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Authors	MacDonald, Aidan D. S.
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UCC
University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

ON 'PAPAR' NAMES IN N. AND W. SCOTLAND

Aidan Macdonald

The Historia Norwegiae says that before the Norse came, Orkney was inhabited by Peti (Picts) and Papae. The Picts had by this time come to be thought of traditionally as pygmies; the Papae were priests, and an island was still called Papey after them. The Historia, however, regards them as Africans adhering to Judaism. Both groups were destroyed utterly by the first Norse incomers. This description of the papae, written towards the end of the 12th century, is independent of Ari, who, in his Islendingabók, refers to papar in Iceland. According to Ari, they left because of the heathen Norse colonists and were Irish. Ari's Islendingabók was written in 1134 x 1138. The Landnámabók, which was probably derived largely from Ari, gives some additional topographical detail: it mentions Papey and Papyli in Iceland; and Kirkiuboer (also in Iceland), where papar had been previously. Theoderic, writing before 1188, also mentions men from Ireland who lived in Iceland before the Norse arrived, saying that they were very few in number.

These Norse accounts receive some confirmation from Dicuil, an Irishman writing on the Continent c. 825. Some of his informants had been in far northern latitudes and he himself had personal knowledge of some of the islands of Britain. Dicuil says that Irish hermits had lived in the Faeroes for nearly 100 years (c.825), but that these islands had been abandoned by the anchorites because of Viking pirates.

The important Norse accounts, from which most of the documentary evidence for the papar is derived, date to or originate in the 12th century. Even allowing that they draw on uninterrupted oral traditions of the primary settlement period, the accuracy or otherwise of such traditions cannot be established on a priori grounds. A chronological gap of 300 years or more therefore exists between the departure or expulsion of some or all of the papar from the Atlantic islands generally and the first written accounts of them by their successors. The obvious implications of this gap must be kept carefully in mind. But there is substantial agreement among the Norse sources that the papar were Irish hermits, whether dwelling alone or in groups, and the broad accuracy of this picture seems to be confirmed to some extent by the early 9th century Dicuil.

The Irish documentation is inconclusive. Pápa is used of an Irish anchorite in Oengus's Félire: Nem of Aran, coarb of Enda; Laud 610 f. 40a mentions probably the same individual. Popa is used of Patrick in the Vita Tripartita and in the Lismore Lives, but not necessarily as a specialised ecclesiastical title, and popa seems usually to be used in a purely secular context and to be largely confined to the Ulster Cycle of Irish saga. The Félire also says: pupu apud Scottos id est papa; and Nem is called Pupu in the Book of Leinster. Popa, pupu, etc. seem to be rare generally and pupu of an anchorite is largely restricted to the one individual. It is normally assumed that Norse borrowed papa from Irish, but it is at least worth posing the question: who borrowed the term, in its specialised meaning of hermit, from whom?

27 papar place-names are known to the writer so far in N and W Scotland: 9 in Shetland; 7 in Orkney; 2 in Caithness; and 9 in the Hebrides. There seems to be none in Sutherland, mainland Ross and Cromarty, mainland Inverness, or all Argyll. Outside this area, there are apparently no instances in the SW generally, especially Galloway, or in Ireland. Papcastle in Cumberland (a Roman fort) is taken to contain papa, as is Glen Faba in the Isle of Man. Icelandic examples have already been mentioned. The following list is based mainly on the Ordnance Survey Name-books and the OS 6 inch sheets:

Shetland

1. Papa Geo, Aithsting, Mainland. 2. Papa Little (island). 3. Papil, W. Burra. 4. Papil Water, Fetlar. 5. Papa (island). 6. Papil Geo, Isle of Noss. 7. Papil, N.Yell. 8. Papa Stour (island). 9. Papil, N. Unst. (In addition, Jakobsen lists 8 names containing pobi-, -poba, etc., referring this element to papa. But in general neither the locations nor the archaeological evidence support him. 5 of these names appear on the OS 6 in. sheets).

Orkney

1. Papleyhouse, Eday. 2. Paplay, Holm, Mainland. 3. Papdale, Kirkwall. 4. Papley, S. Ronaldsay. 5. Papa Stronsay (island). 6. Papa Westray (island). 7. Steeven o' Papy (a rock off the shore of N. Ronaldsay).

Caithness

1. Papel, Canisbay (a rock offshore opposite the parish church). 2. Papigoe, Wick (also Papi Geo).

Hebrides

1. Bayble, Lewis. 2. Pabay, More & Beg, Lewis (islands). 3. Paible in Taransay (island), Harris. 4. Pabbay (island), Harris. 5. Paible, N. Uist. 6. Pabbay (two adjacent small islands, both so called), S. Uist. 7. Pabbay (island), Barra. 8. Pabay (island) Skye. 9. Papadil, Rhum. (These sites are taken from the OS 1 in. sheets and have not yet been examined in as much detail as those in the other groups. With regard to the general observations (below), it will be as well to bear in mind that the historical situation here may have been different from that of the N. Isles and Caithness).

Many factors influencing the distribution of these names - such as the general availability of land for settlement, geological considerations and perhaps differing emphases in the subsistence economy practised (varying dependence on pastoral or arable land, fishing and fowling), accident of landfall in small and frail craft in a large ocean of capricious winds and currents, adequate shelter for men, beasts and boats - have not yet been looked at thoroughly. But certain broad observations may point to the essential accuracy of the Norse accounts.
1. Some of the sites (not all names coincide with surviving church or graveyard sites) have produced remains of the material culture of the Irish and Pictish churches, which are usually dated to the pre-Viking period. 2. Both in the N. and W. Isles, the names tend to avoid the large land masses; this tendency seems to be confirmed by the virtual absence of papar names from the mainland of Scotland. 3. There are more such names in Shetland than in Orkney; in the Hebrides they are concentrated overwhelmingly in the Long Island:

a strong eremitical element among the papar seems to be indicated by this emphasis on small islands and extreme marginal areas. And at least a number of those involved were not primarily, or, perhaps, at all concerned with missionary or pastoral activities among the local people: Iceland and the Faeroes were uninhabited in pre-Norse times and the papar in Iceland would not remain alongside pagans.

The papar, then,included a significant element of mainly Irish ascetic and eremitical groups and individuals established in the Atlantic islands by the 8th century, possibly already in the 6th in the N. and W. Isles, if Adamnan's account of Cormac ua Liathain's voyage to Orkney, and its implications, are taken at face value. It may be supposed that Pictish as well as Irish anchorites settled in at least Orkney and Shetland (which were inhabited by Picts; and it is known that Orkney was controlled, at any rate spasmodically, by the over-King of the Picts): the material evidence for the presence of Pictish Christianity has already been alluded to; the location of the 2 Caithness names strongly suggests an approach up the E. coast from mainland Pictland, parallel to that up the W. coast from Ireland and Scottish Dalriada. The Historia Norwegiae only mentions the Picts as forming the secular population of Orkney, but in most respects there would probably be few obvious differences between Pictish and Irish anchorites or ecclesiastics generally. And Pictish Papae would be Papae rather than Peti.

To what extent they were despersed by the early Norse raids and settlement cannot be known accurately. The material evidence suggests the survival of some native Christian (lay) population and of at least a rudimentary Christian

organisation with accompanying churches and/or burial grounds in the Norse "pagan" period. Most papar names are directly associated with church or graveyard sites which still survive as such, or survived into medieval or post-medieval times. In the N. Isles and Caithness (the position in the W. Isles has yet to be looked into), a few are the sites of medieval parish churches: 3 in Orkney; 2 in Shetland; 1 in Caithness. But not all sites which have produced Early Christian material remains in the N. Isles (to take 2 geographically well-defined areas) are designated by a papar name. It is also not known, of course, whether or not the early Norse pirates and settlers designated all Celtic ecclesiastics in the islands as papar, or whether they were aware of distinctions among such of function and purpose. Since such distinctions would not have been clear-cut in any case in churches which were largely or wholly monastic, it seems quite likely that papar was a colloquial blanket-term. In that case, it is reasonable to suggest that the element was applied as a place-name only to church sites of all kinds which had been (temporarily) abandoned (other sites may have been so designated at one time: survival of any kind of evidence is accidental). Other churches, perhaps many others, were not abandoned; and the evidence strongly suggests that the gap in occupation at those that were was not long - perhaps only spanning the period of raiding and primary settlement. When conditions became less turbulent, they were reoccupied (by Celtic ecclesiastics?). But by that stage a papar name had been applied, and to a greater (or less) extent it stuck.