

# Among *Dímions* and *Papeys*: What kind of contact do the names really point to?

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The Viking Age and its impact on the North Atlantic area have interested historians, archaeologists and onomasts alike for well over a century now. Questions such as: “When did the Vikings arrive?”, “Where did they first settle?” and “What happened to the original inhabitants?”, have been central to the discussion right from beginning. The focus of this paper will be on the last of the above-mentioned questions, namely the relationship of the incoming Scandinavians with the already existing populations. Since I work on place-names, I shall address the issue from an onomastic and linguistic perspective. Place-names of Scandinavian origin number tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands in the Scottish Isles, the Faeroes and Iceland. The vast majority of these, however, cannot reveal anything about the contact between the Scandinavians and the indigenous populations. Therefore, I shall focus on two name-types, namely the place-names like *Dímon* and the place-names in *Pap*-. The reason for focussing on the *Dímions* and the *Pap*-names is that these two name-types are generally taken to be proof of Scandinavian-Gaelic contact. In the following, I shall attempt to weigh the *Dímions* and *Papeys* against each other and see what types of contact they reflect from an onomastic point of view.

## *1. The place-name type Dímon.*

It has generally been assumed that the place-name construction *Dímon* is derived from a compound of the Gaelic words *di* ‘two’ and *muinn*, f. ‘top, back’, literally meaning: ‘The place with the two tops’. This origin was first suggested by the Faeroese scholar Jakob Jakobsen (1902:1-4). His main argument for this origin is owing to the fact that there is no native Scandinavian word-stock that can readily be related to the form *Dímon* or *Dimun*. Although most of Jakobsen’s other attempts at finding place-names of Gaelic origin in the North Atlantic have been rejected by later scholars, a possible Gaelic origin for the *Dímun*-names has never been seriously doubted (cf. e.g. Fellows-Jensen 1996:117-18). The main reason for this is presumably the

entirely un-Scandinavian character of the construction *Dímon* or *Dímun*. However, the alleged Gaelic origin is not entirely without its problems. Not only is there seemingly no direct onomastic or linguistic model for *\*Dímuinn* in either Irish Gaelic or Scottish Gaelic (see below), place-names in *muin*, m., or *muinn*, f. ‘top, back’ are seemingly not very common either.<sup>1</sup>

There are, however, good reasons to assume that this group of names are ultimately of Gaelic origin. Firstly, there is no Scandinavian word-stock that can be related to the place-name type *Dímon*, or which even bears some vague resemblance to the construction. Secondly, and most importantly, the name-type always either denote two distinct localities or a double-peaked feature. This trait is so strong that it is difficult to imagine any other word than Gaelic *dí* ‘two’ as the first element of the construction *Dímon*.



*Fig. 1. Aerial view of Dímonarklakkar, Iceland.*

A number of place-names of this type, mostly denoting islands, are found throughout an area covering the Northern Isles, Western

<sup>1</sup> For some possible examples of *muin(e)* ‘hill’ in Irish place-names, please see McKay 1999:108-10. W. J. Watson, on the other hand, claims that Gaelic *muine* is never used in the sense of ‘mountain’ in literature, the normal meaning being that of a ‘brake’ or ‘shrubby’ (Watson 1926:391). Besides *muin(e)* in the sense of ‘hill’, McKay also states the meaning ‘thicket’ as a possibility.

Norway, the Faeroes and Iceland. There seems to be little doubt that place-names of the *Dímon*-type in one way or another relate to some form of contact with Gaelic and Gaelic-speaking people. The question is just what kind of contact we are talking about?

As mentioned earlier, place-names of this origin occur in most of the North Atlantic area, and relatively frequently. So far, I have collected no less than fifteen names which have been taken to originate from this source:

- Iceland: *Dímon*, mountain, Þjósárdalur, Árnessýsla,  
*Dímon*, stacks, Ölfusá, Árnessýsla,  
*Dímon*, islets, Bjarnarfjörður, Strandasýsla,  
*Dímonar*, two hills, Holtum, Rangárvallasýsla,  
*Dímonarklakkar*, Dalasýsla (Jakobsen 1993:187),  
*Stóra* and *Lítla Dímon*, rocks, Markarfljót,  
 V.-Eyjafjallahreppi, Rangárvallasýsla (Jakobsen  
 1993:187),  
*Stóra* and *Lítla Dímon*, mountains, near  
 Laugarvatnsvellir  
*Stóra* and *Lítla Dímon/Dima*, rocks/rocky islets, A.-  
 Skaftafellssýsla,  
*Dima* (?), rocky islet in Jökulsá, A.-Skaftafellssýsla
- Faeroes: *Stóra* and *Lítla Dímun*, islands, the Faeroes (Jakobsen  
 1902:4f),  
 Shetland: *Da Dímons*, stacks, Yell, Shetland  
 (Jakobsen 1993:187),  
*Da Dímons*, stacks, Northmaven, Shetland (Jakobsen  
 1993:187),
- Orkney: *Diamonds*, house, Deerness (Marwick 1923:2570,  
*Damsay*, island, (Marwick 1923:258, 1952:117),
- Norway: *Dimna* (?), island/settlement, Ulstein sokn, Møre  
 og Romsdal fylke (NG 13:55).

The localities in question are normally islands, islets, mountains or rocky features. The common denominator for these names is a characteristic twin-peaked topographical feature – often two localities and not one as Jakob Jakobsen (1902:4ff) has claimed. Only *Dímonarklakkar* (see fig. 1.) and probably *Dímonar* can be said to consist of two peaks. Instead, most of the names are borne by localities forming the one part of a distinctive set of peaks within an area. For instance, the Faeroese *Stóra* and *Lítla Dímun* (see fig. 2.), clearly show the pairing of two distinctive but separate localities in

one name. It should be noted, however, that some of the place-names said to derive from this source are rather doubtful. Especially the



*Fig. 2. Aerial view of Stóra and Litla Dímun, the Faeroes.*

Orkney examples are fraught with difficulties: *Diamonds* in Deerness, for instance, is a relatively late settlement and does not have any distinctive peaked formations near by, although Marwick (1923:257) does state in one of his early papers that the Faeroese scholar Jakob Jakobsen was convinced of its \**Dímuinn* origin when investigating the locality himself at some time in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is also extremely unlikely that *Damsay* contains this element. Early source-forms of the name are consequently spelt as *Damisey* or *Daminzey*,<sup>2</sup> which, if anything point to a masculine form of the name under discussion, namely \**Dámuin*, for the specific. However, the presence of an Old Norse genitive singular morpheme, suggests the first element is a personal name. Recently, Sandnes (2003:186) has argued that the specific could be a Scandinavian rendering of a Gaelic male

<sup>2</sup> *Damisey* c. 1300 Orkn (p. 292 (Orkn 3251)); *Daminzey* c. 1350 (c. 1640) DI (III, p. 51n.); *Damisey* c. 1387-95 Orkn (p. 171); *Damesay* 1603 SheDoc (no. 369).

personal name, e.g. *Daimine* or *Daman*, a suggestion that does not seem unreasonable.

The topographical similarities aside, the most striking feature of this group of names as a whole is that there are seemingly no examples of this type of name in Gaelic-speaking areas of Ireland and mainland Britain (although *dá* or *dhá* 'two' is relatively common in Irish place-names (cf. Joyce 1883 1:248ff.)). The distribution of this name-type is confined to Shetland, Iceland, the Faeroes and perhaps also Western Norway. It would be tempting to see these names as a sign of Gaelic-speaking communities or individuals in these areas, i.e. a group significant enough (either in numbers or in power) to have named these localities and ensured their survival. Although the source of the name-type may well be Gaelic, there are other explanations for its occurrence in the North Atlantic region than the settlement of Gaels in this area.

The Gaelic influence on Scandinavian is relatively slight. In the region of 40 words have entered into the Scandinavian languages from Gaelic (Schulze-Thulin 2001), whereas some 160 words of Old Norse origin (cf. Macbain 1998) may be found in Gaelic today. To this number should also be added the large number of place-names of Old Norse origin that have survived in Northern and Western Scotland. This body of place-names is of a varied nature covering both topographical names and settlement names. Should we have expected a Gaelic element in the North Atlantic region of any significant number or status, one would expect the body of place-names, however great or small, to be varied in nature. This is not the case. The place-names in *\*Dimuinn* are virtually the only onomastic indication of Gaelic influence in place-names in this area. Therefore, it must be considered whether *\*Dimuinn* is not rather a place-name element which has been borrowed from Gaelic into the Old Norse onomasticon (cf. Zachariasen 1984:109). If this is the case, then the names of the *\*Dimuinn*-type are not Gaelic coinages, but rather Scandinavian constructions utilising a Gaelic loan (cf. Sveinsson 1948:127-130, 195-96; Fellows-Jensen 1996:118). The contact with Gaelic mainly took place further south in Scotland, the Hebrides and in Ireland and not in the Norwegian Sea. This helps explain the stereotypy of the name-type *\*Dimuinn*; it is basically a loan from Gaelic in Old Norse.

2. *Names in Pap-*

Whereas the form and composition of the name-type \**Dímuinn* must ultimately be Gaelic in origin, the place-names in *Pap-* are purely Scandinavian coinages. All the names in the North Atlantic area containing this element are standard Old Norse compound constructions consisting of a specifying element in *Pap-* or *Papa-* followed by a generic element. In total there are more than 30 *Pap-* names in the Scottish Isles, the Faeroes and Iceland. The group as a whole is of a relatively restricted nature and composition, as can be seen from the following list:

Iceland:	<i>Papey</i> , island, S.-Múlassýsla. <i>Papaþjörður</i> , firth, A.- Skaftafellssýsla. <i>Papós</i> (< * <i>Papafjarðarós</i> ), confluence, A.-Skaftafellssýsla. <i>Papýli</i> , lost settlement. <i>Papi</i> , pool in river Laxá. <i>Papafell</i> , mountain, Strandassýsla.
Faeroes:	<i>Paparókum</i> , cliff-ledges, Vestmanna. <i>Papurshálsa</i> (?), cliff-ledge, Vestmanna.
Shetland:	<i>Papa Geo</i> , creek, Aithsting. <i>Papa Little</i> , island, Aithsting. <i>Papa Stour</i> , island, Sandness. <i>Papa</i> , island, Burra, Shetland. <i>Papil Geo</i> , creek, Noss. <i>Papil Water</i> , loch, Fetlar. <i>Papil</i> , settlement, Burra. <i>Papil</i> , settlement, North Yell. <i>Papil</i> , settlement, Unst.
Orkney:	<i>Papa Stronsay</i> , island. <i>Papa Westray</i> , island. <i>Papdale</i> , settlement, Kirkwall & St. Ola. <i>Papley</i> , district & settlement, South Ronaldsay. <i>Papleyhouse</i> , settlement, Eday, (probably late?). <i>Ward of Papley</i> , mound, Holm.
Caithness:	<i>Papel</i> , tidal rock, Canisbay.

## Hebrides:

- Papigoe*, creek & district, Wick.  
*Bayble/Paibal*, settlement, Stornoway,  
 Lewis.  
*Pabanish*, rocky hill, Uig, Lewis.  
*Pabay*, island, Strath, Skye.  
*Pabay Beag*, island, Uig, Lewis.  
*Pabay Mór*, island, Uig, Lewis.  
*Pabbay*, island, Barra.  
*Pabbay*, island, Harris.  
*Pabbay*, two islands, South Uist.  
*Paible*, chapel & settlement,  
 North Uist.  
*Paible*, chapel & settlement,  
 Taransay.  
*Papadil*, islets, Rhum.

24 of the *Pap-* place-names have a generic element in ON *ey*, f. 'island' or in ON *býli*, m. 'settlement'. Only in a few instances is the generic another element such as ON *dalr*, m., 'valley', ON *fell*, n., 'a mountain', ON *óss*, m. 'confluence of a river'.

The exact date of the formation of the names is not known but they must in most cases be of considerable age. The examples from Scotland must certainly have been coined before the Scandinavian language died out there, i.e. the 13<sup>th</sup> century in the Hebrides and the 17<sup>th</sup> century in the Northern Isles. It is, however, possible to date the names more precisely. *Pap-* place-names from Orkney are mentioned in the sources from around 1300. The first occurrence is *i Papey ina littlu* from an Orkneying Saga manuscript from c. 1300 (Orkn325I) and *til Papeyiar hinnar meiri* from the same saga but in a manuscript from c. 1300-1350 (Orkn325III). The first of these *Papeys* is *Papa Stronsay*, whereas the latter is *Papa Westray*. *Papa Westray* is also mentioned as *Papey* in 1350 in an Icelandic charter (1350 (1640) DI III.50n.). The contact between Orkney and Iceland had diminished considerably in the High Middle Ages, and the recorded saga and diploma forms are probably based on even earlier oral or possibly textual transmissions. Even earlier must be the occurrence of the Old Norwegian syncope of the unstressed middle vowel in *\*Papaey* > *Papey* and *\*Papabýli* to *Papýli*. These sound changes occur no later than in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, so the *Pap-* place-names must have been coined prior to this sound change, a point to which I shall return in more detail. When the earliest of the *Pap-* place-names were coined or when the majority of them were coined cannot be established with absolute certainty but linguistic and documentary evidence does allow

us to determine that the majority of them must have been coined in the early period of Scandinavian influence, probably during the Viking Age.

For as long as the Scandinavian settlement in the North Atlantic has been studied, there has been a general consensus that the element *Pap-* was the ON word *papi*, m./*papar*, m.pl. ‘priest(s), (Irish) Christian(s)’, and referred to Irish monks or anchorites, the *Papar*, who inhabited the Northern and Western isles of Scotland together with the Picts at the beginning of the Viking Age.<sup>3</sup> As far as I can see, this supposition is mainly derived from the early Norwegian and Icelandic historical accounts about the original inhabitants of the North Atlantic area. For instance, the *Historia Norwegiae* describes the original inhabitants of Orkney in the following way:

These islands were first inhabited by the *Picts* 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 ... 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. (ESSH 1.330f).

A similar tale is found in Ári Þorgilsson’s *Íslendingabók* which states that:

Iceland was first settled in the days of Harold Fairhair ... 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;

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<sup>3</sup> There is, however, also another possible explanation which has never even received a single mention. The Norwegian island of *Papper* in Østfold in South-Eastern Norway is recorded c.1400 as *på Papøy* (cf. NG I:265). Although this source-form look temptingly similar to the many North Atlantic *Papeys* (both in the source-forms as well as in modern forms of the names), *Papper* is usually interpreted as containing the same word as Norw. *pappe*, ‘breast, teat’, here used of two heights on the islands. Formally, there is no reason why this possibility should not lie behind some *Pap-* place-names in the North Atlantic, either. I must, however, immediately concede that I have not been able to find any suitable breast-shaped formations on or near any of the localities, apart from possibly *Papa Little* in Shetland which has a tendency to a double-peaked profile. So, although ON *\*pap-* ‘breast, teat’ might be a formal possibility, the topography seems to speak against this in most cases.



and they left behind them Irish books and crosiers. Therefore one could perceive they were Irish men (*Íslendingabók*, ch. 1).

For this reason, the word ON *papi*, m., was early on taken to be of Gaelic origin. There can be no doubt as such that *papi* is a loan in ON (as a rule of thumb, any appellative in Scandinavian that starts with a voiceless plosive stop, i.e. the sound [p], is a loanword). However, no great amount of study of the origin of the word has ever been attempted. Recently, the alleged Irish origin been seriously questioned by the historian Aidan MacDonald (2002:13-30). Furthermore only this, MacDonald and the archaeologist Christopher Lowe (2002:83-95) have also made strong reservations as to the age of the names containing this element. Their reservations mainly stem from the fact that it has proved extremely difficult to find any signs of continuity on the *Pap*-localities between Pre-Norse ecclesiastical sites and later 12<sup>th</sup> century ecclesiastical sites. This has caused them to doubt the notion that the Norse actually found Irish monks or anchorites at these localities and subsequently named the localities after them. MacDonald (2002:21-22) has instead suggested that the *Pap*-names, or some of them at least, are ‘retrospective’ coinages from the second half of the 9<sup>th</sup> century and the tenth. Lowe goes one step further and suggests that this group of names “may more be a feature of the twelfth century rather than the earlier Norse period” (Lowe 2002:95), i.e. essentially post-Viking-Age coinages.

These suggestions by MacDonald and Lowe raise the need for a serious re-evaluation the entire body of evidence for this group of place-names. In saying that, I speak merely as an onomast who cannot in any way evaluate the archaeological evidence from *Papar*-sites. Instead, I wish to focus on the linguistic and onomastic evidence and investigate the etymology of the word ON *papi*, m., and the age of the *Pap*-place-names.

### 2.a. Etymology of Old Norse *papi*, m.

ON *papi*, m. ‘a priest, (Irish) Christian’ is normally taken to derive ultimately from Latin *pāpa*, m. ‘father’, ‘Pope’, i.e. the father of all Christians. As Christianity progressed throughout Europe, this word was borrowed into the Germanic and Celtic languages. Originally, Latin *pāpa*, m., simply meant ‘the Pope’, but when it turns up in Scandinavian *papi* is still a word for the Pope, but in the North Atlantic colonies it also carries the less specialised meaning of ‘a

priest, Christian'. How did this meaning arise? Where did it originate from and when?

Old English, *pāpa*, m. (A-S Dict. 1898:272), Old High German *pabes*, m., (Graff 1837: 322) and East Frisian *pape*, *pāp*, m. (Doornkaat Koolman: 1882:701), all exclusively carried the meaning of 'Pope'. In East Frisian, an alternative meaning of 'popelike' is also recorded. The East Frisian Dictionary also states that this alternative meaning was initially only used of the highest ranking clerics, mostly bishops, whereafter the meaning slid semantically to be used of clerics generally and later simply of lay-clergy.<sup>4</sup> The core meaning with which Latin *pāpa* entered into the West Germanic languages was that of a term for the Pope, a meaning which only some time in the late Middle Ages came to signify a cleric of any sort. In Old Danish *papa* or *pave*, m. meant 'Pope' (cf. GldOL), as did Old Norwegian *pafi* or *papi*, m. (Fritzner II:923, II.929: *papi*, m., 2<sup>nd</sup> connotation). Only in a North Atlantic context do we find ON *papi*, m., with the connotation of 'a priest' or '(Irish) Christian'. This connotation is recorded already in the last half of the 12<sup>th</sup> or the first half of 13<sup>th</sup> centuries (Fritzner II:929: *papi*, 1<sup>st</sup> connotation). The first instance in which *pape* is recorded in the sense of 'a cleric' in Mainland Scandinavia is not until the 15<sup>th</sup> century in Swedish (Söderwall II:197), where it is presumably a loan from Middle Low German *pape*, and not an internal Scandinavian development. The Low German influence on the Scandinavian languages is at its highest from the 12<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. This leaves very little room for ON *papi*, m., meaning 'a Christian' or 'a priest' to have been borrowed from Low German *pape* 'cleric', especially considering that this meaning does not develop internally in the Low Countries until relatively late. Therefore, any attempt at deriving ON *papi*, m. 'a priest, (Irish) Christian' from a Germanic source is highly problematic. The *Historia Norwegiae* is not a reliable source with regard to this piece of information either.

Considering the apparent North Atlantic confinement of the use of ON *papi* meaning 'a priest' or 'a Christian', the possibility of a Gaelic source of the word must be investigated. As is the case with the Germanic languages, *pāp* in Scottish Gaelic is used of the Pope, as is Old Irish *pāpa* for the most part (cf AU 1214.12). Old Irish *popa* (also in the forms *pobba*, *bobba*), also from Latin *pāpa*, retained the secular

<sup>4</sup> Doornkaat Koolman 1882:701: "**pape, pāp, Pfaffe...** - *Wie Papst ...* womit in der ersten christlichen Zeit nur die höheren Geistlichen u. Bischöfe angeredet wurden, während später unter *pape* od. ahd. *phafō* nur ein Geistlicher u. dann bloß ein Weltgeistlicher (im Gegensatz zu einem Klostergeistlichen od. Mönch) verstanden wurde."

meaning of ‘father’. A development of this meaning was the use of *popa* in the sense of ‘master’ or ‘sir’ as a means of respectful address to an elder or a superior, always occurring in the form *popa* + personal name (cf. MacDonald 2002:16). Most importantly, however, the rarely occurring Old *papa* (or *pupu*) is used to describe persons in relation to their monastic or anchorite activities in the Scottish Isles (MacDonald 1977:26, 2002:15f). The word occurs e.g. in the Martyrology of Oengus the Culdee, apparently composed around 828-830, but only surviving in a number of 16 c. transcriptions. In one of the versions we learn that: *Nem macc hui Birn do Dail Birn i n-Osraige 7 comarba Enna Arné ocus is hé sin in papa atberar do bith i n-Arainn* (‘Nem moccu Birn of the Dál Birn of Ossory and successor of Enda of Aran; and he is that papa who is said to be in Aran’ ([828-830] (early 15 c.), MS. Rawlinson B505)). If the dating of this document is correct, a Gaelic origin for ON *papi*, m., is very conceivable. Not only is the word known and used in Gaelic in the area during the Viking Age, it also seems to carry a connotation which is comparable to *papi* in Iceland and the Northern Isles. At the same time a loan from Gaelic would also account for the special North Atlantic focus of ON *papi* in Old Norse. Although there is no definite proof for a Gaelic source for ON *papi*, m., linguistic evidence does point clearly in this direction.

## 2.b. Are Pap- place-names ‘retrospective’ names?

When ON *papi*, m., forms the specifying part of a place-name it is usually compounded with either ON *ey*, f. ‘island’ or ON *býli* m. ‘settlement’. In the Scottish Isles, the former compound, \**Papaey* is usually found in the form *Papa* or *Pab(b)ay*, whereas \**Papabýli* has developed into modern *Papil*, *Papley* or *Paible*. The modern forms of these names relate partly to the process of transmission from Scandinavian into Scots and Gaelic. Some developments had, however, taken place already in Old Norse. The loss of the central unstressed vowel in \**Papaey* to *Papey* (> *Papa/Pab(b)ay*) and in \**Papabýli* to *Papýli* (> *Papill/Papley/Paible*) most probably reflect the Old Norwegian syncope.<sup>5</sup> This syncope is more active in Old

<sup>5</sup> In addition to the syncope of the medial *-a-* in \**Papabýli*, the ensuing *-b-* is also lost. Although these phonemes were probably dropped simultaneously, their loss is owing to different linguistic processes. Whereas the syncope of medial *-a-* effectively shortens the word by a syllable, i.e. a prosodic reduction, the ensuing *-b-* is rather lost for reasons of phonotaxis. With the

Norwegian than in Old Icelandic,<sup>6</sup> but has also taken place in Icelandic with the *Pap-* place-names, compare e.g. the Icelandic place-names *Papey* and the lost *Papýli* which both show syncope. This particular sound change is found already in the earliest ON manuscripts and must therefore have taken place before 1150. The Old Norwegian syncope is not as thorough or as fundamental as the Common Scandinavian syncope; it mostly concerns the loss of a central unstressed vowel or syllable, as in words like *iarðriki* (< *iarðarriki*), in personal names, such as *Þórðr*, m. (< *Þórraðr* < *Þórfraðr*), and in place-names, e.g. Norw. *Sæme* (< *\*Sæhæimi*), etc. (Seip 1955:116f. Cf. also Noreen 1923:139n; Indrebø 1951:117f.; Olsen 1915:51ff.). Syncope is popularly speaking a means of shortening multi-syllabic words and names by a syllable and it probably takes place owing to frequent use of the linguistic element in question. In terms of dating the names, it is important to note that syncope does not take place in the coining process of a name but it is solely the result of frequent use of the coinage (cf. Seip 1955:117). Therefore, the numerous *Papas* and *Papils* must predate this sound change by a generous margin in order that they could be well-established and often-used place-names prior to the time when the Old Norwegian syncope came into force. There seems to be little doubt that the primary *Pap-* place-names comfortably predate the known High Medieval ecclesiastical structures found on some of the localities, such as on *Papa Stronsay* (cf. Lowe 2002:83-95). It is, therefore, not plausible that *Pap-* place-names should be 12<sup>th</sup> century coinages such as Lowe (2002:95) has suggested - the linguistic evidence speaks out against this possibility. The *\*Papaey* in *Papa Stronsay* predates the ecclesiastical structure. This proves that the excavated ecclesiastical structure cannot be naming motive in this case and that the notion of a 'retrospective' coinage (cf. MacDonald 2002:21) for *Papa Stronsay* appears to be an unlikely supposition. Any other *Pap-*locality with a religious site pertaining to the 12<sup>th</sup> century or later may thus also be excluded from the list of possible 'retrospective' coinages.

Whether place-names in *Pap-* belong to an early phase or not is impossible to ascertain, but the place-name material may furnish us

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loss of the medial vowel a new consonant cluster *\*-pb-* would appear, a cluster which is not acceptable in Old Norse whence the *-b-* is lost as an additional result of syncope (cf. Bakken 1988:97ff).

<sup>6</sup> For instance, *vesall*, adj. 'wretched' has syncopated forms, e.g. *vesla*, m. acc. pl., already in the earliest Norwegian manuscripts, whereas Old Icelandic retains the unsyncopated form *vesala* (Seip 1955:116).

with some indication as to their age: In general, names containing major topographical features, such as bays, fjords, rivers, straits, headlands and islands, seem to be among the first names of Scandinavian origin to have been coined in the North Atlantic area. Marginally later, in terms of relative chronology, are names with generics denoting settlements. There are more than of 20 *Pap*-names in *-fjörðr* ‘firth, bay’, *-ey* ‘island’ and *-nes* ‘headland’, etc., i.e. names denoting major topographical features, and 12 settlement-denoting names in *-býli* ‘abode, farm’. This seems to suggest that the majority of *Pap*-names belong to the earliest stratum, followed shortly by a series of settlement names. The place-name material on its own does not speak in favour of them being ‘retrospective’ coinages.

Instead, *Pap*- place-names seem in some way or other reflect reality in the namer’s mind. A coinage of a place-name with the element *papi*, m., ‘a priest, Christian’ with *ey*, f., ‘island’ or *býli*, m., ‘settlement’, signals the association of a locality with the *Papar*, be it their presence at, or ownership of, the locality. In this way, a name like *Papa* in Burra, Shetland, is comparable to island-names containing a personal name, such as its neighbouring islands of *Hildisay* (< ON \**Hildirsey* ‘Hildir’s island’) and *Trondra* (< ON \**Þrondarey* ‘Þrondr’s island’). The specific elements of these islands signal the association of the localities with *Hildir* and *Þrondr*, respectively. *Hildir* and *Þrondr* were probably the original owners or the first settlers on these islands. In the same way, *Papa* must have had *Papar* associations. The place-name evidence, however, cannot reveal whether the *Papar* were real or imaginary, or whether they were present at the time of naming or whether they had vanished by then. Only archaeology may furnish us with this answer one day.

If we compare what onomastic remains we have of the *Papar* with what we have of the other population in the area, the *Picts* (termed *Pettar* by the Scandinavians), we see that a number of localities – possibly more than 30 – of considerable age contain references to the *Papar*, whereas the *Picts* are not mentioned in more than a handful of names, most of which have only recently been recorded and which do not appear to be of any significant age (Gammeltoft 2003:93). I have only been able to locate five primary *Pet*-place-names in the Northern Isles, four of which are situated in Shetland: *Petta Dale* (2), *Petta Water* and *Pettifirth*. Of these, only *Pettifirth* seems to have been recorded prior to the 17<sup>th</sup> century (cf. Stewart 1987:284). Only the name *Pentland Skerries*, first recorded as *Petlandz skær* in 1329 (DN II, no. 170) can be regarded as an early name most probably originating from the Viking Age. The element *Petland* is a Scandinavianised form of the name *Pictland* (i.e. the northern and

eastern parts of the Mainland of Scotland at the time of the Scandinavian colonisation). The skerry is situated halfway between Orkney and the Mainland and acts as a halfway mark between Orkney and Mainland Scotland. The name thus refers to *Pictland* itself and not to *Picts* as such. The onomastic evidenced thus suggests that the *Papar* were regarded differently from the *Picts*. But in what way? Gillian Fellows-Jensen (1996:116) has earlier argued that the *Pap*-place-names may originally have been given to sites abandoned by monks at the time of the settlement of the incoming Scandinavians. For this supposition to work, however, the following conditions have to be met: Firstly, the *Papar* would have had to have been known generally to the Scandinavians; secondly, the remains of the *Papar* would have to be distinct enough to be recognised, not only as remains as such but also specifically as *Papar* remains (and not e.g. *Pictish* remains). We know very little of the *Papar* and how they lived. We know particularly little about what they lived in and whether their dwellings and other building structures were any different from what the *Picts* lived in. The only building structures one could imagine to be different to the buildings in the Pictish tradition would be chapels and churches, and even those are relatively unknown to us. Considering that the *Picts* left considerably more impressive and distinctive remains behind them than the *Papar* seem to have done, it is strange that the population group leaving the least significant remains behind are the ones whose names survive for posterity. As far as I can see, other alternatives must be sought.

The most obvious possibility is that the incoming Scandinavians found *Papar* at the *Pap*-localities and lived alongside them long enough for the *Pap*-place-names to be coined and to become established. For how long is uncertain but it need only be long enough for the names to have been given and generally accepted. What is important in this connection is that it is the incoming Scandinavians who do the naming. This means that the named feature is of relevance to them and that the constituents forming part of the name are specific enough to describe the locality. There are numerous instances where the neighbours and not the inhabitants have named the localities. Just think of the many *Denbys* and *Normanbys* in the Danelaw area, whose first elements contain the Old English inhabitant designations *Dene* 'Danes' and *Norðmenn* 'Norwegians'. These names seem to have been given by English-speaking people to isolated Danish and Norwegian settlements (DEPN), i.e. names that have been coined by the neighbours and not the inhabitants themselves. This would also account for the fact that the only onomastic evidence of the *Papar* in

the former Scandinavian colonies is names of Scandinavian origin containing the inhabitant designation *Papar*.

Another possibility is that the presence of the Christian *Papar* might represent early attempts at converting the heathen Scandinavians. It is difficult to imagine that the *Papar* could have been allowed to live alongside the Scandinavians when the *Picts* seemingly disappeared into thin air. This could either mean that the *Papar* did not threaten the Scandinavian colonisation process or that they were seen as useful partners in one way or another. The Vikings, although never afraid of sacking monasteries when the possibility arose, were not holy warriors hell-bent on destroying the Christian Faith and eradicating it off the face of the earth. In many cases the Viking-Age Scandinavians were so much drawn to the new faith that they readily let themselves be converted to Christianity. If we dare trust the number of converted Scandinavians in the *Landnámabók* (cf. e.g. Pálsson & Edwards 1972) and recent studies in early Viking-Age sculpture in the Isle of Man (Trench-Jellicoe 2003: 30f), a serious amount of conversion must have taken place in the Scandinavian colonies in Scotland and Ireland. Was this what the *Papar* really did? But since we find remains of pre-Norse Christian activities at places like *Papil* in Burra, Shetland, it seems more likely that the *Papar* were present at *Papil* and other *Pap-* localities prior to the Scandinavian influx.

From an onomastic point of view, at least, the former explanation seems to be the most plausible one. As far as can be discerned, the *Pap-* place-names are in no way different to all the other place-name material in the area we readily associate with the Viking-Age Scandinavian settlement of the North Atlantic. The *Pap-* names are structurally similar to place-names featuring a personal name as their specific element and thus signal an association of the locality with the *Papar*. Who or what the *Papar* were may be a point of contention, but there can be no doubt that the incoming Scandinavians associated them with the localities that they named after them. The most logical consequence of this is that the Scandinavians that named these place-names actually encountered *Papar* at these localities. Taken one step further, it must be assumed that the *Pap-* place-names thus signal direct contact between the Scandinavians and *Papar*. The place-names, however, remain silent about the kind of contact and its duration.

### 3. Conclusion

It is my hope that the above discussion of the *Dimon* names and place-names in *Pap-* has shown that each name-type is evidence of a different type of contact. *Pap-* place-names seem to signify the presence of actual *Papar* at the time of naming, and presumably also signify some amount of mutual contact. The *Dimon* names, on the other hand, seem to have been borrowed from Gaelic into the Scandinavian language as a fixed expression for a double-peaked feature of a certain appearance. The appearance of a *Dimon* name is thus not evidence of Gaels having coined place-names in the area, they are most likely Scandinavian coinages utilising a loan name from Gaelic. A *Dimon*-name is thus merely a sign of linguistic contact between Scandinavians and Gaels at some earlier stage.

In studying *Papar* and the *Pap-* place one has to be aware of a number of problems. The main problem concerns the etymology of the name, which in some ways remains obscure. The ON use of the word *papi*, m., suggests that the word here meant 'a priest, (Irish) Christian'. How and through which language this word was borrowed is not fully ascertained, but providing that Old Irish does use *papa* or *pupu* in relation to anchorite activities already in the 9<sup>th</sup> century and Low German *pape* does not acquire the meaning of 'cleric' until some time in the High Middle Ages, there are very strong indications that Old Irish is in fact the source language for this loan. Theoretically speaking, *Pap-* place names could have been coined for as long as Scandinavian was spoken in the various parts of the North Atlantic area. Linguistic, onomastic as well as documentary evidence, however, allow us to establish that the majority of these names must have been coined a considerable time before they were first documented. Exactly when is unclear but there is no reason to assume that they are not Viking-Age coinages, possibly even dating back to the early period of colonisation and settlement by the Scandinavians in the area.

I am well aware that the conclusions of this paper are deeply traditional. However, when the new suggestions do not bear close scrutiny, one cannot but go back to what the evidence does seem to support.



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