean to buy boats and accessories from Norway. The boat trade must therefore have been an important trade for several participants on both side of the ocean.

But this trade also raises a lot of questions on how details in this trade happened: What kind of boats and who built them? How many boats were built and how were they ordered in a time when communications were based on favorable winds? What role did entrepreneurs on both side of the ocean play and who were involved in this trade? And least but not last: how did they transport these fragile boats across the weather exposed North Sea?

Paul, Nalini, (Poet, writer and lecturer)

The sea that surrounds the Northern islands of Orkney and Shetland acts as a constant reminder of links to other cultures, which can challenge perceptions of a fixed cultural identity.

My paper will focus on how migrations allow for a sense of "being and becoming", a subjectivity that is constantly changing, rather than a sense of identity that is determined along essentialist lines of race and culture. The theory of "becoming" is one that allows for a state of transformation for the individual. The sea itself is in a constant state of flux, a fluidity that discourages the imposition of borders and boundaries.

Using poetry, folklore and fiction, the paper will encompass a literary journey that examines the individual in a state of change or becoming. This *subjectivity*—a term that allows for seeing based on a subject position, rather than a normative term, such as "identity"—is greatly influenced by migration. The latter is a journey that challenges the notion of a beginning and/or end. The sea acts as a conduit for migration journeys, which continue through the life of the individual, particularly the poet, who takes on aspects of different cultures along the way. This journey continues indefinitely, allowing for a greater understanding of the poet and his/her world. The paper will incorporate folklore from Orkney and Shetland; a selection of poetry, including my own; and extracts of Jean Rhys's fiction. Raven and crow imagery and myth will be utilised poetically to chart a narrative that encompasses the West Indies, British Columbia, Shetland and Orkney. As folklore, poetry and fiction come together, the boundaries between these forms will also be blurred. The place of the individual amidst migration and change will be examined, questioning and challenging the notion of a fixed cultural identity.

Peebles, Alistair

How distant? How present? 'Gods of the Earth, Gods of the Sea'

Internationally acclaimed, the work of the Scottish poet, artist and gardener Ian Hamilton Finlay (1925-2006) includes a sustained exploration of our relationship with the sea: an enduring source of meaning and value. Best known in this regard for its focus on fishing, his work ranges widely, bridging apparently great distances – the classical world and the nuclear present, Midway and 'Mare Nostrum'. His achievement overall is most famously exemplified by his garden in Lanarkshire, begun in collaboration in 1967. Described (1971[5]) as 'an inland garden', Stonypath, Little Sparta's metaphorical associations with the sea and with islands are a major source of its artistic and ethical significance.

But which islands? On his journey towards that mature achievement, the periods he spent in Rousay in the 1950s, though brief, were crucial. However those connections, which have been central to my archival research, have only recently begun to emerge from near-mythic obscurity. The installation there, in 2005, of 'Gods of the Earth, Gods of the Sea' was the occasion for Finlay's third and final visit to the island. Commissioned by the Pier Arts Centre, this great work, paradoxically both unobtrusive and monumental, now overlooks – and embraces – not only an impressive sweep of coastline and cliff but the Westray Firth, the North Isles, on a clear day, Shetland – and much else besides, and beyond.

My paper will discuss this installation and that setting, which taken together, comprise arguably his most distinctive statement about our place in the world. In discussing this work, and tracing its connections with those earlier visits, my intention will be to consider both its presence there, and the extent to which it may be true to say of the island itself, as has been said of Whalsay and Hugh MacDiarmid, that in a sense he never left it[6].

Poilvez, Marion (University of Iceland)

The outlaw of the Northern Isles; Comparative dynamics of outlawry and insular spaces in the Old Norse corpus

Narratives of outlawry in the saga-corpus are intertwined with narratives of islands. Grettir sterki is forever bound to Drangey (*Grettis saga*), Gísli found shelter at Hergilsey (*Gísla saga*), and Hörðr created for a time a new community at Hólmr (*Harðar saga*). Moreover, some other minor figures are said to look for shelter on Norwegian islands in time of tension with the king, creating a continuous frame of association between trouble-makers and islands.

All occurrences of outlaws on islands appear dynamically related towards the mainland they got excluded from (Norway or Iceland). When turning to the Northern Isles, one question can be raised: what are the dynamics of outlawry when the mainland is composed of islands? Icelandic sources, both legal and literary, are clear on how outlawry and islands were related : the criminal was either temporarily exiled from Iceland (*fjörbaugsgarðr*) or expelled from

[5] *From 'An Inland Garden'*, IHF with drawings by Ian Gardner, Wild Hawthorn Press, 1971.
[6] See: McQuillan, Ruth, 'Hugh MacDiarmid's Shetland Poetry', in *MacDiarmid in Shetland*, ed Graham & Smith, Lerwick, Shetland Library, 1992, p. 16.

society yet forbidden to leave Iceland (*skóggangr*). Unfortunately, we lack sources to identify the procedures in the Northern isles and the only testimonies we have at hand are the sagas. *Orkneyinga saga* is particularly meaningful as it describes outlawry as the result of the decision of a single leader, in contrast with the Icelandic court system.

This paper aims to compare the wide-spread outlawry representation from the classical sagas and Icelandic legal texts to the only outlaw from the Northern isles as depicted in *Orkneyinga saga* : Þórbjörn klerkr Þórsteinnson, outlawed and executed by Earl Rognvald in 1158. This perspective will help to understand the ambiguous status of the isles as a place itself already on the border of marginality for its pirate raids against Norway during the Viking age. Finally, this paper will integrate the Northern Isles in a larger study on the function of islands and insularity in the medieval North.

Ralph, Victoria

Landscapes, Seascapes and Dreamscapes from Old Norse Literature in *Sigrid Storråda* in *Drottningar i Kungahälla* by Selma Lagerlöf

Drottningar i Kungahälla (1899) comprises an Introduction entitled *På Det Stora Kungahällas Grund* and five short stories about different types of women: *Skogsdrottningen* (savage), *Sigrid Storråda* (valkyrie), *Astrid* (slave), *Margareta Fredkulla* (peace-woman) and *Drottningen På Ragnhildsholmen* (queen). The Collection is located on the west coast border of Sweden in Bohuslän and set in medieval Kungahälla on the Göta River when it was once part of Norway.

Sigrid Storråda is modelled on Sigríðr in stórráða in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* in Snorri Sturlason´s *Heimskringla*. The heathen, Swedish Queen is depicted on a bridal journey to Kungahälla to marry the Christian, Norwegian King. As Sigrid Storråda sails around the islands of the Baltic and up the Nordre River she is greeted by all kinds of supernatural creatures along the liminal shores. However, King Olaf Trggvason resists the temptations of the beautiful, but evil Valkyrie-Queen in her ship on the harbour. In a dream he sees himself as a dead man lying at the bottom of the sea after a battle and receives a vision of the good, Fair Queen of Heaven who leads the converted Heathen King to Christian Salvation.

Lagerlöf maps the Culturescapes of an Old Norse Mythological world-view incorporating a series of binary oppositions (Male/Female, Christian/Heathen, Culture/Nature, Land/Water and Us/Other) onto the Landscapes of the Mind.

This Paper discusses the role and function of Landscapes, Seascapes and Dreamscapes to offer either supernatural or psychological explanations of events. It asks if Lagerlöf uses imagery from *Gísla saga* of two dream women, one evil and one good, in combination with the feminine element of water to reinterpret Old Norse accounts of King Olaf's death. It aims to show that fluidity and dreams are connected to both his Fate and Salvation that are determined or assisted by two different types of women.

Rendall, Tom (Centre for Nordic Studies)

Vernacular and Variation – Voices of the Northern Isles

This paper will examine the attitudes of dialect speakers in Orkney and Shetland in terms of their use of the vernacular in a variety of speech situations.

Both island groups use a dialect with words derived from the Norn. Johnston (1997) believes that its one of the best examples of a relic speech form in Scotland:
"….yet both Orcadian (insular A) and Shetlandic (insular B) are not totally conservative; they are better described as going their own way relative to Scots, adopting sometimes striking but highly localised innovations ." (1997:448)

Johnston makes the point that "…. Both groups contain a high level of diversity, and the internal divisions do not always correlate with island boundaries" (1997:448)
My research corroborates with this statement and the paper will identify some of those features along with the use of code-switching and the perceived need to use Scottish Standard English as the mode of communication.

It could be argued that Shetland islanders value their dialect to a greater extent than Orkney and display more loyalty to their vernacular than their counterparts in Orkney.
During a study visit to Shetland (2005) a small scale survey using the questionnaire adapted from the Orkney research was used and 20 informants from Whalsay, Lerwick and Voe took part. Some of the results will be compared with that of Orkney in order to ascertain whether or not the two island groups share the same attitudes on the use of dialect.

Greatest influences on the use of dialect were considered in respect of migration to the islands, movements between the islands and the power of the media. Informants offered useful insights into how school and work experience had impacted on the way they use dialect.

The paper will offer some comparisons and contrasts between Orkney and Shetland using primary sources from both island groups.

Reeploeg, Silke (Centre for Nordic Studies)

Of Boats and Men: intercultural objects and regional identity in Western Norway and the Shetland Islands

This paper analyses the role of the boat as a mediator of both tangible and intangible culture in the North Atlantic region by comparing the representation of boats and seafaring collections in local folk-museum exhibitions in Norway and Scotland. It investigates the similarities and differences in terms of how the coast is defined as a

'seafaring place' via objects, particularly the narratives and aspects of communal memory that influence the formation of regional and national cultural traditions. By linking the theory of cultural transfer and material culture studies, the paper compares how Shetlanders and West Norwegians participate in the construction of and identification with coastal culture or *kystkultur* by way of maritime objects and narratives.

Renwick, Esther

Islands of Significance: an exploration of authenticity and visitor experience at the Heart of Neolithic Orkney World Heritage Site

The Heart of Neolithic Orkney WHS represents one of the best preserved and richest Neolithic landscapes in Western Europe. Representing a culture that spread across land and sea; a culture where Orkney could be central to new developments and influence trends across the mainland UK and Europe; a maritime culture where the sea was a routeway rather than a barrier.

This paper takes this accepted academic 'truth' and examines the Heart of Neolithic Orkney WHS as experienced and reviewed by its visitors. An interesting dichotomy immediately emerges, this place of centrality, movement and community effort in the past has become translated, through the interpretation of the visitor, into a place of wilderness and isolation. Rather than seeing an active maritime culture that use the sea as a way of life, a source of food and resources, a route around the islands and onto the Scottish mainland, the visitors appear to be creating a view of an isolated culture who battle to survive against the elements.

This paper presents an aspect of ongoing research into the relationships between various experiences. An examination of the experiences of the modern visitor, the experiential archaeologist and the past habitant of the site raises interesting contradictions which in turn raise questions about definitions of 'authenticity' and the potential of experiential archaeology to influence heritage interpretation.

Shafer, John D. (Centre for the Study of the Viking Age, The University of Nottingham)

The Trajectory of Feminine Challenge to Masculine Authority in North Atlantic Narratives

The well-known Papa Stour document addressed to Duke Hakon Magnusson, which details the Easter 1299 events in which Ragnhild Simunsdatter accused Thorvald Thoresson of betraying the duke over the island rents, preserves a prominent real-world example of the challenge of feminine unruliness to masculine authority and order in the North Atlantic.

There are other good examples of this narrowly-defined type of conflict in the semi-historical literary narrative products of the North Atlantic, the medieval Icelandic sagas that tell stories of the residents of Iceland, Orkney and Shetland itself. In *Orkneying saga* an Orcadian woman named Ragna publically challenges Earl Rögnvaldr Kali on behalf of her guest Hallr Þórarinsson, who has been refused a place in Rögnvaldr's retinue, prompting the perpetually versifying earl to compose a verse about the eye-catching horsehair headdress she is wearing. In their verbal exchange it is not entirely clear whether or not insults are being traded between the demanding woman and the authoritative man, and on the whole this account provides a more ambiguous picture of this sort of conflict than the Papa Stour document from about 200 years later. In the saga account, indeed, the earl ultimately grants Ragna's suit.

My paper addresses several such Norse-source accounts of the challenge women lacking in social power and authority present to the masculine order of medieval North Atlantic societies, especially those texts that specifically record a verbal exchanged sparked by such an encounter between a woman presumed powerless and a man of power – recording, even amplifying her provocative voice. I outline the most characteristic features of such accounts and analyse key distinctions, tracing this type of episode through differing text-types of differing provenances, times, places and contexts, drawing out the relationships the characteristics of feminine challenge to masculine authority bear to these dimensions of the narratives they enliven.

Smith, Brian (Shetland Museum and Archives)

'"This man played his part well like others": accounts of fishing disasters in the 1880s.'

I will discuss two accounts of fishing disasters in Shetland in 1881 and 1887, both written long after the event. I consider what they tell us about the experiences and emotions of men and boys in a fishing society that was changing rapidly.

Stepp, Russell (Ph.D. Candidate, Cornell University)

Travel and Space in Pre-Cartographic Scandinavia

For most people in the modern world, long-distance travel and maps are connected to such an extent that it is difficult to imagine maritime or overland travel without the aid of a map of some sort. Maps provide a convenient vector for transmitting information about a journey to a traveler who has not had first-hand experience moving from one specific locale to another. However, there is no evidence that maps were produced, or even known, in Scandinavia until well after the great maritime voyages of the Viking Age. This paper will examine methods in use in Scandinavia prior to the introduction of

maps which were used to transmit information about routes from one location to another and how these methods reflect pre-cartographic notions of space.

I will examine texts in Latin, Old English, and Old Norse which give step-by-step instructions of routes taken as a part of specific maritime crossings. These texts demonstrate, not only how the early Norse were able to safely execute open-ocean voyages, but also how they thought of the space through which they traveled. Unlike the mindset of our modern, cartographic culture the Norse conceived of space from the first-person perspective of a traveler, rather than from a bird's-eye view. Their construction of space was principally linear, as routes moved from one point to another, but certain texts indicate that the Norse were able to translate these one-dimensional narrative instructions into complex webs of interconnecting routes which, while certainly not cartographic in our use of the term, indicate a complex, two-dimensional understanding of space which could have facilitated the impressive, open-ocean, maritime voyages of the Viking Age.

Stige, Morten (Cultural Heritage Mangement, Oslo)

The cathedral of Kirkjubøur – an insular monument between Norway and Britain

At Kirkjubøur, some few miles out of Torshavn, we find the ruins of the medieval cathedral of the Faroe islands. Most of the masonary is intact and can be dated to c 1300. This stone building is unique in the Faroes context and the key craftsmen must have come from elsewhere. Norway and Britain are the obvious candidates.

The Faeroe islands were inhabited by descendants of Norsemen who mainly came from the Norwegian West coast. Since 1152 the Faeroes was a part of the archdiocese of Nidaros. The Faeroes was also part of the kingdom of Norway. From 1177-1319 Sverreætten reigned. King Sverre was brought up at Kirkjubøur. The trade connections to Bergen however were another strong link. Like mainland Norway the Faeroes must also have been open to influences from the British isles and the other seafaring nations of the North sea.

At the time of construction the cultural, ecclesiastical and political ties to Norway were strong. The distance was not a serious handicap either. Bergen is situated c 680 km from Kirkjubøur, while Trondheim is c 890 km away. The southern alternatives to Bergen were Kirkwall in the Orkneys at a distance of c 400 km and Caithness on the Scottish mainland isn't much further. However it was necessary to go on to fi Elgin to see ambitious Scottish architecture, and there the distance is only some 100 km short of Bergen.

Through an analysis of the architecture and artistic characteristics of the cathedral the cultural links with Norway and the British Isles are discussed. The main conclusion of

these investigations are that no direct line of influence can be proven due to the many common features of the medieval stone architecture of the lands around the North Sea.

Stykket, Sigrid A

The Sea as limitation and opportunity in the Scandinavian Medieval Ballad

The Scandinavian medieval ballad is a genre spread around much of the North Sea; it is found in Norway, Denmark, Sweden, the Faroe Islands and Iceland, a couple of them also in the Shetlands, and equivalents may be found in Child's *Popular English and Scottish Ballads*. The singers who made them known obviously had to travel by sea, to what extent is the sea present in the ballads, and how is the motive of the sea treated?
One historical ballad tells rather realistically about King Hakon Hakonsson, who actually died at Kirkwall, Orkneys during winter time, and how his body was sailed to Bergen and buried in the spring (1264).

In others, where the historicity may be limited to that of using names of known historical persons, like "Dronning Dagmar og Junker Strange" (Queen Dagmar and Knight Strange), the seafaring knight is the hero, while the king who stays ashore and sends his knight to propose for him, is ridiculed.

Interestingly enough some of the seafaring heroes are women. To Stolt Ellensborg (Proud Ellensborg) the sea is limiting her for a long time, but in the end she has the opportunity to regain balance and harmony when she sails off with her maids to fetch her betrothed.

Looking at these and other examples I want to explore how the motive of the sea is treated, whether this can possibly tell us anything about the ballads' view on it as a borderline or a possibility, and whether this view may be of older or newer origin.

Svihuus, Arstein

Herring and Common Heritage. A Historical Overview,

When investigating our common coastal heritage herring could be an interesting object to follow. Herring is chosen because it has been a significant part of the coastal history of both the North Sea region as well as in the Baltic Sea. This is not to say that it has been equally important all over the region or in every historic period, but important as part of the common coastal history, as well as of every involved nation's economic or cultural history. Considering the history of the region from medieval times until today, one will find countless examples of how variations in the herring fisheries have influenced not only local communities, but also on the entire region.

However, this part of coastal history has not been the main focus for maritime history throughout the region. All though some parts of our common herring heritage is visible in daily life through our food culture.

By looking in to our history we will find the grander parts of the herring history of the region. Its fisheries marked the seasonal life of the coastal inhabitants, and created markets, became important in trading and created meeting places all over the region. As the fisheries are fluctuating, so was also the fisheries, trade and meeting points. The last great meeting place based on herring was in Icelandic waters in the first post war decades. The fisheries gathered an enormous fishing fleet from all over the Nordic and Baltic region.

In my presentation I will mainly focus on Norwegian herring history during the past two centuries, but I will relate this to the development in the bigger region of the North Sea and the Baltic Sea.

Tulinius, Torfi H. (University of Iceland)

Islands and Identity in Medieval Iceland

Within the wider question of medieval Icelanders‘ perception of themselves as a group, this paper explores the representation of islands and island dwellers in medieval Icelandic literature. The question in focus is whether the fact that Iceland is an island contributed to the way its inhabitants understood themselves. Paul Ricoeur‘s concept of “narrative identity” will be used to describe the outlines of theoretical framework for the study of how medieval authors progressively established and explored a collective self-representation of Icelanders and their social world. In that context, references to Iceland as an island, in comparison with other insular communities mentioned in the sagas will be studied. Special attention is given to the portrayal of inhabitants of Orkney and Shetland as islanders in the Old Norse-Icelandic sources. The question under study is whether insularity was an important factor in the identity of medieval Icelanders.

Turner, Val (Shetland Amenity Trust)

[to be confirmed]

Watt, Angela (Centre for Nordic Studies/UHI)

Cast your light upon the water: the legacy of lighthouses as locations for cultural illumination

In the early 1960s, the Northern Lighthouse Board (NLB) began a process of automation that would result in the automation of all Scottish lighthouses by 31 March 1998. There followed a period of drastic institutional and organisational change, with the gradual displacement of lighthouse keepers and their families, and other auxiliary staff. As navigational aids, the function of lighthouses was supplemented with satellite technologies to enhance their effectiveness, whilst supplanting the human element of lived experience and occupational identity.

This paper explores the increasing fascination with the lore and lure of lighthouses as historical landmarks of maritime heritage. Situated at the frontier of island and coastal life, lighthouses maintain a unique and, at times dangerous, relationship between 'civilisation' and the sea. The dichotomy of their locality has contributed new threads of cultural and historical narrative, promulgating a particularly idealised and romantic image. Fifteen years post- automation, lighthouses continue to illuminate and enhance our shores.

Wilkins, Frances (University of Aberdeen)

Da Merry Boys O Greenland: Musical Reflections of Shetland's Maritime Culture

Many of the songs and tunes in Shetland's musical repertoire have been inspired by the islanders' long associations with the sea and seafaring. A number of these were transported back across the Atlantic from whaling and fur trading expeditions to the arctic fringes and carry tales related to Shetland's rich maritime past. During the time of the Greenland fishery in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, most ships included a member of the crew able to play the fiddle and keep the crews' spirits up. This can be seen in the Hay and Company Whaling Agency Ledgers of the time, where every ship can be seen to have bought a fiddle or fiddle strings as part of its supplies. Similarly on exploratory journeys to the Arctic the fiddle has been documented as an integral feature of the social and leisure activities of crew members. In addition to this, different nationalities onboard ships contributed to a lively exchange of music from a variety of different geographical areas across Scandinavia, the Arctic, the British Isles, and Northern Europe.

This paper aims to explore the strong link between Shetland's tune and song repertoire and the islands' nautical past. In doing this, I will discuss the use of music as a means of reflecting and reinforcing the cultural identity of Shetland's seafarers over the last two

centuries. The presentation will include photographs and archival recordings as a means of illustrating how the Shetland musical tradition can be used a valuable resource in exploring the maritime history of the islands.

Zickermann, Kathrin

Commerce and Conflict: The Northern Isles as Central and Remote Places during the Early Modern Period.

Throughout the early modern period the Scottish Northern Isles maintained significant commercial and maritime links with Northwest Germany, Norway and the Scottish mainland. These links, which predominantly evolved around the export of white fish and herring from Shetland and Orkney, have received some scholarly attention in the past. However, this older research tends to miss the complexity of the commercial exchanges, marginalizes the role of the Shetland and Orkney inhabitants and stresses the dependency of the islands on the visits of foreign merchants. My paper will challenge these research positions and explain the multilateral trade links between the Northern Isles and the wider world based on old and new sources maintained in Scottish and foreign archives. In particular, it will analyse the commercial activity of individual Shetland and Orkney inhabitants in their maritime context and evaluate the importance of the islands' exports for foreign communities. In addition, my paper will examine the significance of the Northern Isles for by-passing ship traffic and vice versa, especially during times of international maritime warfare when the sea route via Northern Scotland was increasingly chosen as a commercial 'highway'. In doing so, my paper aims to contribute to the discussion as to whether the Scottish Northern Isles should be perceived as remote communities or indeed as central places at the heart of important European commercial networks.

Poster Presentations (to be confirmed)

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