

# **THE SOCIAL CONTEXT OF NORSE JARLSHOF**

A Thesis

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## ABSTRACT

A series of excavations from 1897 to 1951 showed the site of Jarlshof in Shetland to have been occupied by proto-Pictish, Pictish, and Viking peoples. These inquiries culminated in J.R.C. Hamilton's 1956 monograph *Excavations at Jarlshof, Shetland*. In the years since the writing of the monograph, much new information has come to light that relates to the time periods found at Jarlshof. The concern of this thesis is how the new findings relate to Viking Age Jarlshof and how Viking Age Jarlshof relates to this new information.

In order to set Viking Age Jarlshof into its overall historical context regarding Shetland, a geographic and historical summation of Shetland is given. In order to set Jarlshof broadly within the sphere of Viking movements, the history of, and the reasons for, Viking activity are recounted. Next, specific aspects of Viking Age Shetland are examined. The evidence for the interaction of the Vikings with the native Picts is then reviewed. The relevant details of Jarlshof are then presented, along with the findings of recent studies that have been conducted that specifically relate to Viking Age Jarlshof.

Various studies, especially new archaeological finds, are used to set Viking Jarlshof into its social context and to hypothesize about the history of the site itself. The major conclusions of this inquiry are: Vikings raiding was a product of a transitional stage of economy; the Shetland Norse came from an as yet unspecified region of Norway; the replacement of firehouses at Jarlshof by longhouses may be related to a greater reliance on trade and taxation; the clustering of houses at Jarlshof may be evidence of the



antiquity of land management of Shetlanders as recorded in more recent centuries; three stages of Viking colonization that were first hypothesized for Orkney, i.e., pioneering, consolidation, and establishment, are also applicable to Shetland; sites in Orkney also demonstrate that Jarlshof is not unique in the ambiguity of evidence for interaction between the Picts and the Norse; Jarlshof may have been subjected to particularly aggressive Norse activities.

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

Due to extensive erosion of a nearby shoreline in 1897, the site of Jarlshof in Shetland was discovered to contain much more than one ruined building dating to the sixteenth century. A series of excavations over the next 50 years revealed that the site contained architecture of the proto-Pictish, Pictish, and Viking cultures. These investigations culminated with a series of excavations conducted by J. R. C. Hamilton from 1949 to 1951. Hamilton ended these inquiries with the monograph *Excavations at Jarlshof, Shetland*, published in 1956, which is the best extant source of the findings at the site.

Though Hamilton does give an excellent summation of the work that had been done at Jarlshof, he does not delve into the placement of the site into the wider social context of Shetland as a whole or of the Northern Isles. When he does, he notes basic trends and draws conclusions from them with little input from information outside of Jarlshof; most of these conclusions are concerned with the proto-Pictish and Pictish occupations of the site, not the occupation of the Norse. In general, Hamilton suffered from a lack of data to compare with his Jarlshof findings.

Since his time, a great deal of new information on Viking archaeology has become available. New sites, especially those in the Orkneys, reveal settlement patterns (which correlate well with medieval literature), the links between these sites and Viking homelands, the interaction between the Norse and the Picts, and the subsequent history of Viking settlement. Some of this information can be directly compared to that found at Jarlshof. Indeed, some data from other sites can supplement gaps in the Jarlshof data; gaps created due to a lack of modern methods of excavation and analysis at the time Hamilton's study. Much of this new data indicates that the Norse occupation of Jarlshof was thoroughly enmeshed in the changes of the time. All of it reveals the complex strands of culture that met and mingled on the Shetland Islands.

This thesis is divided into six chapters. Chapter 2 and the first half of Chapter 3 give necessary background details. Chapter 2 details basic information regarding Shetland, including its geography, prehistory, and history. Knowledge of Shetland archaeology and history is important for the placement of Jarlshof in general and Viking Age Jarlshof in particular in the unfolding of Shetland's chronology.

The first half of Chapter 3 gives a broad description of the series of Viking raids. Whereas Chapter 2 places Jarlshof in its local timeline, this information places Jarlshof in a larger regional and extraregional context. It summarizes the theories regarding the reasons for Viking raids and proposes a new viewpoint based on a combination of viable, complementary hypotheses. The second half of Chapter 3, as well as Chapter 4, contains the research portions of this paper. The second half of Chapter 3 discusses Viking Age Shetland and present research that elucidates Jarlshof's role in Viking activities. Place name evidence is used to hypothesize upon the original homeland of those that settled in Shetland. A brief history is given regarding the role of longhouses in Europe throughout time. Theories concerning the change from firehouses to longhouses at Jarlshof are then discussed. The increase in residential buildings through the Viking Age is then explained, as well as the implication of this trend for the subsequent history of Shetland.

Chapter 4 concerns the interaction of the Vikings and Picts of both Shetland in general and Jarlshof in particular. Place name and limited archaeological evidence are used to support the hypothesis that the Picts were still residing in Shetland at the beginning of the Viking Age. An hypothesized set of phases of settlement is reviewed, and literary, place name, and Shetlandic archaeological evidence are found to support this theory. Archaeological evidence from sites outside of Shetland is also shown to support this pattern of invasion by revealing the close social interaction between the Picts and the Norse.

Chapter 5 begins with a concise summary of the location of Jarlshof and a history of the excavations performed at this site. It then briefly describes the archaeology of the site prior to the Viking invasion. Next, it gives a detailed description of the Viking Age buildings of

Jarlshof. It concludes with a summary of recent work that directly relates to the site, including reinterpretations or confirmation of original interpretation of some of the buildings.

Finally, Chapter 6 summarizes the conclusions reached in the previous chapters.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Shetland: Geography, Prehistory, and History**

Though sharing a geography similar to that of nearby lands, as well as elements of history, Shetland's location provides a unique perspective on the ways in which climate affects societies and on the ways that migrating peoples affect established societies. In the middle of this struggle is intertwined the story of the Vikings.

#### **2.1 Geography**

Composed of about 100 islands that extend approximately 100 kilometers from south to north, Shetland (Figure 1) lies 320 kilometers to the west of Norway and 150 kilometers north of the Scottish mainland; the Atlantic Ocean and the Norwegian sea encompass its western and northern shores, while the rest is bordered by the North Sea (Figure 2). One of these bodies of water is almost always visible from every spot on the islands. Lerwick, the capital of Shetland, is located at 60° 46' N. 0° 51' W. At the winter solstice, the sun is present for only 5 hours 39 minutes. Conversely, at the summer solstice the day is 18 hours 48 minutes. Even though the sun sets, the sky is never completely dark at this time of year, creating what is known as 'simmer dim' (Small 1983:20-24).

The year-round temperatures of Shetland are remarkably mild compared to other regions of similar latitude. This is due to the persistent westerly and south-westerly winds that are a result of the Polar front combined with the jet-stream, as well as warm water provided by the North Atlantic Drift. Though snow can be seen on the ground for 20 days a year on average, the lowest average temperature for any month (3.3° C in February) is still above freezing. July and August have the warmest average temperatures at a mean of 11.9° C. The temperature in summer has been known to reach up to 28° C. Summer also brings fog and humidity with yearly averages that range from 85% to 89%. Though usually not heavy, precipitation occurs on 248 days of the year on

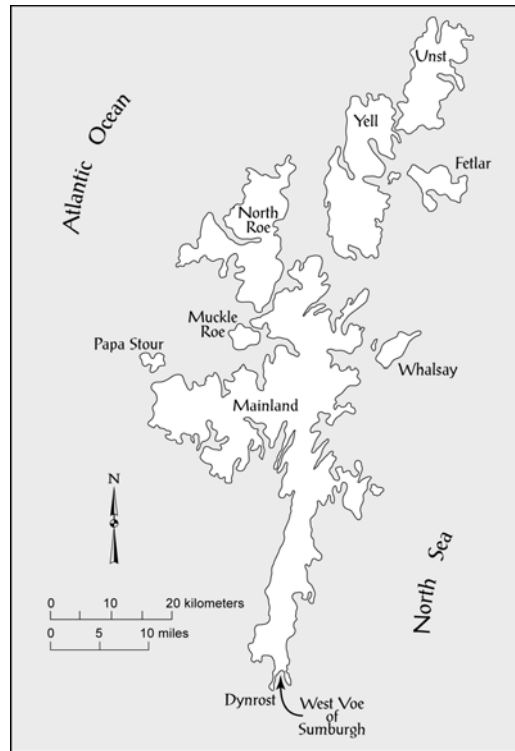


Figure 1. The main islands of Shetland and the surrounding waters (redrawn after Crawford 1984:41).



Figure 2. Shetland and surrounding regions (redrawn after Espenshade 1995:142).

average. The overall wind speed averages 27 kilometers per hour, though the gales that take place on 56 to 57 days on average occur mostly in winter (Small 1983:23-25).

The total land area of Shetland is 352,319 acres. Only a small percentage of this is arable (3.4% as measured in 1931) (Fenton 1978:2). When seasonal weather is favorable, crops are quite productive. Particularly cold and wet summers, however, have been known to create devastating famines (Small 1983:24-25).

The rolling landscape, which at some points ascends over 300 meters, was formed prior to the last glaciation, which retreated 10,000 years ago (Butler 1998:3; Small 1983:20). This Ice Age event erased any possible evidence of local glaciation and fine-tuned the Shetland topography by widening valleys and creating rock basin lakes. Since its dissipation, peat growth has been practically uninterrupted (Small 1983:21-22), aided by Shetland's tendency towards "soil leaching, acidification, and podsolisation." The Early Holocene (8,000-3,000 B.C.E./10,000-5,000 B.P.) only saw sparse woodland growth in Shetland due to salt spray (B.C.E. - Before Common Era; B.C.E. dates are equal to B.C. dates). In the Late Holocene (3,000 B.C.E. – Present/5,000 B.P. - Present), the conditions that supported peat growth caused even these trees to disappear. In the third millennium, the islands contained large tracts of "podsolised peaty soils, blanket peats, and species-poor heathland or acid grassland." In other words, it was becoming the landscape that it is today (Figure 3). Though this environment was bound to occur naturally due to Shetland's moist climate, humans sped up the process by clearing woods for agriculture, which began in the third millennium B.C.E. In addition, a switch to the dependency on pastoralism occurred in the late Neolithic (ca. 2,200-1,800 B.C.E./ca. 4,200-3,800 B.P.) and Bronze Age (ca. 1,800-800 B.C.E./ca. 3,800-2,800 B.P.). Burning was employed to produce sufficient grasslands required by large herds of domesticated animals. While the short-term effect on the ecology of the land was positive, the long-term effect of this burning was to encourage the growth of heather and blanket peat,

worsening the already poor quality of soil. Colder winters with increased precipitation may have occurred ca. 500-750 C.E./1,450-1,200 B.P., giving peat growth another boost (C.E. – Common Era; C.E. dates are equal to A.D. dates). The manuring and draining of land, however, may have prevented peat from overgrowing in some areas (Butler 1998:5-9).



Figure 3. A typical Shetland landscape.

## 2.2 Prehistory

Stone was the building material of choice in Shetland until recent modernization, due to its abundance and also due to the lack of trees. The spread of peat and the accompanying soil acidification caused the removal of many early agriculturists from their lands, and later people tended to rely on pastoralism more than crops. The use of building material that does not decay combined with a lack of plowing that would have destroyed the remains of past peoples gives Shetland a high density of archaeological sites (Turner 1998a:1).

If present at all, a Mesolithic population would have been the earliest human residents of the Shetland Islands. The evidence for such a people, though, is restricted to



the fact that the red deer was commonly hunted by Mesolithic peoples in Britain and that the change in flora in Shetland around 5,500 B.C.E./7,500 B.P. may indicate an abundance of this grazing animal (Butler 1998:6). Any direct indication of Mesolithic residences may have been washed away by the rise in global sea level, since the preferred habitat of Mesolithic peoples was that of coastlands (Small 1983:25). Numerous, potentially Mesolithic, stone tools, the origin of which has yet to be identified with any certainty, have also been found in Shetland (Turner 1998b:140). In brief, a Mesolithic residence in Shetland cannot be confirmed or denied.

The prehistory and history of successive occupations of different cultures in the Shetlands can be seen in domestic architectural styles. However, the earliest definitive evidence of human habitation yet discovered in the Shetlands is a dike at Shurton Brae that dates to 3,500 B.C.E./5,500 B.P. (Turner 1998a:2). By the beginning of the Neolithic (3,000 B.C.E./5,000 B.P.), cairns and oval stone houses were spread throughout the islands. The cairns date to the third millennium B.C.E./fifth millennium B.P., while the oval buildings are usually dated to the third and second millennia B.C.E./ fifth and fourth millennia B.P. (Whittle 1985:1). On the basis of comparative evidence, the agriculturalists who constructed these buildings island hopped to Shetland from Scotland (Small 1983:25).

In contrast to the Neolithic, Shetland has a paucity of Bronze Age (1,800-800 B.C.E./3,800-2,800 B.P.) sites. The Bronze Age culture of Scotland is only apparent at a few sites, such as Jarlshof, by distinctive buildings. Otherwise, because a clear distinction between Bronze Age and Neolithic pottery is often difficult to draw, Bronze Age settlement in the Shetlands remains poorly understood (Small 1983:25-26).

In the sixth and fifth centuries B.C.E., an apparently peaceful migration of Iron Age people to the islands took place. This is represented by “open settlements and small enclosed farmsteads” (Cunliffe 1974:216; Small 1983:26-27). Somewhat later, a “proto-Pictish” people (Sutherland 1994:16), who constructed “ring forts,” invaded. By 200

B.C.E./2150 B.P., these proto-Picts developed their forts into brochs (Small 1983:27). Brochs are dry-stone, circular structures, which lack any opening with the exception of a small doorway. Three feet typically separate the double-skinned walls from each other. Galleries inside the walls were linked by staircases (Cunliffe 1974:219-221). About eighty brochs have been discovered in Shetland. Since Shetland is currently a part of Scotland, this country can claim to possess all known brochs.

Overlapping in time with the brochs were aisled round houses, circular buildings with a hearth in the center and radial partitions. Brochs went out of use by the second century C.E. (1850 B.P.), which is approximately when wheelhouses were beginning to be produced (Cunliffe 1974:216). Wheelhouses are much like round houses, except that the partitions butt against the main wall so that no aisle encircles the building. The result is that their inner space takes on a trefoil shape.

Wheelhouses continued to be in use until the arrival of the Vikings. As the people of Scotland at this time also shared wheelhouses (as well as artifactual similarities), and as the people of Scotland at this time were Picts, the people of Shetland at this time are also conclusively Picts (Small 1983:27; Sutherland 1994:16). According to mainstream theory, the Picts were a people of Celtic culture (even if the population mixed with non-Celtic people when it migrated into “Pictland”) who lived north of the Forth-Clyde valley in Scotland (including the Scottish isles) from 297 to 843 C.E./1,653 to 1,107 B.P. The incipience date is taken from the first mention of the Picts as “Picti” by the Roman historian, Eumenius. However, they were previously known to the Romans by a different name, and Celts in general may have been in Scotland as early as 500 B.C.E./2,450 B.P. The terminal date of Pictish occupation marks the date when the Picts on the Scottish mainland were overrun by a Celtic people from Ireland, which effectively obliterated Pictish culture in this region (Sutherland 1994:xvi, 25)

The migration of the Vikings to Shetland began about 790-810 C.E./1,160-1,140 B.P. (though some scholars debate the date) (Small 1983:28). Shetland (as well as the

Orkneys) would have made an ideal stepping stone for raids on and migrations into Great Britain (Roesdahl 1991:210-211), reviving these islands from their previous peripheral status (Small 1983:28). Due to the lack of written records from the Viking period, nothing regarding the use of these islands in Viking raids can be said unequivocally. Available evidence does indicate that most of the Pictish culture was either obliterated or absorbed by the Norse settlers who subsequently took over the islands. Debate rages as to what extent obliteration or absorption took place (to be discussed in detail below).

### **2.3 History**

The environmental richness of the Orkney Islands enabled it to become the center of the region under Viking control in north Britain (which also included the Hebrides, islands on the north-west tip of Britain, and Caithness on the northern tip of Scotland). Few sources are informative regarding the early centuries of Shetland's history under the Norse. Outside sources do state that until 1195 C.E., Shetland was an earldom of Orkney. In 1195, Shetland came under the direct rule of Norway for purposes of tax and tribute. It was returned to the earldom of Orkney in 1379 C.E. When Sweden and Norway were brought under the rule of Denmark in 1397 C.E., the Shetlands also became part of Denmark (Small 1983:28-29). In 1469 C.E., the Danish princess Margrethe married the Scottish King James III. Not having enough money for her dowry, Margrethe's father pledged the Shetland Islands to Scotland until he was able to obtain the funds (Roesdahl 1991:214). He was not able to do so. Though attempts have been made since to reclaim the islands for Denmark, Scotland has refused to cooperate, and the Shetlands remain a part of Scotland today (Small 1983:29).

Some Scotsmen moved to Shetland even before it became a part of Scotland (Small 1983:29). The official transfer to Scotland, however, opened the way for Scottish immigrants; later, it allowed individual Scottish "lairds" (lords) to claim large portions of the country that had previously been owned by those who worked the land. By 1700 C.E., the residents of Shetland who did not belong to the lairds' families were tenants

under them. The rent required by the lairds increased through time. In the 1800's, large numbers of people were removed from the land that they had occupied or tilled or grazed so that the lairds could have these lands for their personal uses. Many Shetlanders were forced to leave the islands altogether. The complaints of tenants in the 1870's to the Scottish government promoted investigations into the current state of life in these islands. The Liberal government, which was in power at the time, passed an act in 1886 C.E. that declared that the tenants should have the security of tenure, as well as reimbursement for improvements that they made to the buildings they occupied. Scottish concern for the well being of, as well as their curiosity about, Shetlanders continued to increase in part because of studies done on and books written about the islands. With ships traveling more frequently to and from mainland Scotland in the later half of the nineteenth century, however, many inhabitants left the island to find more secure work than could be provided by fishing and farming (fishing may have begun to replace farming as the principal subsistence focus during the Norse occupation; see Chapter 4) in a region where poor weather sometimes too easily created famine. Shetland's population decreased until the 1960's, when the discovery of oil created new, well-paying jobs, encouraging people to stay on or return to the islands. Inevitably though, a change will occur when the oil is depleted (Nicolson 1990:19-25, 35-36, 168-172, 191-194).

Whether politically a part of Norway, Denmark, or Scotland, Shetland is its own place historically and culturally. Once the Norse and (pre-laird) Scotsmen had settled down, though their respective cultures were different, both groups were Shetlanders, who developed a lifestyle that suited the islands. The subsequent fusion of these two people was reinforced by their struggles with the lairds. The way of life that developed became known as crofting. In this system, crops, animal husbandry, and fishing were combined to create a decent living. Generally, on-shore jobs were the responsibility of the women, while the more dangerous offshore tasks were that of the men. This was reinforced by the amount of fish required by the lairds as part of their tenants' rent. By this time, fish

were the most important commodity produced in Shetland (Nicolson 1990:21, 50-52, 102-123).

Crofters were organized into townships in which cropland was divided through the system of “runrig”. Under its rules, arable land was divided into rigs or strips, with alternating strips worked by different people. This was done to give each family more or less equal access to all the different qualities of land in the country—no single family or group of families, then, could control the best land. The result was a complicated system in which each family had land dispersed throughout the farm or township. Though complex, it was seen as fair, especially since one piece of land was seen as equal to another only when it could produce an amount equal to the other. While requiring much cooperation, this system was not a cooperative (Nicolson 1990:51, 53; Thomson 1998).

This synopsis of Shetland’s prehistory and history provides a background from which the settlement at Jarlshof can be appreciated. It indicates that Jarlshof is extraordinary in its preservation of Viking Age remains and for the wealth of remains in general, and it therefore embodies a long portion of Shetland’s human occupation. This history also gives an indication of the unique way in which the culture of the islands developed. Though greatly influenced by the Scottish lairds, much of this development has its roots (as will be seen) in the Viking Age.

## **Chapter 3**

### **The Vikings**

The term “Viking” may be derived from “Vik,” which may have been a harbor in southern Norway that became central to raiding expeditions. Vik was definitely a word in Old Norse that meant bay or harbor; in Old English, it also meant “refuge.” From this term came the phrase “a-viking,” as in to go a-viking or raiding a distant town.

Technically, the term Norse refers to those people who spoke Old Norse (the Germanic people of Norway, Sweden, and Denmark). While Viking refers to those Norse who traveled abroad as marauders of foreign lands and often as conquerors of them, the term is only applied when the land was previously inhabited. In recent times, the term has been used in a much broader sense to refer to all the speakers of Old Norse during the “Viking Age” (Fitzhugh 2000:14).

#### **3.1 History of Viking Raiding and Colonization**

Archaeologists, as well as social anthropologists, see the Viking Age as the last stage of the Iron Age. Historians, on the other hand, see it as the beginning of the high Middle Age (Myhre 1998:3-4). The Viking Age is typically viewed as starting in 793 C.E./1157 B.P. with a raid on the Lindisfarne monastery in England. Identifying a beginning date for the Viking Age, however, is complicated by a several factors. Some raiding recorded slightly prior to 793 may or may not have been caused by Vikings; and eastward expansion of Scandinavians began prior to this date. In addition, some types of artifacts associated with the Viking Age date to the mid-eighth century or perhaps earlier (Myhre 1998:5; Roesdahl 1991:9-10). Concerning this last objection, some scholars state that “Viking activity,” i.e., raiding and settling, should define the Age and that the C.E. 793 date is appropriate (Myhre 1998:6).

### **3.1.1 Finland and Russia**

The Norse traveled eastward into Finland and Russia, beginning at least as early as the mid-seventh century. In this expansion, they were probably more interested in wealth from trade and tribute, rather than from raiding. The inland waterways allowed them to travel as far as the Byzantine Empire, though sometimes this required a portage to the next river. These eastward-traveling Vikings also came to rule the Eastern Slavs and founded the kingdom of Kiev (Edgren 2000:103-106; Roesdahl 1991:277-282). The first true raids, however, occurred to the west.

### **3.1.2 England**

The first definitive Viking raid was that on the English Lindisfarne monastery in 793. The initial raid on Ireland came two years after this. The next few decades brought many more raids on both west Britain and Ireland. The focus shifted to England in the 830s. Monasteries were the typical targets, with some monasteries raided multiple times. One result of this was the recording of these occurrences by the monks who witnessed them (Batey and Sheehan 2000:127-129).

Vikings overwintered in England for the first time in 850. It was not until 865, however, that their goals changed from looting to occupation (Batey and Sheehan 2000:130). From this year until 876, an army of perhaps 2,000 to 3,000 men marched across England in a zigzagging line, conquering it piece by piece. This campaign finally ended when many of the Vikings settled in Northumbria and began to set up a permanent community. Place name evidence testifies that the colonizers were a mixture of Danes and Norwegians (Roesdahl 1991:247, 334-336). One more attack was attempted not long after Northumbria was settled, but the counterattack was successful enough to draw it to a standstill (Batey and Sheehan 2000:131).

In 885, “Danelaw,” the area under Norse control, was officially established over much of England. Over the years, battles that weakened Danelaw over particular regions continued to take place between the Norse and the Anglo-Saxons. In 954, the death of

the Viking King, Erik Bloodaxe, finally caused its demise (Batey and Sheehan 2000:131).

When silver ceased to flow from the east around 980, Vikings turned their attention back to Britain. In 1016, however, Cnut of Denmark managed to become the king of all of England, after which he put an end to the raiding and attempted to atone for the grievances of the English caused by Viking violence and domination. Cnut's son, Edward, who had been ruling England, died in 1066. Shortly afterwards, William the Conqueror, Duke of Normandy, became king of England after Norman victory at the Battle of Hastings. This victory was the last of the attacks that the Norse perpetrated on Great Britain and continental Europe (Roesdahl 1991:209, 250-258; Morris 2000:99,102).

### **3.1.3 Ireland**

The Vikings first overwintered in Ireland in the 840s. The Irish military responded, often victoriously. Beginning about 915, the Vikings established several trading towns along the east coast of Ireland. The urban character of this particular type of settlement pattern is unique for the Norse (Batey and Sheehan 2000:129-131, 134-135).

Like England, Ireland was influenced by both the Danish and the Norwegians, and both of these countries became involved in local politics. Though they were not able to dominate a large portion of the land as they did in England, the Vikings in Ireland took part in inter-tribal warfare. Sometime, they even found themselves on opposing sides (Loyn 1995:34-36; Roesdahl 1991:240).

### **3.1.4 Manx Kingdom and Scotland**

When the Isle of Man and Scotland were first colonized is unknown (Roesdahl 1991:211). When the Vikings arrived, these two countries were inhabited by tribal Celts (Sutherland 1994:26). Thus, no towns existed prior to their arrival, and the Vikings did not create any; their settlements were rural in nature. They took control of the entirety of



Man, resulting in the most complete merging of Norse and Celtic populations of the era. This Manx kingdom eventually contained Scotland's western islands (Roesdahl 1991:211, 214, 216-220). Archaeological evidence, however, is scarce in this kingdom, with the exception of the Isle of Man, where a few buildings have been excavated. There is also little evidence of Viking settlement on the coastal areas of mainland Scotland (Batey and Sheehan 2000:131, 138; Roesdahl 1991:218). Outside of the Manx kingdom and mainland Scotland, linguistic and place name evidence demonstrate the complete conquest of the Orkney and Shetland island groups (Roesdahl 1991:212).

### **3.1.5 The European Continent**

In 799, the first recorded attack on the Frankish Empire took place. The Vikings concentrated on Frisia, a province of the empire "that stretched from southern Denmark to the western Netherlands" (Price 2000:116). This aggression came as a shock because, previously, the Norse had been peaceful traders. In the 830s, when the focus of raiding shifted away from Ireland, forces previously in Ireland also moved to Frisia. From 834 to 837, Danes raided and burned the Frankish town of Dorestad once a year. In 837, an army led by Emperor Louis the Pious put an end to this raiding, along with a brewing local rebellion. His death in 840, however, plunged Frankia into a civil war that lasted for three years. Not only did the Viking attack as never before, but their involvement in local politics sometimes led to different groups of Viking assaulting each other (again). By the time the war ended, the Vikings were in an even stronger position to raid the territory. Except for when paid not to attack, the raids continued in full force until the Frankish emperor, Charles the Bald, put into action a full-scale response in 862 by blocking rivers and making alliances with Vikings so that they would attack other Vikings. In 865, the Vikings transferred their focus to England until 879 (see above for intervening events in England). The Frankish Empire split in 887 when Charles was dethroned. The new leaders, Odo in the west and Arnulf in the east, lead military campaigns and established fortifications to drive away the Vikings (Price 2000:116-121).

Norse interest in the region was renewed in 896, particularly around the Seine River. They were granted land around Rouen in 911 on the condition that they would stop raiding and protect the vicinity from other raiders. They did not, however, follow this agreement, and their leader, Rollo, led more raids around the Seine. William Longsword, Rollo's son, expanded Viking territory. In 933, a treaty that created the province of Normandy solidified the borders of this territory. By this time, the Norse were protecting the area, as they were supposed to do originally. The archaeological evidence points to a quick assimilation of the Normans into Frankish culture (Price 2000:122-124).

### **3.1.6 The Faeroes, Iceland, and Unsuccessful Colonies**

Some regions that the Norse settled were not taken by force because the lands were uninhabited before their arrival. The Faeroe Islands were colonized, probably by Norwegians, around the same time as the Shetlands were invaded by the Vikings (see Chapter 2). Changes in native vegetation of the kind that result from human activities indicate that people were present in the seventh century. No artifacts have been found from this period though, and medieval literature states that the islands were first occupied about 825 (Arge 2000:154). Also according to medieval literature, the Norse began colonizing Iceland in 870, which had been empty up to that point with the exception of a few Irish hermits (Miller 1990:13-14). Geology shows that this date is approximately correct. About 871, a volcanic explosion covered the island in ash; layer of debris can still be found in most parts of Iceland, a foot or two under the current ground surface. The oldest sites are found to have been established not long after the eruption (Vésteinsson 2000:164).

The new society of Iceland was organized as a commonwealth, which ended when it came under Norwegian rule in 1262 (Thorláksson 2000:175). Though Norse people are still in Iceland today, other colonies did not meet with success. At the beginning of the second millennia, Icelanders began a colony in Greenland. The reasons

for its failure in the mid-fifteenth century are not completely understood. Worsening weather conditions in Greenland's already harsh climate may have combined with a lessening of population pressure in Iceland due to plague, so that those surviving in Greenland emigrated back to Iceland (Lynnerup 2000:292-294). The Norse also reached North America proper from Greenland. Though one Norse encampment has been found at L'anse Aux Meadows in Newfoundland, literary and archaeological evidence indicate that a North American colony was not successful for any length of time. The sagas (see below) attest that conflicts with *skraelings*, i.e., the previous inhabitants of the land, had much to do with this failure (Wallace 2000:208-216).

### **3.1.7 Viking Literature**

A fascinating body of literature was produced by Icelanders during the Medieval period. This work is the result of the recording of Icelandic oral literature (Sigurdsson 2000:186). This body of work and Norse archaeology are the sources for most of our knowledge of the culture history of the Norse in the Viking Age. While some of its accounts of bishops were recorded when the events happened, all other narratives were recorded at a significant time after they are supposed to have occurred (Fridriksson 1994:2-3), and thus are not necessarily reliable. Because of this, the Viking era inhabits a liminal stage between prehistory and history that has been dubbed proto-history (Miller 1990:44-46). The conditions that created this transitional stage in Norse chronology also created the conditions that resulted in the Viking raids.

### **3.2 Reasons For Raiding**

Archaeological evidence indicates that the Norse were traders before they were marauders and conquerors. Throughout the Viking Age, some Norse probably continued trading with Europe, as attested by the sagas. One person could even easily change his role as needed (Postan 1973:148-149). Why did anyone risk his good relations and even his life by raiding? The simple and immediate answer is that that it was lucrative (Price 2000:117). The conditions that existed in Norse and other European societies that

contributed to raiding, however, are much more complex, and the picture is still not entirely clear.

### **3.2.1 Population Pressure and Internal Strife**

Previously, one of the most popular theories for Viking raiding cited population pressure as the primary cause. Some scholars still argue for this, at least concerning Norway (Sawyer 2000:29). The warming trends that started before and extended into the Viking Age and increased cereal production may have promoted an increase in population throughout the Norse world. Botanical evidence exists for this increase. Population pressure may be especially significant with respect to Norway. Prior to the Viking period, Denmark and Sweden may have been somewhat politically centralized, while Norway was still controlled by chieftains. As such, redistribution was still an integral part of its economy; redistribution included the giving of precious gifts to loyal underlings. Also prior to the Viking period proper, wealth was flowing into Norse regions from trade, mercenary expeditions, and possibly from pirate activities. An abundance of native resources due to beneficial weather conditions may have provided wealth to purchase foreign treasure. Such conditions would have resulted in an increase in the number of competing chieftains. Those who were not successful, as well as their underlings, may have sought fame and fortune elsewhere (McGovern 1980-81:288-290).

According to Myhre (1998:11-16), however, archaeology, has yet to demonstrate that settlement expansion took place immediately prior to or during the early Viking Age (before 1000). Even areas in Norway that had been abandoned in the sixth and seventh centuries were not resettled. Neither were non-agrarian resources, such as iron, soapstone, slate, reindeer, and elk, exploited more at this time than in previous eras.

Rather than overpopulation in general, overpopulation in selected classes may have been a contributing factor. While the Norse did not practice primogeniture, the eldest son did have more inheritance rites than other sons did. Rather than breaking up farms and risk ruining their own farms and the farms of their relatives, some younger

sons may have decided to seek status by exploiting regions away from home (Loyn 1995:16).

### **3.2.2 Religion**

Some monks of the day blamed the fact that the Norse (for the most part) still practiced their indigenous (“heathen”) religion for Norse assaults on British monasteries (Batey and Sheehan 2000:127). The Norse, however, were not the only aggressive people in Great Britain at this time. The Irish tribes also fiercely fought each other. Sources that were not so blatantly biased as those left by the monks demonstrate that no clear separation of Norse and Irish aggression during the Viking Age can be made (Sawyer 1982:361). The more biased accounts demonstrate that the destructive power of the Viking was exaggerated for “literary reasons or because of nationalistic fervour” (Roesdahl 1991:191-192). The main reason that monasteries were targeted for plunder is probably that much easily portable wealth was stored in these building (Batey and Sheehan 2000:128). Whether or not the Viking ever ransacked monasteries with the intention of desecrating religious buildings cannot be said for certain. If this is so, they probably did this to revolt against social changes that would be brought about if the missionaries in their homelands were successful (Loyn 1995:15).

### **3.2.3 Allure of Foreign Wealth**

Another source of concentrated wealth was the trade towns that were emerging in northern Europe and western Asia at the beginning of the period. However, many of these towns were in politically unstable areas (with the exception of the Byzantine Empire). This made the trading towns relatively easy to plunder (Roesdahl 1991:189).

One “item” that the Viking took by force was probably much easier to obtain by raiding than by negotiation, because of the lack of people selling the item. This item was slaves. Even after the Vikings settled in a conquered territory, the settlers needed slaves and often took them by force (Loyn 1995:17-18).

### **3.2.4 Creating Alliances and Status**

The driving forces behind Viking raiding were probably buried deep in Norse society itself. As noted above, at the beginning of the Viking period, Norway was composed of chieftaincies for which redistribution of costly items was important in maintaining alliances. Though more politically centralized, the situation was not much different in Denmark and Sweden. Important areas of all three countries were unified at different times through the Viking age. As long as the regions of a kingdom remained independent (i.e., maintained regional laws), they were able to overthrow unpopular rulers and cause the disintegration of kingdoms. The aristocracy, however, was accumulating more power with the passage of time. By the end of the Viking period, the countries of Norway, Sweden, and Denmark had solidified (Jorgenson 2000:72-75; Roesdahl 1991:64-65). Alliances of the upper class through much of this period, however, were still held together by the giving of gifts. Rings were an especially common gift. The wearing of such a gift displayed one's loyalty. Raiders often stole items that were such appropriate gifts, for instance swords, jewelry, or other items that could be made into jewelry or cut up for dispersal. Therefore, a major reason behind the Viking raids was to obtain items to build or maintain political alliances (Batey and Sheehan 2000:130; Jorgensen 2000:72). The emphasis on status is reflected in poetry and rune stones (carvings written in the native script that commemorate the lives of individuals), which speak of people who directly acquired higher rank through raiding or of powerful people who sent others to raid for them (Roesdahl 1991:188-189).

Another hypothesis for the development of Viking raiding states that it may have been a simple extension of a pre-existing local pattern; in other words, prior to the "Viking Age," instead of invading foreign lands, the Norse assaulted each other. The harshness of this possibility is made more understandable when considering that, as exhibited by the sagas, in this society that forthrightness of one's intentions and actions

(e.g., plundering) was much more honorable than manipulation (e.g., stealing secretly) (Dubois 1999:137).

### **3.2.5 Conclusion**

Ultimately, a combination of the above theories probably explains the scenario better than any single theory. The circumstances (already mentioned) at the turn of the ninth century made expansion of raiding more profitable (Roesdahl 1991:189-190). In addition to this, consolidation of power was taking place in the Norse homelands (Jorgensen 2000:75). If the Norse had been raiding each other, this would no longer have been permitted, and the attacks may have been turned outward.

The consolidation of power also probably displaced many previously high-ranking people (a particular problem if, as stated previously, more wealth was being created through the warming trend of the time) and generally created grudges because of the strictness of the new hierarchy. This would have given people a reason to find a new home. One saga (discussed below) indicates that this shift was the reason that Iceland and Shetland were settled by the Norse (Roesdahl 1991:188).

With the organization of various European powers came the strength necessary to impede the Vikings to a point at which their activities were no longer profitable. In the case of Frankia, this occurred in the first half of the tenth century. In the case of England, Denmark itself halted raiding in the first half of the eleventh century. In both cases, the Vikings either then dispersed or settled. Norse society also became more integrated into the rest of European affairs. The conversion to Christianity played no small role in this (Loyn 21:1994). The most important internal factor that brought the Viking Age to an end, however, is undoubtedly the change in economy. The power once maintained through gift giving was now held through relatively anonymous regulation and taxation of trade by the now politically centralized governments of Norway, Sweden, and Denmark. Not only was violence no longer beneficial to the economy, it was detrimental (Hedeager 1994:138-139).

### 3.3 Shetland Viking Homeland

From where did the Norse immigrants to Shetland emigrate? As mentioned earlier, most of the texts concerning the Viking Era were written after the fact. Though Shetland has no saga of its own, its settlement is mentioned in *Egil Skallagrimsson's Saga*. According to this saga, residents of Norway fled when King Harold Fairhair was in the process of consolidating power. Among their stopping places was Shetland (Fenton 1978:12). Swedish Vikings tended to travel eastward, while Danes did not become widely involved in Viking activities until after the settlement of Shetland (Wainwright 1962:141). On one hand, this is not a specific answer, as Norway encompasses a wide region. On the other, Sweden and Denmark did produce Vikings, so settlers potentially could have come from these countries.

The particular dialect of Norse that developed on Shetland is known as Norn. This language survived until the eighteenth century (Roesdahl 1991:214). At the end of the nineteenth century, Jakob Jakobsen found that more than 10,000 Norn words survived in the Shetland vocabulary. On the basis of comparison, Jakobsen pronounced that the settlers' homeland was southwest Norway (Figure 4, regions I, II, III). Jakobsen also noted that Shetland had healthy trade links with Norway until the early nineteenth century, and this was the reason why Norn was closer to Norwegian than was Icelandic or Faeroese (Nicolson 1990:40). That recent interactions and linguistics studies based on current languages may have given the false appearance of Norse migration from southwest Norway did not occur to him (Crawford 1987:115).

Place names tend to change less with time than does the rest of language. Thus, one might look for Danish or Swedish linguistic elements in place names for evidence of Norse migration from those countries. In Shetland, the Danish element *-thorpe* does rarely occur. The name itself refers to a "secondary, outlying settlement" (Crawford 1987:115). Several names, such as Dainaberg, may make reference to the Danes. Such place names, though, were most likely given by non-Danes who saw Danish settlers in



Shetland as unusual. All other available place name evidence confirms that the Norse in Shetland came from Norway. Specifically, it concentrates on Møre in central Norway (Figure 4, region IV) (Wainwright 1962:141-146).

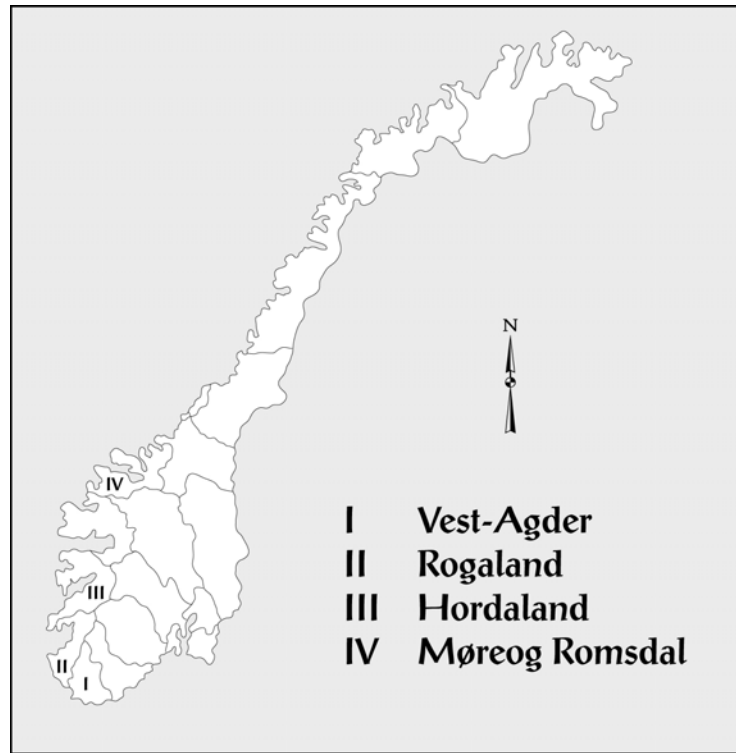


Figure 4. The regions of Norway (redrawn after Wainwright 1962:145)

Another source of information concerning the origin of the Shetlanders comes from physical anthropology. The contents of 50 graves on St. Ninian's Isle from a cemetery in use from the Viking Age to the eighteenth century were used in a comparison of skulls from Shetland and Norway (Berry 1974). The study found that the Shetlanders “diverge[d] considerably” when compared to all of Norway (Berry 1974:355). When compared only with fifty skulls recovered from the district of Jaeren, the divergence shrinks greatly. The Jaeren skulls, which come from medieval ossuaries, may themselves represent an older Norwegian population that was pushed inland by later Iron Age people. Jaeren is located in the district of Rogaland (Figure 4, region II), which is within

the same region Jakobsen believed the Norse settlers to have come (Berry 1974:346-347, 355). Without skulls from elsewhere in Shetland to compare with those of St. Ninian's Isle and of Norway, whether all Viking Shetlanders emigrated from Jaeren is unknown.

### **3.4 Firehouses and Longhouses**

During the Viking Period of Jarlshof, two significant architectural changes took place. One is the clustering of residential building (discussed below); the other is a change in these buildings from firehouses to being longhouses.

The Icelandic sagas commonly refer to the Viking dwelling as a *skáli* or firehouse or fire-hall. This building was almost uniform throughout the Norse realm at the beginning of the Viking period (though debate continues to this day concerning whether the longer walls of the buildings in some regions were actually curved or whether this effect is an illusion brought by degradation of the structures). As shown by House 1 at Jarlshof, a *skáli* consisted of one elongated rectangular room. A long rectangular hearth—a longfire—ran through the middle. Along the two extended sides of the building were benches, used for sitting during the day and sleeping at night as told in *Grettir's Saga*. Two rows of posts placed along the inside edges of the benches supported the roof. In regions such as Norway and Iceland, turf was the common building material (Simpson 1967:49-50; Stoklund 1984:98, 100; Urbanczyk 1992:84-85, 88). As seen in Shetland, walls could also consist of an earth core with stone faces.

The symbolic importance of certain elements of the *skáli* is indicated in sagas that recount the removal of the “high seat pillars” to a new home. Though no saga gives a description of these pillars that were a part of the most important seat in the house, they do state that the pillars were often thrown overboard by early settlers to Iceland. The immigrants would then colonize the spot where the pillars landed. Thus, a portion of the settler's old home was used in an omen for the building of a new home.

The symbolic importance of the *skáli* is also greatly emphasized by their continued use in areas where they were not economical. One such region is Greenland,

which did not have the trees (or an alternative fuel source, such as peat) to feed the large hearth. Such persistence is not unique to the Norse, as immigrants in all times and places may be comforted by the familiarity not just of the construction but also of the symbolic meanings that inform how one should act (Stoklund 1984:98, 100). The uniformity of dwellings at the beginning of the Viking period is also indicative of “cultural integration, a harmony regarding the goals, norms and values of life” (Stoklund 1980:122).

In time, Norse housing diverged, as widely separated Norse adapted to specific conditions. Yet, the separate settlements continued to influence each other. Longfires went out of use by Phase V of Jarlshof (as will be seen). This change in hearths may be taken as evidence for the influence of the European *Stube* or *stofa* (Bigelow 1987:34), a room whose original use is uncertain (Stoklund 1984:101). What is known is that it spread through the Norse regions as an adjunct to the house that functioned as a “daily room,” whereas the *skáli* became a “bedroom” (Urbanczyk 1992:85).

Much more significant at Jarlshof is the switch from firehouses to longhouses. A longhouse is a building that houses both humans and livestock, and inhabitants can move from one part to the other without stepping outside (Fenton 1982:231). The change at Jarlshof (and elsewhere) is also accompanied by the abandonment of the use of outbuildings. The name “longhouse” is a literal translation of the Welsh term (*ty hir*) for such a building (Beresford 1979:124)

The late Viking Age Norse were not the first to build longhouses. The Iron-Age (Pre-Viking) Norwegians also used them. By the Viking Age though, the byre (where cows were housed) was separate from the human dwellings, with the exception of a few houses in northern Norway (Myhre 1998:13). Longhouses may be much older than this, though. There are long rectangular buildings of timber, wattle, and daub, on the continent in the Rhineland and in the Alpine region from the Neolithic. They were first thought to be simply barns that were divided into two parts but are now thought to be longhouses (Bradford 1979:309-310). Longhouses may also been discovered in pre-

Common Age Denmark. All the houses considered are indeed long in length, compared to their width. One such house was divided in two by a clay partition. One other does not evidence a partition, but one end contained the remains on animals killed in the fire that destroyed the house. In yet another, however, the animals and humans may have lived together. At two others, there is nothing to indicate the presence of animals (Roussell 1934:40-43). Examples have also been found in Germany in the seventh and eighth centuries (Beresford 1979:125). Given this tantalizing but slim evidence of longhouses at early dates throughout western Europe, it is possible that longhouses diffused into Scandinavia in the Iron Age (Fenton 1978:114; Ingstad 1977:157).

In both Shetland and the Orkneys, archaeological evidence shows Norse usage of longhouses to be after that of firehouses (Fenton 1978:114). The same is true of Iceland and Greenland, where longhouses appeared in late medieval times (Fenton 1982:231; Fenton 1985:171). The practice of housing livestock with humans carried on unaltered in Shetland and the Orkneys (with regional variations) until the nineteenth centuries (Fenton 1978:114-115). In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the longhouse also became widespread in mainland Britain (Beresford 1978:125). With the evidence that the earliest longhouses were built in the eleventh century or twelfth century during Phase V, those at Jarlshof are among the first in British Isles (Beresford 1979:125). Interestingly, buildings at Underhoull (on Unst, Shetland) exhibit a pattern opposite that of Jarlshof and of Britain, Iceland, and Greenland. First, a longhouse was built. Later, the same structure was used for human occupancy only, with outhouses nearby (Fenton 1982:231; Small 1982:247-248). Because of its exceptional nature, the progression of structures at Underhoull will be considered an anomaly, indicative of something idiosyncratic at that site.

Longhouses in thirteenth and fourteenth mainland Britain may in part be connected to the practices of Anglo-Saxon ancestors in Germany (Ingstad 1977:157). The

forces that instigated the change at Jarlshof, however, as well as in the more northerly isles, are uncertain. Conjectures, of course, abound.

### **3.5 Theories Concerning the Change From Firehouses to Longhouses**

Diffusion, environment, cultural values, and economy have all been cited as possible causes for the change from firehouses to longhouses. The longhouse appears inconsistently in time and space. It cannot be clearly defined as belonging to or originating with a particular group(s). The possibility exists that it was brought from mainland Britain, as noted above. At present, however, lack of data renders this hypothesis impossible to prove or disprove (Bigelow 1987:33; Fenton 1978:114).

One of the most widely accepted environmental explanations for the inception of longhouses is the cooling trend that began in the thirteenth or fourteenth centuries. In longhouses, humans benefited from the warmth of livestock. This explanation, however, is problematic because not only are the first longhouses estimated to have appeared 100 to 200 years prior to “The Little Ice Age” (a widespread cooling in this region of the world), but people in Iceland and Greenland did not begin constructing buildings with humans and cattle under the same roof until sometime after the beginning of climatic change. Even then, direct communication between human and livestock regions of the house was typically lacking (Bigelow 1987:33; Urbanczyk 1992:86).

Another environmental theory concerning the adoption of the longhouse is that shortages of fuel forced the change in housing. The immigrants to Iceland and Greenland quickly used the wood supplies of these islands; after this, they had no readily obtainable fuel source for fires. With respect to these regions, no reason exists to reject the theory that housing changed in order to keep the inhabitants warm. Shetland had no supply of wood, other than driftwood, to decimate. The source of fuel that it proffered was peat. Peat is abundant in Shetland, and it is still sometimes used as fuel today. No fuel crisis is known to have occurred in Viking times to facilitate the change in architecture in these islands (Urbanczyk 1992:86; Bigelow 1987:33).

Another theory explaining the adoption of the longhouse appeals to status. Bigelow (1987:33) states that, because cows were prestigious items, they were subject to special treatment, such as having the privilege of living with and being warmed by their keepers. On the other hand, the *Orkneyinga Saga* refers to skáli (firehouses) in association with high status. By the modern era, no such connotation exists; the modern Norwegian word *skåle* means “a shed, hut or shack” (Lamb 1997:14). Whatever high status longhouses may once have had, it had disappeared in more recent times. In the eighteenth century, a minister who was visiting Shetland remarked that cohabitation with cattle in longhouses was a mark of the lower class (Fenton 1978:114; Fenton 1985:170).

To look at the architectural changes in a general sense: when people create colonies, there may be a simplification of ranking as the new society organizes itself. This new egalitarianism may be result of several forces, one of which is that colonists may come as a group from a particular social class. With reference to Shetland, many of those that led the move to these islands had to have had some wealth, as they necessarily owned ships (Fenton 1978:19). If the sagas are to be believed, they would have also had a stake in protecting the previous social structure, which was less hierarchical than the one that was evolving in Scandinavia. Other social classes, however, especially slaves, may have come with them, so inequality would have remained.

In theory, another reason for increased egalitarianism would be the relatively small initial population, which required less hierarchy to regulate it. With the accompanying social reorganization of new colonies, old roles may become obsolete as new opportunities arise; that is, new positions may have become available within the new society. The nature of the migration also affects the social outcome—the less ordered the move, the more likely the possibility that people can change their ranks. Will and skill also come into play in these more fluid circumstances as they could not in a longer established society.

Inequality will return, however. Assuming the colony is successful, the population will grow. The larger the population, the greater the resulting social stratification. Growing stratification will of course produce various signatures of the upper and lower classes. As noted earlier, similarity in architecture tends to signify similarity of goals. In the case of Shetland, the change in architecture from firehouses to longhouses may be indicative of diverging social classes.

Both of the cultural theories may have been correct for different regions. They are, however, mutually exclusive, so only one should apply to Jarlshof. According to the first, the adoption of longhouses at Jarlshof is indicative of higher status. According to the second, it is characteristic of a lower status. The former, though, is based on literary evidence much closer to the time in question than the linguistic observation and the minister's observation, which may be a product of a later development.

Few other pieces of evidence give any clues, and may only serve to complicate the argument. As discussed earlier, Viking Jarlshof may have had relatively high status in the region because it may have been a favorable resting point for travelers from Norway to mainland Britain and vice versa. Ships stopping at this point could leave either east or west in order to avoid the tide-race. Therefore, it was potentially a good trading site. On the other hand, Crawford (1984:40) claims that the Dynrost region would generally have been avoided due to the danger of the tide-race. Perhaps the most paradoxical evidence with regards to class, however, is the archaeological material itself. Few artifacts found at the site were "exotic imported material" (Morris 1985:215). The only other indication of status at the site was the presence of pig remains. Bigelow (1985:120) hypothesized that pigs may have been high status domesticates because pigs are an animal that produces nothing useful to humans besides meat and are often destructive to crops.

The explanation with the most evidence for the architectural change concerns the economy (Bigelow 1987:33). The faunal evidence at Sandwick demonstrates that cattle

bones became increasingly common in the twelfth through the fourteenth centuries. Most of these bones are from young calves. The scant faunal evidence available from Jarlshof indicates much the same thing. This suggests that cattle were used more for milk production than for meat. Keeping cows warm greatly increases their milk production. Thus, longhouses may be correlated with increased milk production in the twelfth century. This increase not only coincides with the estimated introduction of longhouses (late eleventh century to early twelfth century during Phase V at Jarlshof) but is contemporaneous with the introduction of taxes and tithing in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries, which were paid mainly in butter and cloth.

Subsistence studies were not of much concern at the time Jarlshof was excavated. Only the species of the bones found and the general location in which they were found were recorded. This record is relegated to an appendix in Hamilton's *Excavations at Jarlshof, Shetland* (Hamilton 1956:212-215) and subsistence is not further discussed. Thus, when investigating questions of economy, information from Jarlshof is wanting. The site can only be compared with sites that have undergone more thorough investigations, but direct comparisons are limited.

In relation to economic trends at Jarlshof, it should be noted that currently a controversy exists regarding the possibility of an increase of the importance of fishing in Orkney and Shetland at the beginning of the Viking Era (Donaldson, Morris, and Rackham 1981:77). Another controversy also exists regarding the possibility of a greater frequency of fishing during the Viking Era. Evidence from Jarlshof gave the first clues regarding these issues—primarily that larger fish were caught at the beginning of the era and that the number of steatite line sinkers recovered increased from Phase V onward (Donaldson, Morris, and Rackham 1981; Hamilton 1956:157). Other Scottish sites (Old Scatness, Shetland [Nicholson 1998:108-109; 2002:71], Underhoull, Unst, Shetland, Buckquoy, Orkney [Donaldson, Morris, Rackham 1981:77], Skaill, Orkney [Nicholson 1997:245], Freswick Links, Scotland [Morris, Batey, and Rackham 1995:190-191], and



Robert's Haven [Barrett 1997:634]) have since been excavated, but give contradictory evidence if these sites are to be viewed as part of one system. Moreover, the arguments, not the least of which includes recovery methods and survival of remains (Morris 1985:228), surrounding this issue deserve an essay to themselves. Only a brief summary can be given here.

One explanation of why fishing may have increased in the middle of Norse occupation simply relies on the scarceness of arable land and the onset of "The Little Ice Age" (Bigelow 1992:19). Another, much more involved conjecture, posits that the increase was due to the transition of Shetland from a subsistence economy to one that created surpluses that allowed for increased interaction with regions outside of Shetland, namely in the form of trade, taxes, and tithes (Bigelow 1985:116, 119, 123;1992:17-19). In this theory, Bigelow relies heavily on evidence from the site of Sandwick and its comparison to Jarlshof. In the 11th century, fish and line sinkers were deposited with a greater frequency at Sandwick than previously. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, line sinkers for a specialized form of fishing were created. Many small fish (saithe) that were used for local consumption were recovered. Larger fish (cod) were also deposited at the site. This type of fish could have been utilized in trade or taxes. As discussed above, an apparent increase in milk production also took place at Sandwick, as evidenced by the increase in calf bones. An increase in imported objects or artifacts that copy objects that could have been imported also contribute to the idea of interaction with those outside of Shetland.

Norse regions outside of the Northern Isles are known to have increased their participation in the fish trade during the Middle Ages (11th through the 15th centuries). Norway and Iceland could only grow limited amounts of cereals even in good years, so fish was often traded for grain. As is hypothesized for Shetland, the proceeds from trade in Norway also came to support the government through taxes (Barrett 1997:616; Perdikaris 1999:388-391, 395). Interestingly, this accords with the supposition (Chapter

2) that the Viking Age ended with the transition from a gift economy to a one based on wealth through trade and taxation. Britain and continental Europe also had a demand for fish for reasons ranging from military use to Lenten food (Barrett 1997:616).

### **3.6 Clustering Over Time**

Over time, more contemporaneous human dwellings came to be present at Jarlshof. Hamilton recognized this as the result of the division of land through inheritance according to odal or udal law (1956:136). This aspect of the site deserves more detailed attention.

#### **3.6.1 Odal Law, Clustering, and Environment**

Odal law was a Norse system of land ownership and inheritance with its roots in ancestral Germanic law (Larson 1935a:vii). One version of this system was incorporated into the Gulathing laws, which were written down in the eleventh and twelfth centuries and which applied to western Norway and later to Shetland. According to these laws, odallers were a distinct class with rank above that of non-land holding freemen and below that of nobility. The odaller had “complete ownership of the land” (Robberstad 1983:49-51); i.e., no one else of higher rank had control over the use of the land. One became an odaller when he managed to use a piece of land for three to five generations, keeping all other people who might want the land away from it by force. Once under the domain of an odaller, land was passed down through inheritance. If present, land was passed to the children. The *heid-bule* or main house passed to the eldest son. Other sons received *outland*, i.e., land beyond the immediate area of the heid-bule, so as not to break up the region belonging to the heid-bule. Daughters also received outland, but only half as much as the sons (Fenton 1978:22, 30). (The complete order of inheritance is complex, and an implication of this is detailed below.) Though possession of land by an odaller was “complete,” the odaller and his extended family were the ones considered to own the land. If the odaller sold it, steps could be taken by the extended family to “redeem” the land (Larson 1935b:424).

These laws would have naturally followed the Norse to new colonies. Whether odallers assumed that their old rights applied to their new estates immediately and whether previous non-land holders could become odallers immediately is not known (Fenton 1978:22).

The clustering of houses at Jarlshof and elsewhere in Shetland in later times (see next subsection) has been seen as “peculiarly Scottish.” (Small 1968b:9); this characterization is reinforced by the single Viking farmsteads scattered throughout the Faeroes, Iceland, and Greenland. While a Scottish influence is not without possibility at this early date, no reason exists to assume that this is the reason for the clustering. Rather, similar conditions in mainland Scotland and Shetland could have led to similar settlement patterns. Both regions have small patches of arable land. The rest is only suitable for pastoralism (and hunting in the cases of mainland Scotland). Farmers would want to settle near the arable land but not on that land itself. Thus, if a separate patch of arable land did not exist for every nuclear family, then families had to live close to each other (Fenton 1978:22-23; Small 1968b:10).

Jarlshof is a testament to the rate at which the population of Shetland grew, whether by immigration or through the native birth rate. This growth is also testified by place names, which indicate that the islands were fully settled by 900-1000 (Phase III) (Bigelow 1989:185) (discussed more fully in Chapter 4).

### **3.6.2 Land Management Practices**

Jarlshof may contain evidence of the antiquity of the land management practices that developed in Shetland, and provides a basis for understanding the antiquity of settlement patterning in the area from the Viking Age to the Industrial Revolution. The period from 1750 to 1830 demonstrates pattern of land use that appears to have developed unimpeded since the beginning of the Viking age. This pattern is more of a system of rules than a consistent method through which each region was organized. Three levels of organization occurred: the tenant or household, the house or farm, and the

township. A township was all the farms in a particular region. The farm itself may have been made up by one or more households. The households of one farm lived close together and shared the land that belonged to their farm though the method of runrig. In this system, most arable land (and possible grazing land exclusive of hill pasture) was divided into a series of strips. Potentially, every other strip could be worked by a different household. Runrig was not convenient but was seen as fair, since one piece of land could only be equal to another when it could produce an equal amount of crop. Just as households were runrig with neighboring households, farms could become runrig with other farms in their township (Leask, Bradley, and Bradley 1998:85; Thomson 1998). The reason for this is examined below.

Like the multiplication of houses at Jarlshof, the runrig of farms and township is believed to have developed through inheritance. In 1790, Rev. John Morison observed that the splitting of farms was the result of the Lairds efforts to keep as many people on their properties as possible, so that the tenants could fish for them. Initially, Lairds did not dictate the manner in which households were to share the land amongst themselves. Thus, a system originated from the tenants in order to cope with many people on one piece of land, i.e., runrig. Lairds eventually attempted to break up the system because they could not keep track of it (Thomson 1998:112, 123). Just as with the layout of houses at Jarlshof, the households that shared one farm or township in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were clustered together on one piece of land. Given that this clustering in both Viking and more modern times are related and given that the system of land management is a folk custom, older than that which the Scottish Lairds wished to impose, then runrig may have its roots in the days of Jarlshof. Thus, the clustering of houses at Jarlshof, which exists on no other Viking sites found in Shetland thus far, takes on additional importance in understanding the history of these islands.

The situation is especially interesting with respect to inheritance laws. As stated above, the Gulathing laws outline a rather complicated order of inheritance. The folk

rules for inheritance were so complex that the transcriber of the law states at one point that “the kinship of men can take so many forms that no one can draw up a complete order of inheritance” (Larson, trans.1935:110). Perhaps, the complexity of land management was partially related to the complexity of these laws.

### **3.7 Summary**

The Viking Age occurred during a liminal time period. At the beginning, Norse society was becoming more organized and was expanding its influence beyond previous limits. The economy at this time was such that it led the Norse to attempt to take advantage of the rest of Europe; the political situation in the rest of Europe made it relatively easy for the Vikings to do so. By the end of the period, however, the growth experienced by the European powers completed the organizational shift that had begun centuries before. With this, all European societies became more integrated. This included the Norse, whose society moved into a mutually beneficial relationship with neighboring countries of its day.

Shetland is an integral part of the Viking story. In its own unique way, it was subject to all the goings-on and changes in the Viking Era. It was invaded (mostly) by Norwegians, who at first constructed traditional Scandinavian houses. The architecture of dwellings changed over time from firehouses to longhouses. The exact cause(s) for this may never be known, but it may be part and parcel of the end of the Viking Era, the very thing that brought the Norse to Shetland. The evidence at Jarlshof that an increase in fishing took place through the Viking Era, though far from conclusive, accords well with this hypothesis.

Clustering of buildings also occurred early in the Norse history of Shetland. This is due to an increase in population, the scarcity of arable land, and the need to reside next to it. In historical times, odal law, Germanic inheritance laws, seems responsible for the breaking up of arable land into strips that were worked by different people. This system

of land management, known as runrig, possibly stretched back to the very beginning of Norse Shetland.

## **Chapter 4**

### **The Picts and the Norse**

One of the major issues of the Vikings' social role in Shetland is whether or not (and, in the event, to what extent) they interacted with an earlier population on Shetland. Some scholars have theorized that no Picts were in the islands at the time of Norse arrival, partly because the Vikings took over so thoroughly. Unfortunately, the Norse did not write about themselves during times of settlement. Therefore, the longer and the more widespread Scandinavian influence was in a region, the less likely historical documents were created concerning Viking times. For instance, in England and Ireland, historians recorded Viking raids, and these accounts have survived partly because the Norse did not decimate the native people or destroy their culture. Norse culture, however, apparently came to pervade the Shetland Islands once the Viking invaded. Since the Norse did not leave behind historical documents from this time period, there is no written record addressing the presence or absence of an indigenous population. Even if there had been a Pictish population present, the Pictish methods of recording contemporary events would not have been as technologically advanced as those of British historians (Bigelow 1992:13; Morris 1985:210). So, the scant literary, place name, and archaeological evidence that are available regarding Shetland must be scrutinized in order to determine what it can show about the possible interactions between the Norse and the Picts.

First, the archaeological and literary evidence for the presence of a Pictish population at the time of Norse arrival will be reviewed. Then, the nature of the interactions of the two peoples will be examined. This examination will include place name, literary, and archaeological evidence for the stages of Norse settlement. It will conclude with a discussion of other sites that contain evidence for interaction between the Picts and the Norse.

#### **4. 1 Archaeological and Literary Evidence for the Presence of the Picts in Shetland at the Time of Norse Arrival**

As mentioned earlier, *Egil Skallagrimsson's Saga* states that residents of Norway fled when King Harold Fairhair was in the process of consolidating power. Among their stopping places was Shetland. In this account, all of the departing Norwegians settled areas that were deserted (Fenton 1978:12). The *Historia Norvegiae*, however, states that the newcomers had to defeat the native population (Roesdahl 1991:211-212). If this were the case, the superior sea power of the Norse combined with the land focus defense of the Picts and their probable "loose tribal nature" mostly likely contributed to the victory of the Norse in the case of conflicts (Small 1968b:4-5).

Also in favor of the absence of the Picts (or their decimation) are the observations of historical domination of indigenous peoples. When a population is subordinated, a recognizable portion of their culture does survive. Place names, for instance, are commonly not replaced by the dominant culture. The one case in which almost no native linguistics remained was in Tasmania, where the indigenous population was obliterated (Richards 2001:72).

Some place name evidence does exist for a Pictish presence about the time that the Vikings arrived. The island names of Unst, Fetlar, and Yell are not Norse, and they may even be pre-Celtic. The name for a Celtic priest, *papar*, is present in some island names such as Papa Stour, as well as in names for features of the landscape (Crawford 1987:104, 211; Brøgger 1929:61). The component of *petta* that appears as part of the names for features of the landscape probably refers to the Picts (Crawford 1987:211). Such places are particularly prone to having "tales of supernatural things" attached to them (Brøgger 1929:60). This may be a product of the supernaturalization of the



previous population, as happened in Orkney. In contrast to the Shetlands, however, in Orkney, fanciful stories about these people survived to be recorded. For instance, the *Historia Norvegiae* states that the Picts in Orkney became weak at noon. This phenomenon is a repeating element in Celtic folklore (Crawford 1987:211).

Unfortunately, very little recognizable Pictish culture has survived in Shetland, though a general dearth of information regarding original Pictish culture exists (Richards 2001:72). What is known regarding their culture indicates many similarities with the Norse. For instance, both had writing, and burial practices were often similar (Ritchie 1974:31). They may have had other similarities that eased Pictish assimilation and hid their previous presence, though all evidence indicates that artifacts are typically diagnostically distinct. (Note that the identification of Pictish artifacts and architecture is often a process of elimination. The approximate time frame and regions that Picts occupied is generally known. Archaeological evidence from this time and region, when it cannot be attributed to other people, is credited to the Picts.) Another possible reason for the lack of recognizable Pictish culture, besides the theory that no Pictish population was on the island ca. C.E. 800, is that the population of the islands was small compared to the incoming population (Bigelow 1989:185). Considering the archaeological evidence for an abundant population in earlier times, the complete absence of people at later times seems (at least to some scholars) extreme (Bigelow 1992:13-14).

Some archaeological evidence not associated with habitation sites also points to the presence of the Picts. On St. Ninian's island, a hoard of Pictish treasure was hidden beneath a church. Such hoarding is commonly taken to be a reaction to the threat of

Viking activity (Roesdahl 1991:213). More importantly, a stone on the island of Bressay has writing both in runes (Norse script) and ogham (Celtic script) (Richards 2001:73).

#### **4.1.1 Archaeological Evidence of the Presence for the Picts at Jarlshof at the Time of Norse Arrival**

The evidence for interaction between the Picts and Norse at Jarlshof is slim but present. One type of artifact may represent this. Small stone disks of similar size, which are considered pot lids, were found in the Wheelhouse Phase and continued into the Viking Phases. These pot lids have also been found at other Pictish sites. The Norse had similar artifacts in Norway and in other parts of Shetland that were over twenty centimeters in diameter and that may have been used as baking griddles. Those found at Jarlshof and at Pictish sites, however, are for the most part consistently smaller than all those found outside of the British Isles (Bigelow 1992:15)

In the case of the rectangular structure built next to Huts 1 and 2 (see Chapter 5), Hamilton interpreted the mixture of pre-Norse and Norse features to be evidence of the mingling of the indigenous people with the newcomers (Hamilton 1956:88). In the case Building 1D, he took the mixture of pre-Norse and Norse artifacts as a sign of the native's subjugation to the newcomers (Hamilton 1956:111).

#### **4.1.2 On the Dearth of Shetland Viking Age Sites**

There is a severe dearth of Viking Age sites in Shetland. Only three or four sites other than Jarlshof contain Viking structures (at Underhoull on Unst [Small 1964-66; Small 1968a]; Sandwick on Unst [Bigelow 1985]; Da Biggins on Papa Stour [Crawford 1979; Crawford 1984]; and possibly Old Scatness [Dockrill 1998:75]). Only one of these sites is from the Early Viking period (Bigelow 1992:10). None show interaction between the Picts and the Norse (Bond et al., in press). This lack of sites continues to be a

mystery. Construction work of the past two centuries should have accidentally uncovered some structures. Except for Old Scatness, it has not. Also, in Iceland, middens associated with long vanished structures have often been found. In Shetland, no such middens have been uncovered. Pagan graves, which are archaeologically valuable because of their grave goods, are likewise only rarely identified (Bigelow 1992:10, 12). Typically, the lack of Viking remains is blamed on the reuse of buildings (such as will be seen at Jarlshof), the reuse of the stones themselves for new buildings, and the reuse of land for new buildings. These destructive processes, plus the fact that current populations are located on the same plots of land as past peoples, makes Norse sites, and particularly early Norse sites, elusive (Small 1967-8:155). Future investigation will disclose whether this is a result of poor recognition and reporting or whether Viking Period structures and middens are truly lacking (Bigelow 1992:12).

#### **4.2 The Interactions Between the Norse and the Picts in Shetland**

The presence of a population in Shetland at the beginning of the Viking Age is commonly accepted, though sometimes still debated. A more complex (and more interesting) question is the nature of the interaction of the indigenous and incoming populations.

All Viking Age settlements (with the exception of those in the Faroes, which had not been settled previously) in Britain are located on top of earlier sites. The Norse may have been utilizing the productive man-made soils that had been created in times past (Bond et al., forthcoming). In Shetland, where so little of the land is arable, all farming inhabitants would have settled near such land (but not necessarily on the best parts) (Small 1968b: 10). In the case of an aggressive incoming population, this would

naturally lead to old areas of occupation being claimed by the immigrants. This seems to be born out by the archaeological evidence. However, the literary and linguistic evidence may show a more complex picture.

#### **4.2.1 Phases of Settlement**

After studying the evidence in Orkney and concluding that the Picts were present when the Norse arrived, Buteux (1997:262) modeled three stages of interaction between the Picts and the Norse. The first is the “pioneer stage,” which would consist mainly of raiding and trading and perhaps winter camps. Orkney, like Shetland, is also often thought to have been a convenient stopping place for raiders on their way to mainland Britain. This first stage would leave few archaeological remains. The second is the “consolidation stage,” in which the Norse would have begun to make permanent settlements but not to encroach greatly on Pictish ways of life. The third stage is the “establishment stage,” in which the Norse would have dominated, abolished, and/or absorbed the Pictish people and culture (Buteux 1997:262). When applying this model to Shetland, the story told in *Egil Skallagrimsson’s Saga* may be referring to the parts of the islands that were uninhabited at the time the Norse first settled, i.e., at the consolidation stage (Fenton 1978:12). This saga also mentions that Orkney is one of the supposedly deserted areas that was settled. As will be seen in detail below, the natives were not only present on these islands but also had some kind of established relationship with the newcomers. *Historia Norvegiae*, on the other hand, may refer to the later establishment stage (Fenton 1978:16).

Relevant to proving the existence of these three stages in Shetland is place name evidence. Place name evidence was being used even before the discovery of Jarlshof in

an attempt to establish the chronology of settlement over all of the Northern Isles. Difficulties with this include determining when a name first came into use and the possibility of names being “recycled,” even though periods of popularity for names can be determined. Complications also arise in the translation of names when a region experiences a change in dialect. Place name analysis as utilized today tends to focus on relatively small regions, such as farms and townships. Data from smaller areas may one day be useful in generalizing over larger areas (Bigelow 1992:10-11; Nicolaisen 1983:73-74).

Despite these difficulties, place names may be useful, especially when used as corroborating evidence. (The data concerning the following theory will not be analyzed, as the author is not a linguist.) One theory, which has been proposed by Nicolaisen (1969), simply states that by C.E. 900-1000 all land suitable for growing or grazing had been taken (and renamed) by the Norse (Bigelow 1989:185). Nicolaisen’s theory is based on the idea that the distribution of place names correlates with the history of settlements. Place names with the element -sta- were common at the beginning of the Viking Age, and such names can be found throughout Shetland and nearby areas of Viking settlement, such as Orkney, mainland Scotland, and the Hebrides (islands to the west of Scotland). These names reflect the earliest settlements in these areas. The next chronologically significant place name element is -set-. Lack of this element in Icelandic place names means that it probably came into use before C.E. 870. Since the name was probably also used for some decades after its initial incipience, Nicolaisen (1969:12) estimates that it was most commonly used from C.E. 880 to 900. Names with this element saturate the Shetland Islands. Thus, they may represent “consolidation and

expansion” (Nicolaisen 1969:12,17). Assuming that the date of greatest popularity is correct and that the name element would still be in use for some time after popularity began to wane, then it may also be estimated that the settlement of Shetland was complete by C.E. 1000 (Bigelow 1989:185).

While not necessarily conflicting with Nicolaisen’s conclusions, Small (1972) includes archaeology with place names to broaden the database. According to Small, all broch sites correlate with “good land,” i.e., land that can be farmed. The oldest place names (those with the element -sta-, which are approximately forty in number) are generally not located on the good land. When they are, they are located away from brochs. Only two exceptions exist, one of which is on Unst and one of which is on Fetlar, and no archaeological proof is present to support early Norse settlements at either of these places. Jarlshof, whether it had been taken over from the Picts by the Norse or had been abandoned prior to Norse arrival, contains the only substantial evidence for an early Norse settlement established on a site that had also been inhabited by the natives.

Additional place name studies show that, towards the end of the ninth century, Norse settlement had expanded and apparently outnumbered brochs by three to one. Generally, though, the two types of settlements remained separate. From this evidence, Small (1982:242-246) concluded that natives still lived around the brochs at this time.

Small’s evidence does seem to indicate that Shetland did experience separable consolidation and establishment stages. The settlements of the consolidation stage seem to have proliferated in the ninth century. In the late ninth century, the Norse outnumbered the Picts, though they did not yet encroach upon Pictish regions. The establishment stage came later, wiping out Pictish culture beyond recognition. The major

exception to this pattern of settlement is Jarlshof, which was a Pictish site that was used by the Norse in the ninth century. Perhaps Jarlshof was subject to particularly aggressive early settlers.

#### **4.3 Archaeological Evidence for Interaction Between the Norse and Picts in Orkney**

For further information concerning the interactions of the Norse and the Picts, sites other than those on Shetland must be examined. This, of course, assumes that the circumstances in other regions, namely Orkney, are comparable to those in Shetland. This assumption (examined above) is made on the basis that, in both Shetland and Orkney, the preceding Pictish culture was effectively obliterated by Viking newcomers. The Orkney sites (Figure 5) that evidence interactions between Viking invaders and the indigenous Picts are examined below.

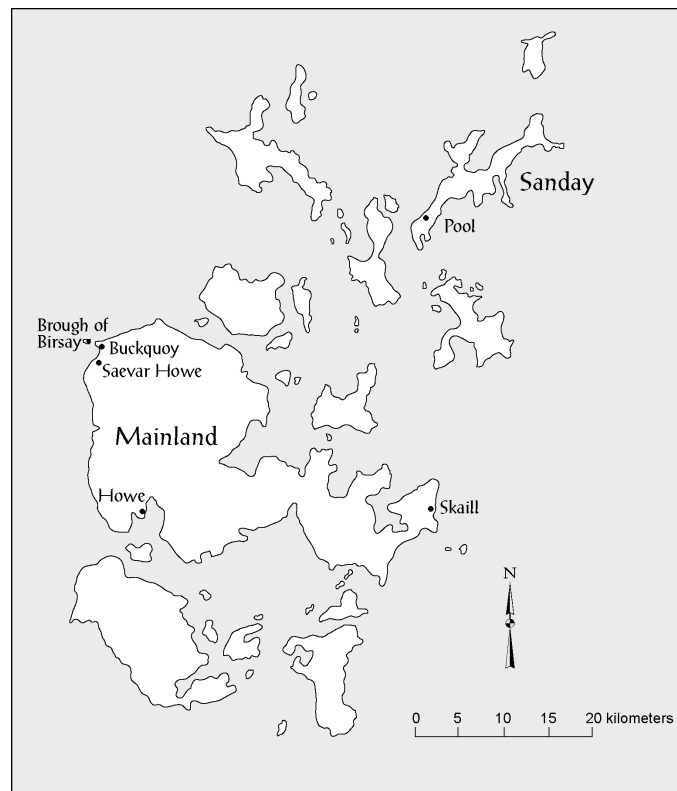


Figure 5. Orkney sites that evidence interaction between Viking and Picts (redrawn after Hunter 1986:14).

#### 4.3.1 Skaill, Deerness, Mainland Orkney

This complex is actually composed of six different sites. Though they are distant from one another, these components can be considered in combination because together they were continuously occupied from the early Iron Age to the sixteenth century. Sites 5 and 6 are pre-Viking. Sites 1, 3, and 4 are Viking and Medieval. Site 2 may show a continuation from the Picts to the Norse (and later to the Medieval era). Hair combs (Figure 6) associated with the earliest structure at Site 2 are Pictish. The architecture is most probably not Norse (Figure 7, left), as it is not rectangular and no benches were found along the walls. Therefore, the architecture may be assumed to be Pictish. If this is so, then the establishment of House 1 may be concurrent with the abandonment of one of the other Skaill sites. Based on the artifacts, the house may have been constructed in the eighth or ninth century (Edwards 1997:76-77; Gelling 1984:12-17). The possibility exists, however, that House 1 was a specialized form of Norse dwelling (Edwards 1997:78; see also Weber 1993:170).

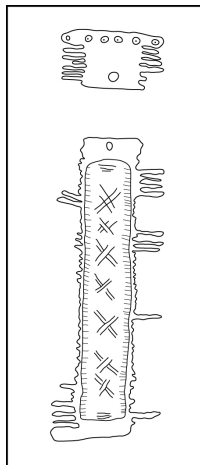


Figure 6. Examples of combs associated with House 1, Site 2, Skaill, Orkney (redrawn after Gelling 1984:29).

At a later point, the dwelling was remodeled to form House 2 (Figure 7, right). Though possibly only a temporary dwelling (because of the haphazard construction), it featured benches and a hearth, which suggests that it was a residence for some time.



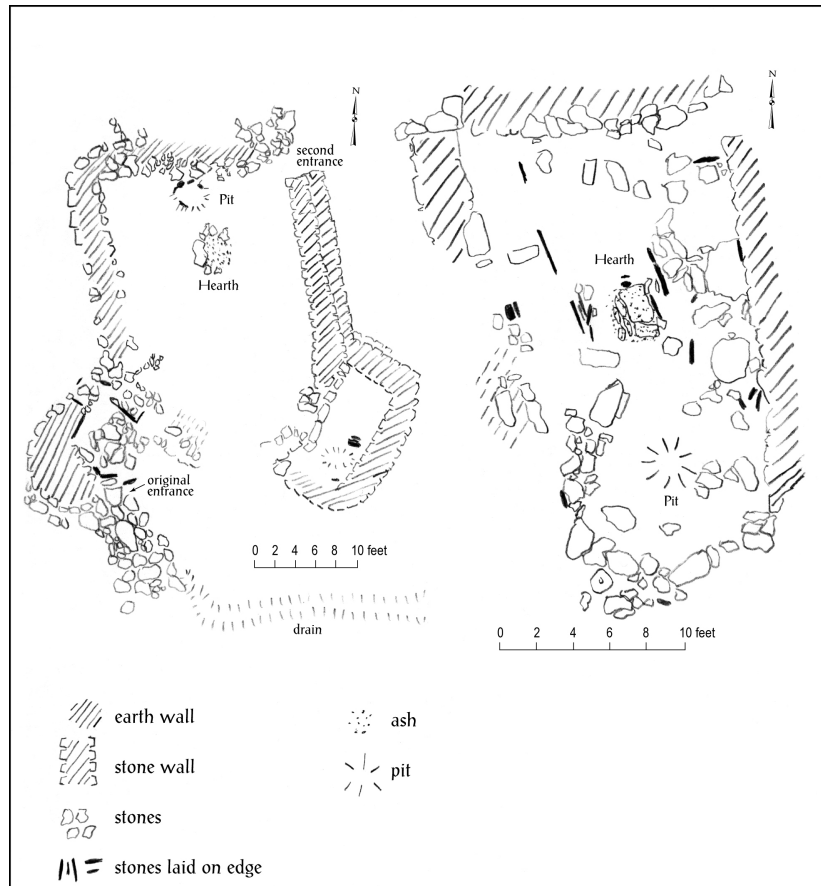


Figure 7. House 1 (left) and House 2 (right) of Site 2 at Skaill, Orkney (redrawn after Gelling 1984:14, 18).

Finds were “few and undiagnostic,” though the benches may indicate that the Vikings were responsible for the renovations (Gelling 1984:17-19; Edwards 1997:78).

House 3 (Figure 8) was built on the remains of House 2 some time after it was abandoned. House 3 is characteristically Norse: it was rectangular, had benches running along the longer walls, and had a long hearth. (If the previous house was meant as a temporary dwelling, then the permanent one that was built while House 2 was in use has yet to be found.) The most interesting aspect of House 3 is that Norse artifacts are

embedded in its walls. The presence of these artifacts is most probably due to residents of House 1 or 2 or another that has not yet been found (Gelling 1984:19).

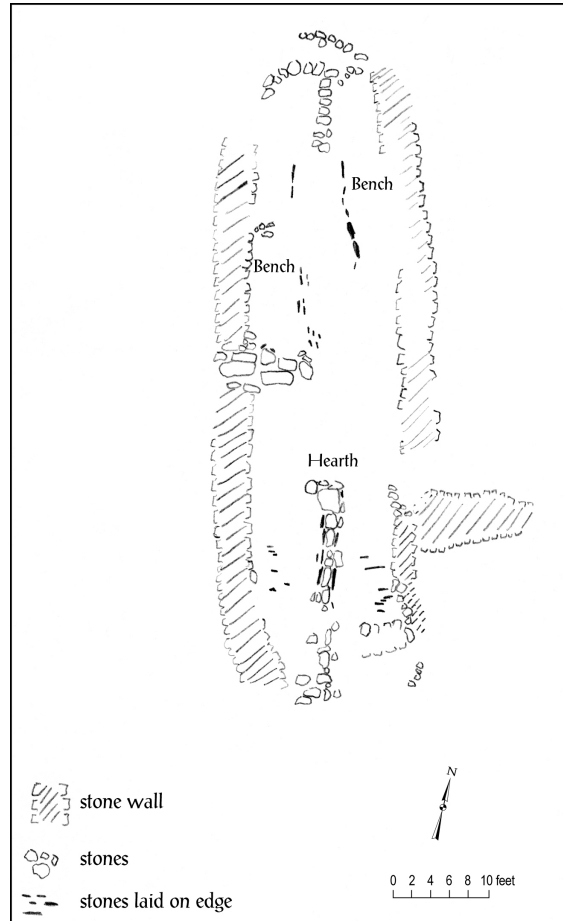


Figure 8. House 3 of Site 2 at Skaill, Orkney (redrawn after Gelling 1984:21).

The ambivalence that accompanies the early levels at Skaill is interesting in itself as regards the Pictish-Norse interface. Colonization is a “process and not an event.” This process may be evident in this ambiguity (Edwards 1997:76-77).

The hair combs from Skaill present some potentially less ambiguous information concerning this interface. Half of all that were found were made from reindeer antler. Reindeer do not seem to have survived in Scotland and England after 8300 BP.

Therefore, the antler would have been brought by the Norse. While some of the combs were made in the Norse fashion, some were carved in a native style. Most significantly, a native comb made of antler was found at Site 6. No Norse habitation is known to have occurred at this site, but Site 6 may have been occupied while the Norse were in residence at Site 2 (Buteux 1997:263; Weber 1993:161, 171).

#### **4.3.2 Buckquoy, Mainland Orkney**

Though about half this site has eroded away, the extant remnants contain evidence of a sequence of buildings occupied from the seventh to the tenth centuries. This construction took place in a restricted area and sometimes used the remains of older buildings as the basis for new ones. Phases I-II are Pictish. The building from these phases, which are each composed of several cells or compartments, are unusual but not unique, and the artifacts are characteristically Pictish. Phases III-V are Norse. The Norse buildings include a dwelling house, a byre, and a barn. Most of the artifacts are characteristically Norse. The Viking Age Norse, however, used steatite instead of pottery, and pottery identical to that found in the Pictish levels was found in all the Norse Phases. One such sherd was found in Phase III, though this may be due to commingling between earlier and later layers. Phase IV, however, contained three Pictish sherds, and Phase V contained one (Ritchie 1977:174-179, 182, 186, 189).

Also in the Norse layers were found a Pictish high-backed comb and several fragments of type B combs (Figure 9) (Ritchie 1977:196; Weber 1993:171). High-backed refers to a comb that is “single sided with tooth segments extending above the connecting plate” (Curle 1982:21). Type B combs resemble a Pictish type of comb dubbed Type A, except that “they are longer; the teeth are not graduated and do not

usually extended to the end of the comb, where there is a narrow vertical band; their connecting plates are not beveled and are semi-elliptical in form; their decoration is less ornate” (Curle 1982:56-57). Type-B combs do not seem to be Pictish or Norse. Though bearing a resemblance to English combs, they could possibly be the product of a combination of Pictish and English styles (Curle 1982:57-58). The high-backed comb was analyzed as “probably” being made of reindeer antler, as were some of the Type B combs (Weber 1993:171).

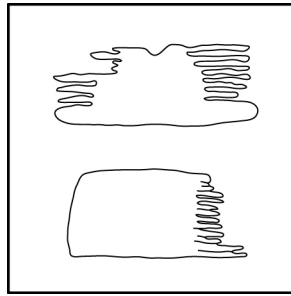


Figure 9. A Type B comb fragment (top) from Phase IV and a high-backed comb fragment (bottom) from Phase V, Buckquoy, Orkney (Ritchie 1977:196).

#### **4.3.3 Brough of Birsay, Orkney**

The Brough of Birsay is a relatively tiny island off the coast of mainland Orkney, not far from the Point (i.e., peninsula) of Buckquoy. A series of habitations occurred at one area of the island stretching from Pictish times, through Norse, and into the 12th century, when a church was constructed (Weber 1993:165).

The Norse layers were clearly defined into lower, middle, and upper horizons. For the most part, they were also clearly distinguishable from the Pictish horizon (Curle 1982:15). The earliest of the Norse buildings (16a) may have utilized previous Pictish constructions. This is surmised from the fact that it was “directly aligned...on pre-Norse

features,” and it adopted a former ditch as an outflow drain. What is so significant about this building is that no perceptible lapse of time took place between the two occupations, “even to the extent of continuing active working function” (Hunter 1986:89, 112).

In the Pictish horizon, two combs of reindeer antler were recovered (Weber 1993:165). Four native high-backed combs were also recovered (Curle 1982:50), as well as two double-sided Type-B combs that were manufactured of reindeer antler (Weber 1993:165). Many other Pictish artifacts were located in the Norse layers: nineteen small, bone hipped pins; four bone pins with iron shanks; a bronze pin; a bronze penannular brooch; and an iron bell. Most of these artifacts came from the lower Norse horizon (Curle 1982:50). Native pottery occurred in both early and later Norse periods (Hunter 1986:113).

#### **4.3.4 Pool, Sandy, Orkney**

This site was first occupied from the fourth millennium B.C.E. to the late third or early second millennium B.C.E. After a period of abandonment, this site was reoccupied by the Picts in the fifth century. The first indication of a Norse presence is a sub-rectangular (10 x 5 m) structure, which was built utilizing pre-existing ruins. The dimensions and lack of remaining internal features do not show it to be a Viking house proper. The artifacts (which are not specifically described by Hunter [1990:189]) associated with its occupation are a mixture of native and Norse types. No date can be assigned to the structure. A previously constructed Pictish roundhouse is known to have been leveled in the eleventh century and integrated into a Viking dwelling (Hunter 1990:178-179, 189-190).

#### **4.3.5 Saevar Howe, Birsay, Mainland Orkney**

This site has clearly distinguishable Pictish and Norse horizons (i.e., time passed before the site's reoccupation), so the associated structures do not demonstrate the way in which the Pictish and Norse interacted. Many of artifacts recovered from Saevar Howe are unprovenienced because of the unrefined techniques used to excavate the site. The artifacts, however, still contribute to the present argument. Two (possibly three) combs are high-backed combs of reindeer antler. One other (possibly two) of reindeer antler is a Type-B comb (Hedges 1983:81; Weber 1993:166).

#### **4.3.6 Howe, Stromnes, Mainland Orkney**

No Viking-Age occupation took place at this site. This is significant in that, in a Pictish phase that is dated from the fourth to seventh (possibly as late as the ninth) century, one native comb of reindeer antler was found. Two other combs were also possibly of reindeer antler (Weber 1993:170). The presence of reindeer antler in a Pictish context with no possibility of later Viking disturbance indicates that the Picts were obtaining antler from the Norse.

#### **4.3.7 Summary**

All the above sites give reasonable indications of interactions between the native and incoming populations. While the Pictish influence inevitably disappeared at each over time, a relationship of some type did seem to typically take place (i.e., the relationship between them was *not* only of raiders and victims). The indeterminable nature of the buildings of the Pict-Norse interface some of these sites (Skaill, Pool) demonstrates that the ambiguity of those at Jarlshof is not unique. Structure 16a at the

Brough of Birsay potentially demonstrates the dominant relationship of the Norse, in that they appear to have seized the building while it was still in use by the Picts.

As stated above, colonization is a process and not an event. This process may be said to be one of “directed contact”, i.e. the Norse imposed changes on the Picts in their interactions with them (Spicer 1961:520). This imposition caused the Pictish culture in the Orkneys and Shetland to gradually disappear altogether. This process is similar to that which has been proposed for some Native American groups in their interactions with Europeans. It begins with a voluntary incorporation of elements of a foreign society; this ultimately culminates in the forced assimilation of the people to the foreign influence (Spicer 1961:532).

Pictish artifacts found in Norse layers and Pictish combs made of reindeer antler (no matter where they are found) are the best indicators of close social interactions between the two. (The preference for reindeer antler may be due to the decline in red deer [Weber 1993:172].) For the most part, they (even Type-B combs) do not indicate whether the Picts ever lived in the same areas as the Norse or whether they were peripheral “both metaphorically or physically” (Crawford 1987:146-148). Hipped pins, however, which are “the most typically Pictish of all the finds on the Brough” of Birsay, may offer another clue. These pins have a “swellings” beneath their “ball-heads” that is designed to prevent slipping of clothing (Curle 1982:19). Such pins are not believed to have been of any use to the Norse. Therefore, their presence in Norse levels at the Brough of Birsay indicates that at this site that the Picts and Norse were living together (Weber 1993:171).

## Chapter 5

### Jarlshof

The site of Jarlshof (Figure 10) is located on the east side of the West Voe of Sumburgh, a bay opening to the south in southern Sumburgh. One of the most fertile regions of Shetland, Sumburgh is located on southernmost tip of the mainland (Figure 11). The regional name for the ruin that was the only building visible at the site until the late nineteenth century was “de Laird’s Hoose.” Sir Walter Scott translated this into Old Norse as “Yarlshof” for his book *The Pirate* (later written “Jarlshof,” but pronounced the same) (Hamilton 1956:1-2).



Figure 10. Jarlshof (photograph taken by Steven Dockrill; used with permission)



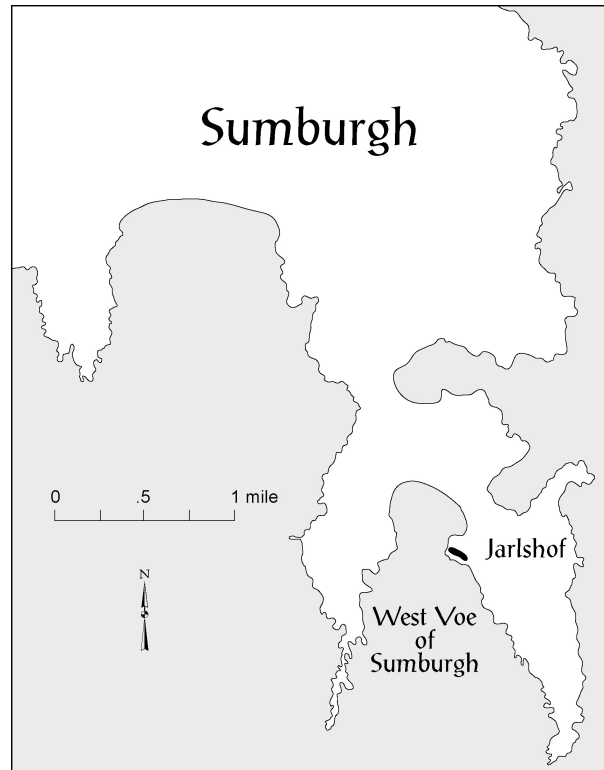


Figure 11. Jarlshof location (redrawn after Hamilton 1956:2)

### 5.1 History of Excavations

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the erosion that had been occurring on the west side of the site for centuries was hastened by a sequence of storms, exposing previously hidden structures. From 1897 to 1905, the owner of land, Mr. Bruce, undertook excavations in order to investigate them. His efforts exposed a broch, two wheelhouses, and a courtyard wall. Recognizing the importance of the site, the Bruce family gave it to H. M. Office of Works in 1925 (Hamilton 1956:6-7).

Further investigations by the Office of Works revealed that the site was quite extensive. This led Dr. A. O. Curle to make a series of excavations from 1931 to 1935 in which he uncovered much of the Late Bronze Age portion of the site, as well as evidence of Norse occupation. In 1937, Professor V. G. Childe and Miss B. Laidler excavated an area next to the Bronze Age settlement in order to obtain a complete sequence of events at the site. After the Ministry of Works acquired an additional portion

of the site from the Sumburgh Estate Co., Dr. J. S. Richardson revealed further Norse remains. His investigations were stopped short in September 1939 by war (Hamilton 1956:7-8).

J. R. C. Hamilton undertook additional excavations from 1949 to 1951. At the end of these, he published *Excavations at Jarlshof, Shetland*. This book collated all the information available to him into one comprehensive volume (Fojut 1998:19; Hamilton 1956:7).

## 5.2 Hamilton's Research

The first settlement at Jarlshof occurred during the Late Bronze Age (Table 1). The resulting “village” was a sequence of circular structures, the earlier of which have an amoeba-like shape to their inner dwellings (Figure 12). Two major occupations took place during the Late Bronze Age. Buildings I – IVa were built during the first; after enough time had passed for these to be covered by sand, Buildings IVb - IV, along with two souterrains (underground chambers), were constructed (Hamilton 1956:18-24, 32-34).

Table 1. The Pre-Viking Phases of Jarlshof.

| Occupation         | Period in Time                         | Structures Built  | Previously Built Structures That Went Out of Use |
|--------------------|--|---|--|
| Late Bronze Age    | 1800 B.C.E. – Before Buildings IVb- IV | Buildings I *– IVa  |  |
| Late Bronze Age    | After Buildings I - IVa – 800 B.C.E.   | Buildings IVb - IV and two souterrains  | Buildings I – IVa                                |
| Iron Age           | 200 B.C.E. – 300 C.E.                  | Broch, with courtyard; a later aisled round-house   | Buildings IVb- IV and the souterrains            |
| Iron Age (Pictish) | 300 – 800 C.E.                         | Wheelhouses 1 – 4; later, Passages Houses I and II; later, Hut 1; later Hut 2<br><br>*Roman and Arabic notations follow Hamilton (1956) | Broch  |

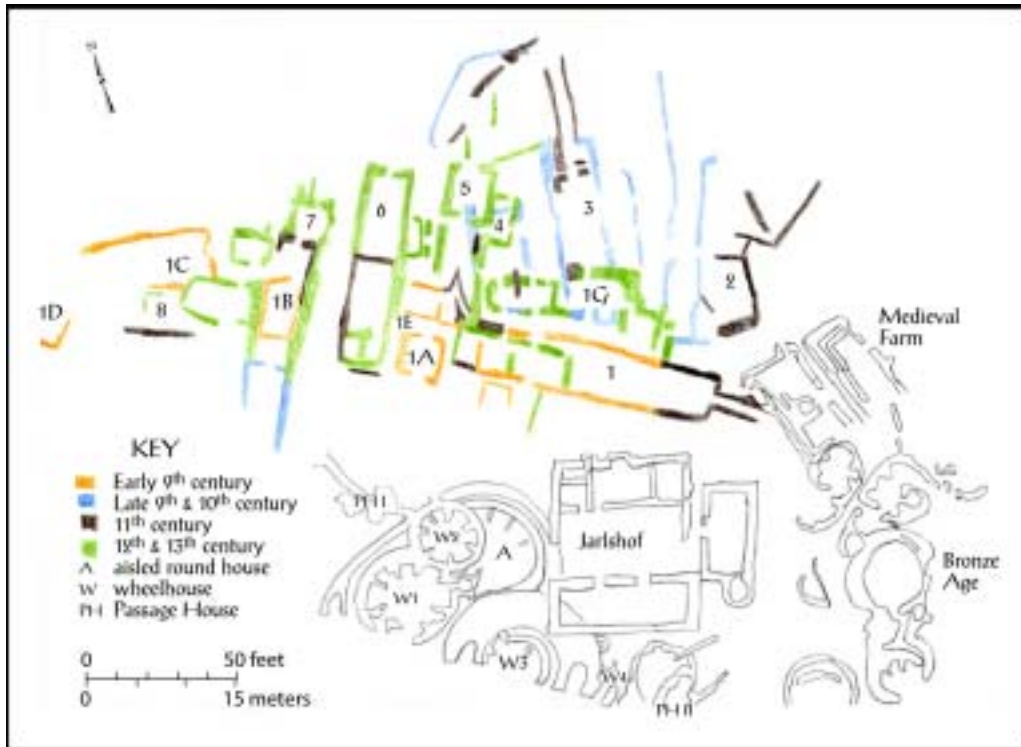


Figure 12. Jarlshof master plan (redrawn after Hamilton 1956).

After this village was abandoned, it became covered with wind-blown sand. Later, Iron Age people from mainland Scotland migrated to Shetland and built a broch with a courtyard next to the earlier remains (Figure 12, the wall to the north of W1, W2, and A). Only half of this broch remains today; the other half has been eroded by the sea (Hamilton 1956:44-46).

Not long after the erection of the broch, an aisled round house and a byre (later overlain by a wheelhouse) were constructed. This round-house was not completely free-standing, as one section followed the broch wall (Hamilton 1956:48, 54-55). This was followed by a succession of wheelhouses built by a people who emigrated from northern Scotland. While these people continued to use a portion of the round-house, they constructed Wheelhouse 1 (Figure 12), which experienced two levels of repavement over its lifetime (Hamilton 1956:58-60). The new-comers also reduced the broch in height. Shortly after the construction of Wheelhouse 1 and this reduction, several other

wheelhouses were built. Of these, Wheelhouse 2 holds the most information. Five periods of occupation were uncovered, each of which was separated by sand blows. At a later time, Wheelhouse 3 was constructed inside the broch. The presence of Wheelhouse 4 is indicated only by its four remaining piers (Hamilton 1956:66-75).

At a later point, Passage House I (Figure 12), a subterranean dwelling with a stone revetment, was built to the northwest of Wheelhouse 2 and provided the entrance into this wheelhouse. Wheelhouse 1 was also occupied when this passage house was in use. A similar building, Passage House II, was built to the east of the Wheelhouse 4 and provided an entrance into it (Hamilton 1956:77, 80-83). Next, Hut 1, a semi-subterranean structure, was built at the far western edge of the site. After it was deserted, Hut 2 was constructed to the southeast. The western entrance into this structure was later blocked by a rectangular building. In shape, this rectangular building resembles the Norse structures that were to follow. The partial remains of this building, however, show that it was constructed in the fashion of pre-Norse buildings, i.e., “with a basal course of uprights carrying horizontal masonry.” It also had a rectangular Viking hearth inside of it. Unfortunately, if any artifacts were recovered from this structure, Hamilton did not report them (Hamilton 1956:85-88).

If the site had been deserted at the time of Viking arrival, then it had not been abandoned for long (Hamilton 1956:129). Norse occupation of Jarlshof went through seven distinguishable phases (Figure 12, Table 2). On the basis of evidence from graves in the Orkneys and the Hebrides, Hamilton (1956:93, 106) dated the beginning of Viking settlement to C.E. 800.

### **5.2.1 Phase I**

Five buildings were constructed during the first phase (Figure 13). The main building is dubbed the Parent Farmstead House 1 (Figure 14) because this was the first of the Norse residential structures to be built. This was a typical house of the Viking Period.

Table 2. The seven phases of Viking Jarlshof and successive constructions.

| Phase                | Period in Time   | Structures Built  | Structures That Went Out of Use                 |
|----------------------|--|---|---|
| I                    | From ca. 800 C.E. to mid-ninth century   | House 1*, Period I; Building 1A; Building 1B; Building 1C; Building 1D  |   |
| II                   | From mid-ninth century to either the end of the ninth century or beginning of the tenth century                      | House 2, Period I; Building 1E; Building 1F   | Building 1A                                     |
| III                  | From either the end of the ninth century or beginning of the tenth century to the first half of the eleventh century | Addition to House 2; Barn south of Building 1B; House 3, Period I   | Building 1E                                     |
| IV                   | From first half of the eleventh century to second half of the eleventh century or the twelfth century                | Outhouse 4  | Building 1F                                     |
| V                    | From the second half of the eleventh century or twelfth century to the twelfth or thirteenth century                 | House 1, Period II; House 2, Period II; House 3, Period II; Outhouse 4 altered; House 6, Period I; House 7, Period I; House 8 | Building 1B                                     |
| VI                   | From the twelfth to thirteenth century; or just the thirteenth   | House 1, Period II altered; House 1G; House 6, Period II; House 7, Period II  | House 2; House 3; Outhouse 4                    |
| VII                  | Thirteenth century and possibly fourteenth century   | House 1, Period III; House 5; House 6, Period III; House 7, Period III  | House 8; Building 1C; East building of House 1G |
| Post-Norse; Medieval | Built in the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century   | Medieval Farm   | All previous buildings                          |
| Historical Period    | Sixteenth century to seventeenth century   | Jarlshof<br><br>*Roman and Arabic notations follow Hamilton (1956)  | Medieval Farm                                   |

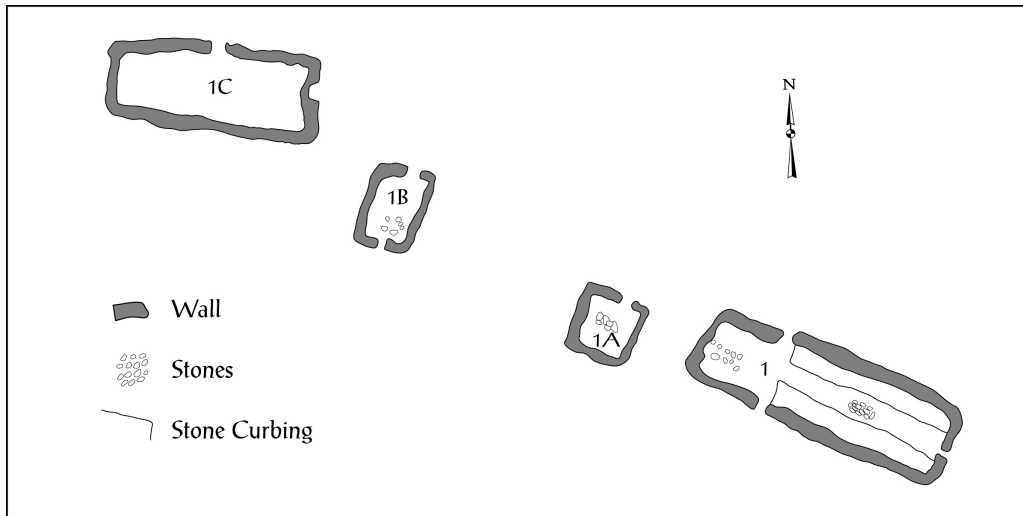


Figure 13. Phase I of Norse Jarlshof (redrawn after Hamilton 1956:Figure 51).



Figure 14. The Norse area of Jarlshof. Building in the foreground is the Parent Farmstead House 1.

All walls but the north were manufactured with an earth core and stone facing on both sides; the north wall was made from alternating layers of earth and stone for protection against wind and cold. Almost all walls of the subsequent Norse buildings at Jarlshof were constructed with an earth core and stone facing on both sides (Hamilton 1956:107).

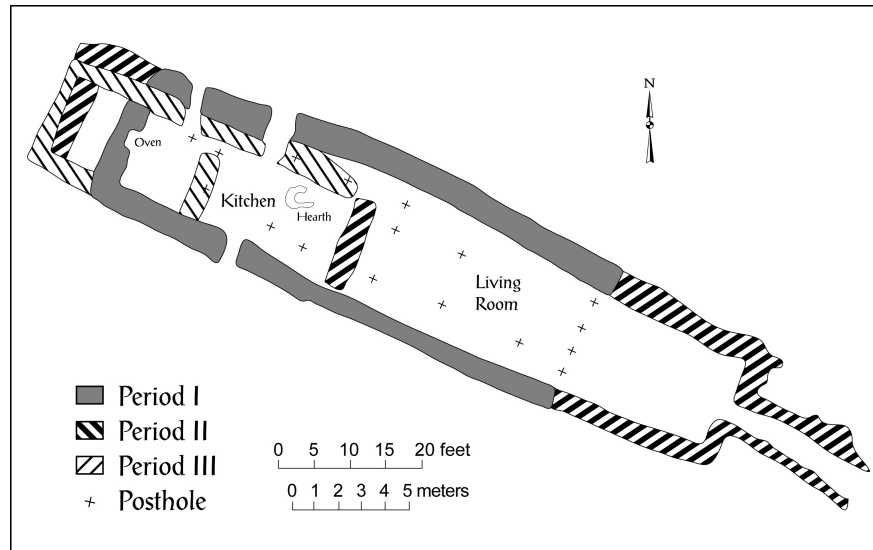


Figure 15. House 1 (same as Building 1 in Figure 13) of Norse Jarlshof (redrawn after Hamilton 1956:108).

House 1 has ample evidence of postholes for the support of a roof; these are typical features of Norse houses (Figure 15, Period I). The structure was altered twice during its use-life. The northwest room was used as a kitchen during its first period, as evidenced by an oven and a hearth that heated stones to be put in the oven. In the living room and running next to the north wall, a stone curb testifies to the bench that ran along this wall. Along the opposite wall is a single slab that is a similar distance from the south wall, which indicates that another bench occupied that space. In-between these benches was a long, rectangular, stone-lined hearth or *langeldr* (also referred to as a longfire). Again, such benches and hearths are typical of Viking houses of the time (Hamilton 1956:107-109).

To the west of House 1 are the remains of a small, square structure, Building 1A. The most outstanding feature of Building 1A is a *langeldr*. Hamilton hypothesized this structure to have been a bathhouse or *hof* (a heathen temple). The bathhouse theory is unlikely on account of the “carefully constructed *langeldr*,” so Hamilton (1956:110) opted for the *hof* theory (see Section 4.3.2 for further discussion).

Building 1B was constructed northwest of Building 1A (Figure 13). This structure had a central hearth, as indicated by four large stones in the center of the structure. Among these was a smaller stone that exhibited pockmarks two inches in diameter, indicating that it had been used as an anvil. Fifty-two fragments of iron slag associated with the hearth were also found. On this evidence, 1B is presumed to have been a smithy.

To the northwest of Building 1B, Building 1C was constructed (Figure 13). A lack of features in Building 1C and the presence of a stamped floor led to the conclusion that this was a byre or space for housing cattle or sheep.

To the southwest of Building 1C, Building 1D was constructed (Figure 13). Building 1D overlay the pre-Viking huts described above. Though only a langedr and portions of two walls remain, the building is significant because it was constructed in the same manner as the buildings constructed prior to the Viking arrival. A mixture of pre-Viking (“bone pins, numerous slate implements and stone pounders”) and Viking (“Norse loomweights, spindle whorls and bone pins”) artifacts were also recovered from this structure (Hamilton 1956:110-111).

The artifacts recovered for the whole of Phase I include, steatite loomweights, pebble loomweights, steatite vessels, line sinkers, sandstone and slate discs or pot lids, claystone and steatite spindle whorls, claystone and steatite beads, stones with drawings (including people, ships, and an animal), and bone awls, needle cases, combs, and pins, as well as bronze pins (Hamilton 1956:116-128).

### **5.2.2 Phase II**

Phase II (Figure 16) is dated to the mid-ninth century on the basis of artifacts in the earliest deposits (Hamilton 1956:137). During this phase, Building 1A, the hof, originally constructed in the first Norse phase of Jarlshof, was torn down. Three new buildings were also constructed. One of these was another house, House 2, though not much remains of this feature (Figure 17, Period I). Only a few postholes (the locations of



which are not given in the original map) could be detected. Paving does seem in evidence in the northern portion of the north room and in the central region of the north room, indicating that this room was a byre (housing for cows and sheep) (Hamilton 1956:130-132).

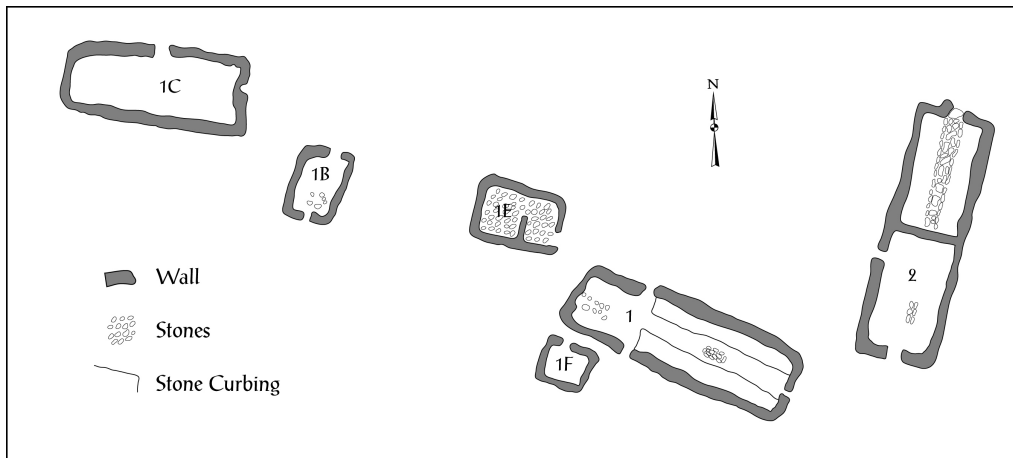


Figure 16. Phase II of Norse Jarlshof (redrawn after Hamilton 1956:Figure 61).

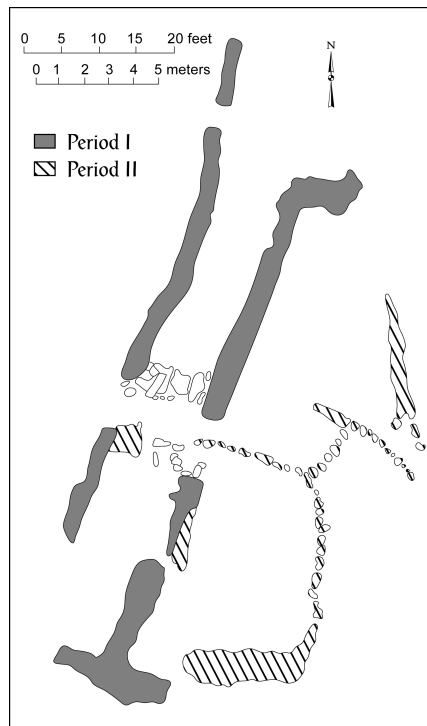


Figure 17. House 2 of Norse Jarlshof. Location of postholes for House 2 not indicated in original map (redrawn after Hamilton 1956:131).

To the northwest of House 1, Building 1E was constructed (Figure 16). Building 1E consisted of two rooms that were both paved with stones (Figure 16). For this reason and because of the “black and greasy” soil in between the layers of paving, this structure is believed to have been a stable, i.e., housing for horses (Hamilton 1956:132-133).

To the south of the western end of House 1, Building 1F was constructed (Figure 16). Only the west wall and parts of the interior of Building 1F survive, and even these sections of the structure were not in good condition. The diminutive size of the structure and the possible presence of benches may indicate that this was a latrine (Hamilton 1956:133).

The artifacts recovered for Phase II include pebble loomweights, steatite vessels, stone discs or pot lids, sandstone and steatite spindle whorls, bone pins, and steatite beads, as well as one of glass (Hamilton 1956:135-136).

### 5.2.3 Phase III

Based on the lack of refuse on the floor of House 2, Hamilton (1956:137,154) asserted that Phase II was relatively brief, and that Phase III (Figure 18) began in either

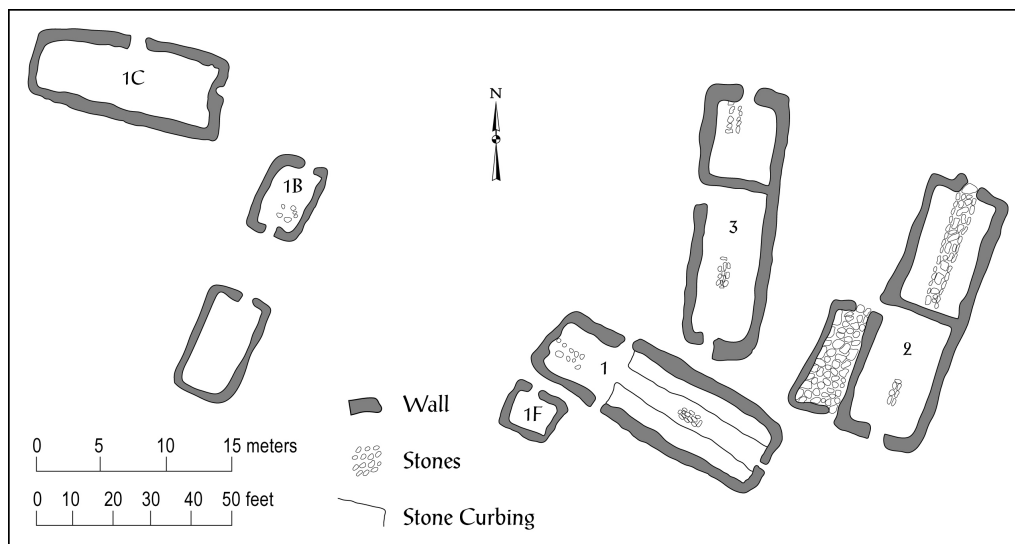


Figure 18. Phase III of Norse Jarlshof (redrawn after Hamilton 1956:63).

the last decades of the ninth century or the first decades of the tenth century. During Phase III, Building 1E went out of use, two structures were built, and an addition was made to House 2. The augmentation to House 2 was cobbled (and so was used for sheltering livestock) and was divided into two compartments later in its life (Hamilton 1956:140).

One of the new structures was built to the west of House 1 and south of the smithy (1B). In the vicinity of this structure was a “rectangular stone setting” that bears a strong resemblance to modern haystack bases used by Shetlanders. This building is presumed to have been a barn (Hamilton 1956:140).

House 3 (Figure 19, Period I), the other building constructed during Phase III,

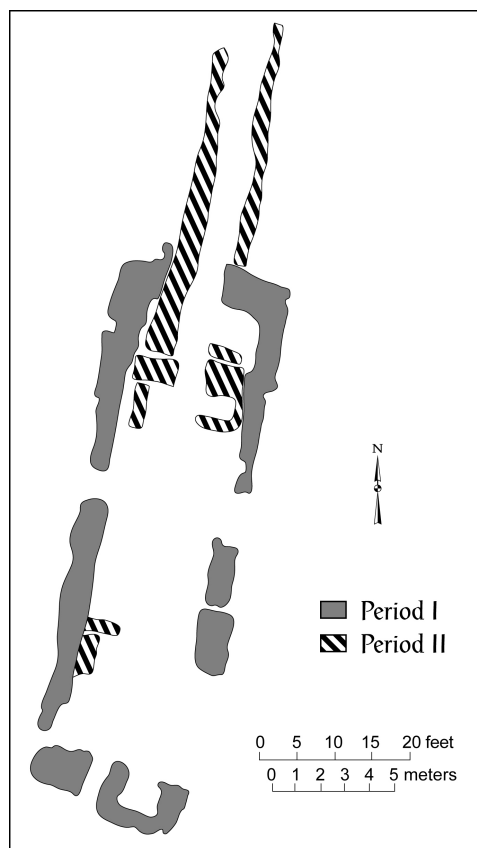


Figure 19. House 3 of Norse Jarlshof (redrawn after Hamilton 1956:139).

underwent extensive renovations during its lifetime, which accounts for at least some of its disjointed look. The internal features are difficult to determine, but during its first period, it was divided in two like House 2. Peat ash, suggesting the presence of a hearth, indicates that the southern portion was the living area, and paving in the northern portion of the north room suggests that it was a byre (Hamilton 1956:137-138).

The artifacts recovered for Phase III include pebble loomweights, steatite vessels, steatite line sinkers, stone discs or pot lids, steatite spindle whorls, a bone spindle whorl, a sandstone spindle whorl, steatite and glass beads, stone with line markings, bone needle cases, bone awls, bone pins, bone combs, a bronze pin, and an iron fishing hook (Hamilton 1956:142-153)

#### 5.2.4 Phase IV

Phase IV (Figure 20) was a minor stage that saw the abandonment of Building 1F and the erection of Outhouse 4 to the west of House 3. Outhouse 4 was paved and was not built before the first of half the eleventh century, based on associated artifacts. No specific use for the building is conjectured (Hamilton 1956:154-155).

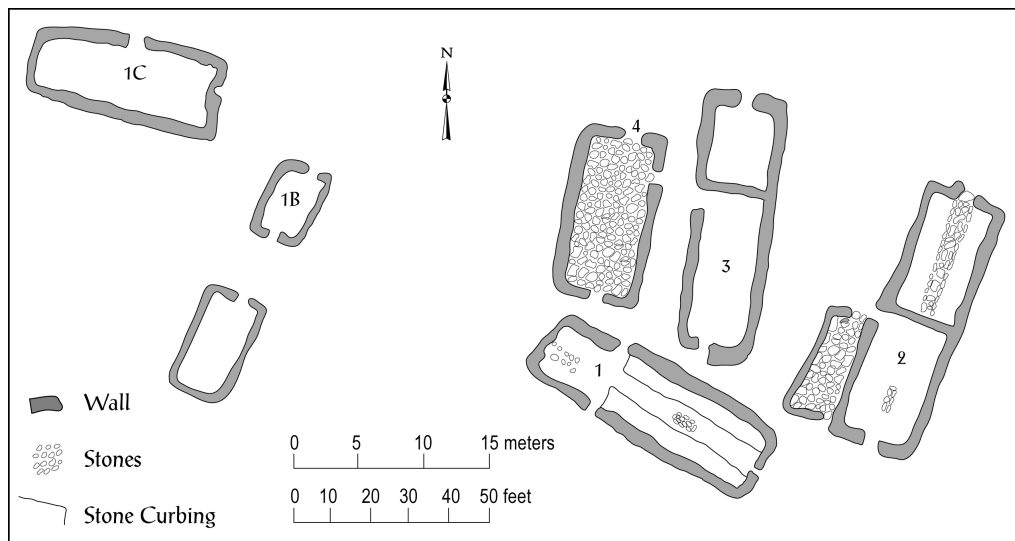


Figure 20. Phase IV of Norse Jarlshof (redrawn after Hamilton 1956:Figure 71).

The artifacts recovered for Phase IV were few. They consisted of two pebble loomweights, twenty-six unidentifiable steatite fragments, and an unidentifiable slate fragment (Hamilton 1956:156).

### 5.2.5 Phase V

The dates for Phase V (Figure 21) range from the late eleventh or twelfth century to the twelfth or thirteenth century (Hamilton 1956:168). This phase saw extensive changes to the site, including the end of the use of the langeldr. Building 1B was torn

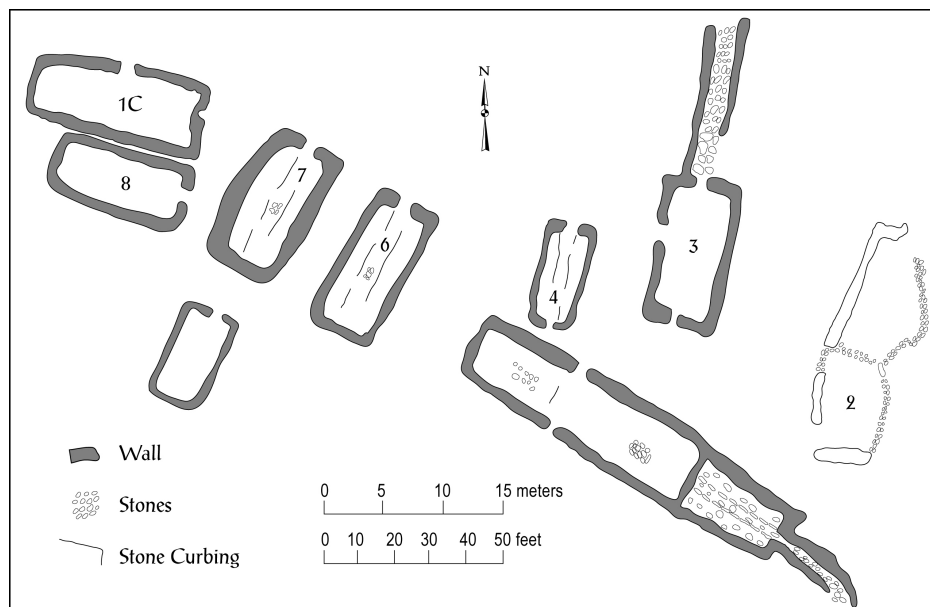


Figure 21. Phase V of Norse Jarlshof (redrawn after Hamilton 1956:Figure 72).

down, several other buildings were altered, and several new buildings were constructed. The first major alteration of House 1 occurred in this phase. The east end was extended by about 23 feet. and paved in order to turn it into a byre. It was also furnished with a paved cattle road or *féta-gata*. The west end of House 1 was expanded. The living room was contracted in order to enlarge the kitchen, which may have also begun to serve as a sleeping room (*stofa*). House 2 was altered to form two compartments, which Hamilton

conjectured were used as compounds for livestock. House 3 was contracted in length. Like House 1, it was furnished with a paved cattle road and was paved inside, indicating that it became a byre. Outhouse 4 was abandoned and shortly thereafter altered and paved, and also became a byre. It was not used as a byre for very long (as shown by the thin layer of refuse on the paving) and was modified to become a smithy (as shown by the insertion of a hearth and recovered iron slag). The older smithy was abandoned during this phase (Hamilton 1956: 158-160).

Three other buildings, Houses 6, 7, and 8, were also erected in Phase V. On the basis of their size and the artifacts found within them, they are known to be houses. Not much of the original walls of House 6 Period I (Figure 22) remain, as they were rebuilt in

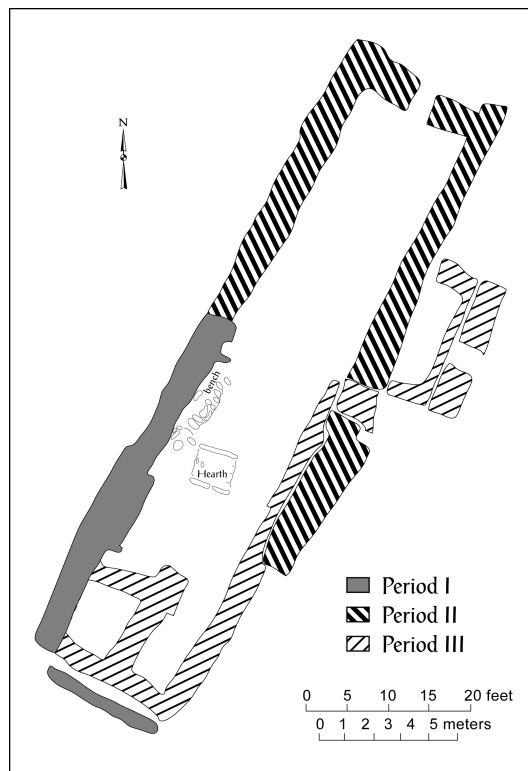


Figure 22. House 6 of Norse Jarlshof (redrawn after Hamilton 1956:161).

later Phases. This house had a central hearth and traces of benches (only a portion of the west bench was large enough to be indicated on original map [Figure 22]) along the walls that ran beside the hearth. A cooking pit (not indicated on original map [Figure 22]), with burnt stones in situ, was found near the northeast corner of the hearth. This house may have been divided into two rooms; the interior projection from the west room 15 feet from the northern gable may indicate a partition (Hamilton 1956:160).

The features of House 7 (Figure 23, Period I) are difficult to reconstruct owing to later alterations (Periods II and III). However, peat from a central fireplace and benches (not indicated on original map [Figure 23]) along the walls could be detected (Hamilton 1956:164).

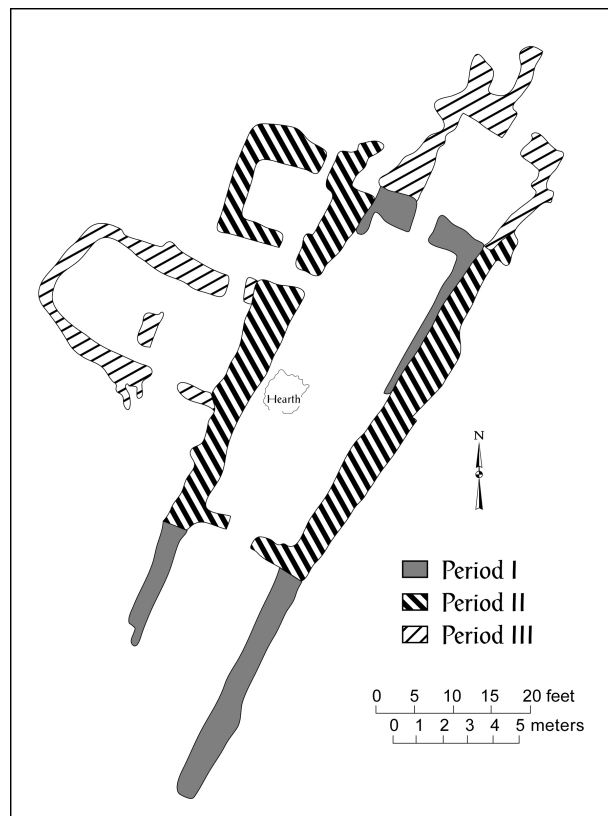


Figure 23. House 7 of Norse Jarlshof (redrawn after Hamilton 1956:162).

Only partial remains of the walls of House 8 indicate its presence. No internal features (Figure 24 Period II) can be reconstructed because of later construction. This house only experienced one Period. On the map (Figure 24), Period I refers to the previously constructed building 1C. Period II refers to House 8. Period III refers to the extension of House 7 over the area of House 8, after this house went out of use in Phase VII (Hamilton 1956:164).

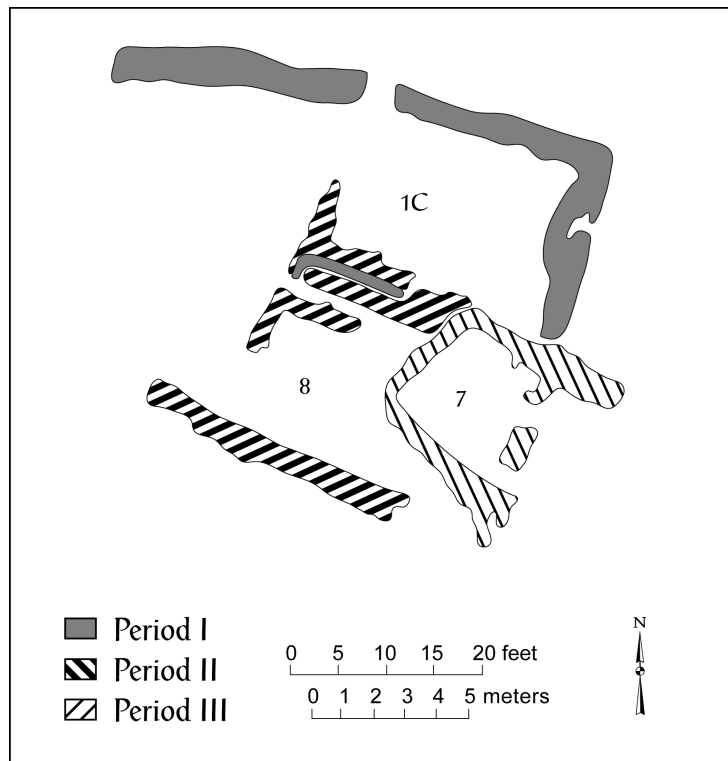


Figure 24. House 8 of Norse Jarlshof (redrawn after Hamilton 1956:163).

The artifacts recovered for Phase V include line sinkers, stone discs or pot lids, steatite vessels, clay pottery sherds, steatite spindle whorl, a bones spindle whorl, glass beads, stone with line markings, bone pins, and bone combs (Hamilton 1956:164-168).

#### 5.2.6 Phase VI

Phase VI either lasted from the twelfth to thirteenth century or was restricted to the thirteenth century. In this Phase (Figure 25), Houses 2 and 3 went out of use, House



1G was created, Houses 7 and 8 experienced alterations, and House 1 gained a minor addition. Two buildings to the north of House 1 were constructed using the partial remains of Houses 3 and 4. The eastern building is connected to House 1; the western building is divided into two rooms. Together they make up House 1G. Based on analogy with Icelandic farms, a platform on the south side of the western half of the west building may have supported a structure that held hay. This room may have housed sheep or pigs. The small size of the east building and its lack of a doorway may mean that it was used as a sty or lambing pen (Hamilton 1956:169-171).

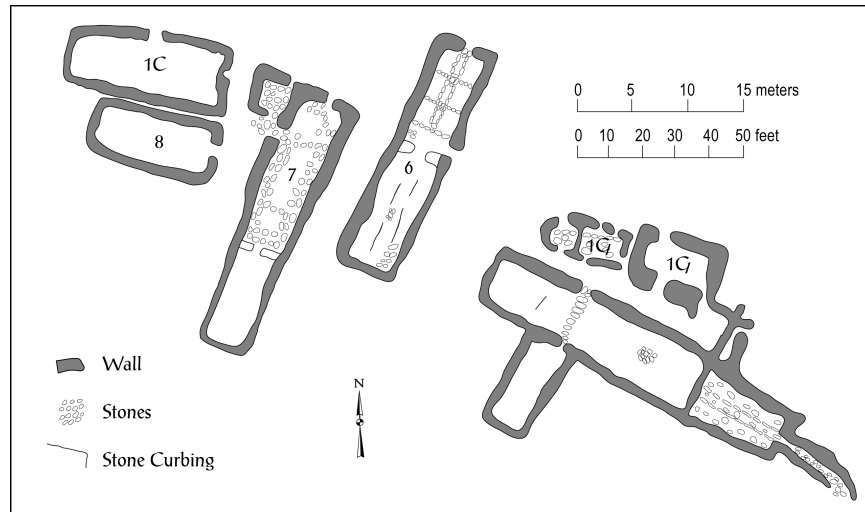


Figure 25. Phase VI of Norse Jarlshof (redrawn after Hamilton 1956:Fig. 79).

As noted, House 6 and 7 both underwent alterations. House 6 was extended to the north (Figure 22, Period II). The partitions of this addition, along with the greasy feel and black color of the artifacts found therein, suggest that it contained stalls for livestock. The older area was still for human use, with new paving being set around the hearth. The west bench was also refurbished. House 7 (Figure 23, Period II) underwent drastic alterations. It was widened, connected to the building to the south, and had an extra room attached to the northern end of the west wall. The building was comprised of a total of three rooms. The northeastern room, being paved and having evidence for fireplaces,

was presumably a living room. There was, however, no well-defined hearth (Hamilton 1956:169-173).

The artifacts recovered from Phase VI include steatite lamps, a steatite vessel, a clay pot, and bone combs (Hamilton 1956:173-174).

### **5.2.7 Phase VII**

Based on artifactual evidence, Phase VII (Figure 26) is dated to the thirteenth and possibly into the fourteenth centuries (Hamilton 1956:189). In this phase, House 8, Building 1C, and the eastern portion of House 1G went out of use. Several other buildings experienced alterations. House 5 (Figure 27) was constructed in this phase. It had an annex on the north half of its east wall; the main portion had three divisions. The north division had a floor of compacted earth. The middle section was partially paved. House 1 entered its third distinct phase. A new building was constructed on top of the old, using portions of the old wall for building material. The new construction is peculiar in that it does not have an earth core. The south portion of House 6 was slightly contracted, and a compartment in the southwest corner was constructed. This may have been a storeroom. Cobbling was placed between this storeroom and the east wall; the cobbling runs along the length of the east living room wall. Similar to House 5, House 6 had an annex attached to it on the east side of the north half. House 7 underwent major alterations. A room was added to the north side. A byre with two cubicles, which may have taken the place of the south room, was added to the east side. That this was a byre is indicated by the presence of a drain (used to divert urine from livestock). The byre partially overlies the disused remains of House 8 and 1C (Hamilton 1956:176-178).

The artifacts recovered in Phase VII include pebble loomweights, stone discs or pot lids, steatite vessels, steatite line sinkers, slates with line markings, a sandstone lamp, a bone spindle whorl, a steatite spindle whorl, bone pins, numerous pottery sherds, a steatite lamp, bakestone fragments, and a glass bead (Hamilton 1956:180-183).

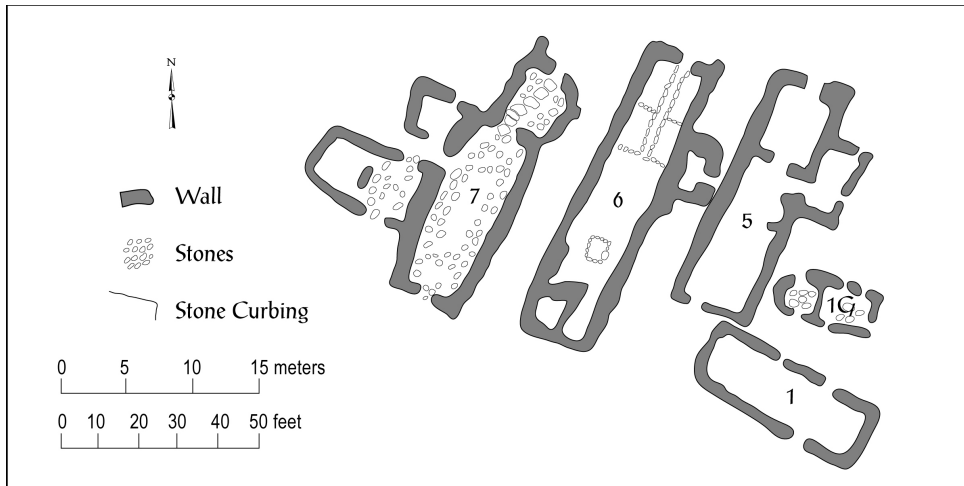


Figure 26. Phase VII of Norse Jarlshof (redrawn after Hamilton 1956:Fig. 80)

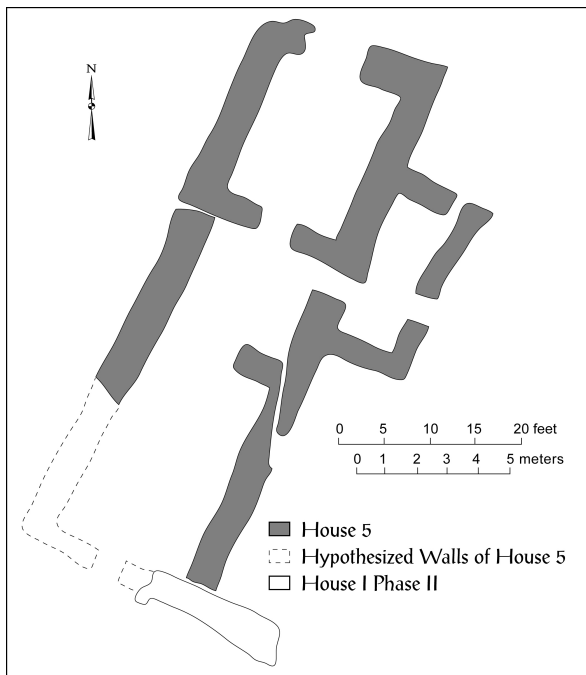


Figure 27. House 5 of Norse Jarlshof (redrawn after Hamilton 1956:175).

### 5.2.8 The Medieval Farmstead

Based on associated artifacts, the next phase of the site was erected in the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century. Whatever its exact date, it has been shown stratigraphically to come after Phase VII. This is when the buildings called The

Medieval Farmstead appeared (Figure 12). Hamilton does not include this as a Norse phase, though the construction is that of stone faces with an earth core. These buildings went through three periods. For the first, Hamilton asserted that the larger structure (the eastern one) probably was the dwelling house because of the presence of red peat and stamped clay on the floor. In the second period, the northern portion of this was rebuilt, and the building was turned into an outhouse or byre. The internal entrance into the eastern annex was possibly blocked for a time. The western building appears to have been a place for drying corn throughout its life, as shown by the presence of kilns (Hamilton 1956:190-193).

### **5.2.9 The “Jarlshof” Building**

The final phase of the site enters into the historical period. “Jarlshof” (Figure 12) was built in the sixteenth century by the Earls Robert and Patrick Steward. The building was in a state of ruin by the end of the next century (Hamilton 1956:194-196).

## **5.3 Subsequent Research**

Various aspects of the Jarlshof site have been investigated since its original excavation. These investigations have been limited, as only so much can be done without having to reevaluate the entire site (Forster 1998:24). The data presented in Hamilton’s *Excavations at Jarlshof, Shetland*, which is part summary of previous work and part monograph, may be cleaner than the actual data that he had on hand. In other words, the data were simplified to present a coherent picture of the site (Fojut 1998:23). No complete reevaluation of the site, however, may be possible. Not only is Hamilton’s *Excavations at Jarlshof, Shetland* the most publicly accessible work that summarizes the site, it also contains the most information available anywhere regarding the site. When the Jarlshof artifacts were given to a museum for storage, only the best preserved were kept. Unfortunately, the small finds numbers (which are used to record the provenience of each artifact) for these were lost (Forster 1998:3, 24). The primary records of the excavations are available. Without Hamilton’s input (which is not possible due to the

fact that he is deceased) however, extracting useful information from these records is difficult (Fojut 1998:23). The possibility of destroyed buildings in the region of the eroded western portion of the site adds to the complexity that a complete reevaluation would entail.

Hamilton has come under attack because the methods of archaeology were not as well developed at the time Jarlshof was excavated as they are today. Hamilton's work itself, however, is highly detailed but also clear and concise. Any problems that exist are strictly due to the methodology of the time, though Hamilton made the most of the techniques that were available (Forster 1998:23-24).

### **5.3.1 The Houses**

Hamilton's identifications of structure function at Jarlshof sometimes relied on the absence rather than the presence of certain features. Given this, and in light of new data from sites excavated since Hamilton's report was written, a reexamination of structure function is warranted. Though the interpretation of structure function is a difficult topic, at Jarlshof, function can reasonably be limited to structures inherent in an agricultural lifestyle (Hunter 1986:107).

House 1 Period II and House 6 Period II were interpreted as containing byres on the basis of ethnographic analogy with eighteenth and nineteenth century Shetlandic architecture. Like the byres of this time period, the sections of the houses in question had paved floors with stone-lined drains down the middle. They also did not contain hearths and had fewer artifacts than those structures for human occupation or use. Archaeology has since corroborated the argument that these were byres. Structures uncovered in Iceland and Faroe since 1950 demonstrate that byres, which were identified by stone stall dividers, had central stone-lined drains (Bigelow 1985:111-112). The byre interpretation of House 6 has also been bolstered by comparison of the Late Norse phase of the house at Sandwick. At the byre end of that house, "gable wall blocks of the Sandwick house were unbounded and inset from the ends of the longwalls" (Bigelow 1987:29). This would

have made the gable easy to take apart and rebuild as needed to remove dung and to place or remove straw bedding. The arrangement of the gable of the Sandwich house is much like that of the gable end of House 6.

The northernmost rooms of House 5 and House 7 Period III were not assigned a function by Hamilton. Bigelow (1985:111-112; 1987:28) makes the case that they were byres also (though he also states that Hamilton originally said that these rooms were byres). Bigelow relies on reasoning similar to that of the interpretation for the byres of House 1 and House 6 —ethnographic analogy with eighteenth and nineteenth century Shetlandic architecture and a paucity of artifacts.

Hamilton also ascribed a byre function for House 2 and House 3, but this has been called into question. Hamilton called them byres because of their partial paving, which would have been convenient for cleaning dung off of byre floors (Small 1968a:65). Though byres in Iceland and the Faroes were found to have stone-lined drains, they did not necessarily have paved floors. Often, they had hard-packed earth floors instead. House 2 and House 3 did not have drains, the diagnostic characteristic for byres. Therefore, they probably were not byres (Bigelow 1985:112).

In addition to using features like hearths, benches, drains, and paving to identify structure function, Hamilton (1956:160-164, 174-176) also used artifact frequency to identify the human living areas of House 5, 6, and 7. Doubt may be cast upon this interpretation as this difference could be due to careful cleaning of byre ends. Hamilton's view is supported, however, by the finds from the Late Norse (twelfth to thirteenth centuries) site of Sandwich. The majority (over 90%) of the artifacts that were recovered were taken from the section of the site interpreted as containing human dwellings on the basis of the presence of hearths and benches. This suggests that a customary "spatial organization" dictated the behaviors that took place in various sections of the dwellings. In other words, the continued human use of these areas (which have similar features) in

each of these buildings caused a large number of deposits, not a lack of cleaning (Bigelow 1987:28-29).

Certain exterior rooms (Figure 28, a) attached to House 5, House 6 Period III, House 7, and House 1 Phase II, that were (at least partially) paved, were not assigned a function by Hamilton. However, one room in House 1G (Figure 28, a) was hypothesized to be a stable or byre. In contrast, Icelandic sagas indicate that these rooms may have been indoor privies, as they were easily accessible and had drains (indicated on Figure 28 by the small gaps in the southern portions of the walls of these rooms). Further excavations may shed light on the interpretation of such rooms. The other exterior rooms of House 1 and House 7 (Figure 258, b) were originally interpreted as a lambing pen or sty and a byre, respectively. Hamilton's hypothesis, however, relied on little evidence. In fact, these rooms lacked the kind of features that would be useful in interpreting them. They may have been multi-use rooms or may have simply been areas of storage for food (Bigelow 1987:29, 31).

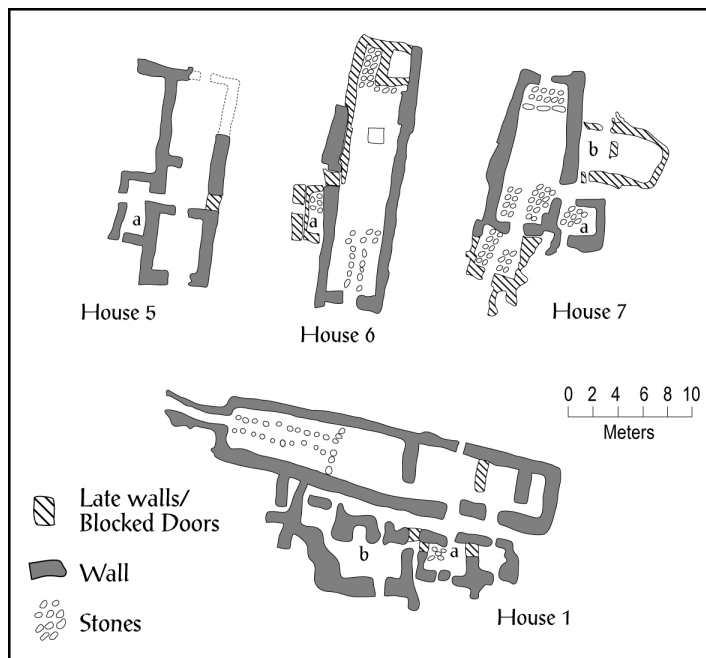


Figure 28. Houses 1, 5, 6, and 7 of Jarlshof. The uses of the rooms labeled a and b are under question (redrawn after Bigelow 1987: 26).

### 5.3.2 Outbuilding 1A

Hamilton interpreted Outbuilding 1A as a hof (a type of temple according to the Icelandic sagas) or a bathhouse. Norse archaeology of recent decades has shown that identifying temples and religious artifacts related to Scandinavian religion is extremely difficult. The identification of artifacts, such as pendants classified as “Thor’s hammers” or statues identified with deities (Gräslund 2000:58-60), are, at best, good hypotheses and at worse random guesses, due to the lack of written material that directly confirms these identifications. Such potentially religious artifacts were not found anywhere at Jarlshof.

Indeed, “religious” artifacts are absent from all structures previously identified as temples. During a time that Icelandic archaeologists were enamored with the idea of finding evidence of pre-Christian religious activity, dozens of temples were identified. This was partially on the basis of the sagas. They stated that hofs consisted of two rooms. The smaller was used for the placement of idols, and a larger one was utilized for sacrifices. These former “hofs” are now simply viewed as farmhouses (Fridriksson 1994:48, 74).

The description of hofs in the literature leaves Hamilton’s classification of Building 1A as a possible hof suspect. Even more puzzling is that other saga references mentioned a ceremonial, pagan place called a *hörgur*. No written descriptions of the *hörgur* are given, though the term itself is thought to refer to a pile of stones or a stony hill. Despite this, various *hörgur* were identified in Iceland during the same time that hofs were being recognized. Structures designated as *hörgur* were square shaped (at least more so than the “hofs”) and one roomed, just as Building 1A is.

The terms *hof* and *hörgur* were recognized among Icelandic archaeologists as associated with certain types of architecture at least by the late 1800’s (Fridriksson 1994:59-62). Yet, Hamilton was evidently unaware of the other archaeology on religious structures, even though he briefly compared Building 1A with the hofs of Iceland



(1956:110). Ultimately, no matter what the original designation was or what it should have been, Building 1A cannot be said to have any connections with religion.

Because of its square shape, Hamilton also put forward the possibility that Building 1A was a bathhouse. He doubted this interpretation, however, because of the presence of a “carefully constructed langeldr” (longfire) (1956:110). The manner of construction, not the mere presence, of the hearth must be what he was referring to, as bathhouses needed an open hearth or stone oven to heat up stones on which water was thrown (Simpson 1967:54, 57).

The only artifacts that were reported to be associated with Building 1A were two bone-combs and an iron spear head (Hamilton 1956:110). Combs seem a likely artifact in a bathhouse, but a spearhead is less likely. The interpretation of this building as a bathhouse cannot be confirmed but it cannot be dismissed either.

### **5.3.3 Chronology**

Jarlshof contains the longest building sequence in the Northern Isles. Its artifacts are potentially valuable in creating a timeline. Steatite, which was commonly used by the Norse instead of clay and other materials, is particularly important in this respect, as the stone is present in all seven phases of Norse Jarlshof. Hamilton (1956:188) briefly discusses the chronology of steatite in terms of the vessels of steatite. The change in the size and shape of these vessels throughout Norse Phases is still seen as the most important factor in the steatite chronology. The placement of other steatite items in this timeline, however, is also significant. This includes the appearance of loomweights in Phase I (soon replaced by beach pebbles), the increase of line sinkers in Phase V, the appearance of lamps in Phase VI, and the appearance of bakestones in Phase VII. Hamilton utilizes Scandinavian studies in his observations of steatite at Jarlshof, as no studies had been undertaken previously on the stone elsewhere in Britain. He produced his own classifications of vessels, as others were inappropriate. The general doubt,

however, about the integrity of Hamilton's data has also cast doubt on the validity of any chronology deriving from Jarlshof (Forster 1998:30-33).

A comparison of the Jarlshof steatite chronology with the sequence of steatite from other Norse sites in Shetland, Orkney, and mainland Scotland has been undertaken. In this study, the distance of Shetland sites from steatite quarries was taken into account. Also, such stone in Orkney and Scotland is presumed to have come from Shetland. In the case of Orkney, this is because Shetland is the closest source. In the case of Scotland, this is because regions further south do not possess related steatite artifacts (Forster 1998:37-50,68, 72). While a chronology for the Northern Isles was not produced, the study did reconfirm (as much as possible) the validity of the steatite chronology from Jarlshof. The dates proposed by Hamilton for the seven phases have yet to be confirmed. They may soon be, at least in part, by comparison with the dating of Scatness, a site currently under investigation.

Generally, due to lack of additional data, the only major change made to Hamilton's timeline is that the period of the Medieval Farmstead has been incorporated into the Norse period. This is because no major change in lifestyle from that which was practiced in the previous period can be detected. Thus, the Norse occupation lasted from ca. C.E. 800 to ca. 1500 (Forster 1998:25).

#### **5.3.4 Underwater Archaeology**

Jarlshof itself has been investigated only once since Hamilton's excavation; this was in the summer of 1972. A team directed by Ian Morrison of the University of Edinburgh undertook an underwater archaeological expedition to explore the possibility of the truth of a portion of the *Orkneyinga Saga* (Morrison 1973:14). The relevant section of this saga tells of the shipwrecks of Rognvald and Earl Harald on the Shetland coast. It also tells of a shore from which boats would launch to fish near the dangerous tide-race (whirlpool) of Dynrost. The location of this tide-race, which is also a good

fishing area, is known. Thus Jarlshof was a likely spot (as shown below) from which to launch boats (Morrison 1973:112-115).

The underwater team turned up no definitive evidence of Norsemen. Few artifacts would have survived the centuries in the water, where rough seas and a stony substrate likely ground most artifacts into indistinguishable bits. Stones from disintegrated buildings would not be recognizable either, because they were not altered when used. In addition, no evidence of boat shelters was found at Jarlshof (Morrison 1973:120-121).

However, the evidence was not entirely negative. Since part of the site was already known to be eroded, the researchers already knew that the peninsula where Jarlshof was constructed once extended further than it does today. How far it once extended, however, was something that was not known. A rock platform underlies the sandy surface of the site (Figure 29). This rock platform more than likely had the shape

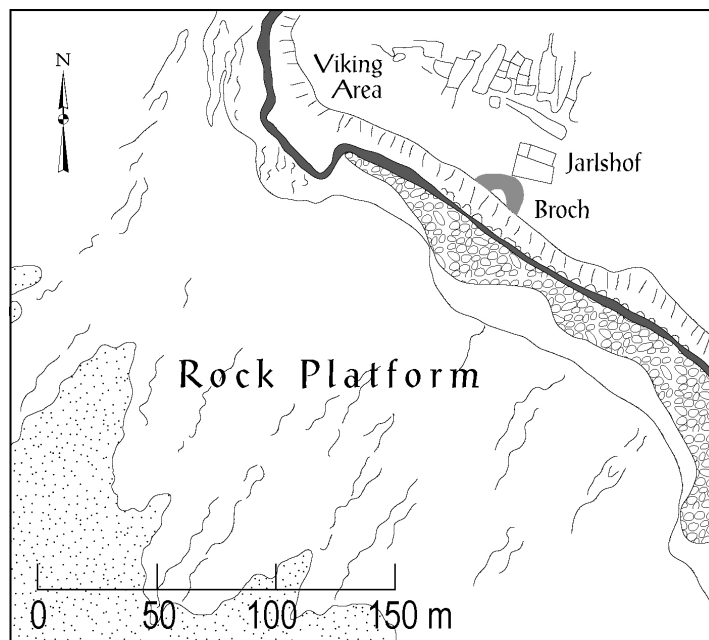


Figure 20. Rock platform underlying the waters of the coast of the Jarlshof site (redrawn after Morrison 1973:120).

one thousand years ago that it has now. This platform also sets a maximum limit for the extent of the shoreline. The minimum estimate for the land was obtained using the well in the broch. The water table, which makes an upward arch from the shore to the inland, does not at present reach the well. In order for water table to supply the well, the land would have to have extended further towards the sea, so that underneath the broch the arch of the water table would be high enough to reach the well. Based on the current sea level, the minimum extent of the site at the time of the building of the broch is the edge formed by the seaward edge of the rock platform. (This would be incorrect if the previous sea level was higher than at present. However, peat beds and man-made structures that are now submerged show that the sea level was probably lower in the past.) Therefore, at the time of Norse occupation, the shore was probably further away from the settlement than at present. In addition, geological evidence points to continual erosion of the shoreline from the time of occupation into the present (Morrison 1973:122-124).

After studying the other bays in the Dynrost region, Morrison also concluded that the configuration (as shown in Figure 11) has not changed much since the Viking Era and that Jarlshof would have been important to the local community because it “offered a range of complementary roadstead and beaching places” (Morrison 1973:136). It could also have been important in trade because a short portage would have made it easy to depart on the east or west coast in order to catch a good wind or avoid the tide-race.

#### **5.4 Hamilton’s Research as a Beginning**

Though Hamilton does give an excellent summation in his book of the work that has been done at Jarlshof, he does not delve into the placement of the site into a wider social context of Shetland as a whole or of the Northern Isles. When he does, he notes basic trends and draws conclusions from them with little input from information outside of Jarlshof, and many of these theories concern occupations other than Norse. Though the theories were partially a product of capricious imagination (Fojut 1998:22), Hamilton

also suffered from a lack of data to compare with his findings. Since his time, an abundance of information has become available. Some of this can be compared with data from Jarlshof, and some can be used to supplement the gaps in the Jarlshof data that were created due to a lack of more sophisticated methods at the time of excavations. Much of this data (reviewed in Chapters two through five) indicates that the Norse were thoroughly enmeshed in the changes of the time. All of the new data reveal the complex veins of culture that met and mingled on the Shetland Islands.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Conclusions**

This thesis has explored a number of topics relevant to the Viking settlement of Britain and specifically of Jarlshof. As discussed in Chapter 2, the prehistory and history of successive occupations of different cultures in the Shetlands can be seen in domestic architectural styles. Shetland has been inhabited at least since 3,000 B.C.E./5,000 B.P. The islands have experienced periodic waves of immigrants thereafter, including a proto-Pictish people around 200 B.C.E./2150 B.P. These peoples built brochs. The Picts that invaded later constructed their own buildings, including the distinctive wheelhouses. The Vikings arrived around 790-810 C.E./1,160-1,140 B.P. Shetland also later received Scottish immigrants, particularly after it became a possession of Scotland in 1469 C.E. Certain Scotsmen claimed large portions of the islands, demanding exorbitant rents from their tenants. These tenants adapted to these demands, and to the demands of the climate, by developing the system of crofting, in which women farmed and men fished. Relief came to the crofters in the latter half of the nineteenth century through laws passed in mainland Scotland. Though previously undergoing a period of decline, the population of Shetland has increased in recent decades because of jobs brought about by oil production. Shetland is still under the rule of Scotland, though even today a romantic hope remains for the return of the islands to Denmark.

As discussed in Chapter 3, “liminal” and “transitional” are words that describe the Viking periods. At the beginning of the era, the peoples of the Norse homelands were turning their attentions outwards to search for wealth in order to forge alliances. This search for wealth may have been caused, at least in part, by overpopulation in certain

classes. Younger sons may not have wanted to break up larger farms through inheritance or may not have been satisfied with their inheritance, so they sought fame and fortune through other means. Ironically, at the same time, one of the primary forces that pushed the Norse outwards, i.e., a growing consolidation of political power within the region, was also producing changes in the economy that would make alliances through the exchange of valuable goods obsolete. In short, Scandinavia was changing from an economy that relied on redistribution to one that relied on supply and demand.

Europe itself was going through transitions that made it susceptible and attractive to attack (even though the Norse had already established trade links with the continent). Two of the major attractions for the Vikings were the growing trade centers within Europe and monasteries; both of which had great accumulations of wealth. Europe was not sufficiently politically organized until the eleventh century to put an end to Viking raids.

Place name and modern linguistic evidence indicate that the Norse settlers came from Norway, as told by the sagas. Place name, linguistic, and biological evidence give conflicting evidence concerning precisely where in Norway emigrants derived. Place name evidence does indicate the presence of a few Danish settlers.

The shape and features of the first house built by the Norse at Jarlshof, a rectangular building with a long central hearth, two rows of posts, and benches along the sides, was typical of the Norse in other regions at the time. The building materials, however, stone walls with an earth middle, were different than those used in other areas, but were suited to the Shetland environment. The general uniformity of houses at the beginning of the Viking Age is indicative of a relatively large amount of cultural

homogeneity at the time. The persistence of these houses in regions where they were uneconomical, such as in Greenland, attests to their symbolic importance.

Longhouses, which replaced these skáli at Jarlshof, were present in parts of Europe centuries or perhaps millennia prior to their appearance in Viking Shetland. However, this history is sketchy at best, so not many conclusions can be drawn regarding invention versus dispersion. It is significant that the longhouses of Jarlshof appear to have been present before those of mainland Britain, so they could not have diffused from there. What is of interest concerning other Viking Age regions is that, with the exception of the Unst example, longhouses appeared after firehouses in all Viking colonies. Some widespread force(s) must have driven this architectural shift. Environment, cultural values, and economy have variously been hypothesized as the cause. While ultimately all these factors may have played a role, evidence at present favors economic causes. The bones of calves (as found at Sandwick) indicate that cows were more important for their milk than their meat. Keeping cattle warm in the shared space of the longhouse would have increased milk/butter production; the surplus could have been used for taxes. These taxes were first put into place in the late eleventh century; according to Hamilton's chronology, this correlates with the beginning of Phase V, which is when the first definitive longhouses were erected at Jarlshof. As seen in Chapter 5, this hypothesis is supported by the fact that, during various phases, Houses 5, 6, and 7, and late House 1 of Phase V, were indeed longhouses and by evidence that casts serious doubt about whether the earlier Houses 2 and 3 had byres. It is also supported by evidence that attests that during Phase V of Jarlshof, Shetland transitioned to an economy based on taxes. This correlates with the hypothesis discussed in Chapter 2—that the



Viking Age ended with a switch from a gift economy to an economy based on wealth through trade and taxation.

Another significant long-term change at Jarlshof was an increase in the number of residential buildings in use at one time. This attests to a population increase in Shetland, either through immigration or native births. The restriction of population to areas of land that were located next to (but not on) arable land undoubtedly led to the establishment of tightly spaced houses, as can be seen in Shetland today.

The division of land would probably have followed odal law, the Germanic system of land ownership and inheritance. The clustering seen at Jarlshof is evidence of the antiquity of the method of land management in Shetland, called runrig, that was documented in the historical period. The complexity of this system, which breaks the land into strips that are used by alternate households, may be rooted in the complexity of the system of odal law.

As discussed in Chapter 4, the nature of Pictish political organization was more scattered and rural than that of most of the rest of northern Europe, and the Picts did not have connections to European powers. Thus, the Pictish population of Shetland and Orkney succumbed to the Vikings.

As exemplified by the treasure of St. Ninian's Isle, the Picts of Shetland had treasure that would have been attractive to raiders. The extent of the raiding on Shetland, however, is unknown. Wealth through raiding, however, was not the Vikings' only concern during the later part of the Viking Period. Vikings also came to control many areas and eventually colonize them. This was partially in order to continue extracting wealth from terrified citizens. However, as described in the sagas, this may also have

been due the consolidation of political power in Scandinavia. This consolidation led to the loss of authority for many of the traditional chieftains, who subsequently left Norway to develop power bases elsewhere. In addition, and as discussed above, colonizers also probably included younger sons, who sought their fortune away from their native lands.

Archaeological and place name evidence were reviewed to determine if the Picts were present when the Norse first arrived in Shetland. Literary evidence was contradictory, suggesting both that the Picts were residing in Shetland and the view that the islands were empty. Archaeological evidence is not well developed in this regard, as a dearth of Shetland Viking Age sites. Very little recognizable Pictish culture has survived in Shetland. Little is known about Pictish culture, however, so this lack may be due to lack of recognition.

Buteux (1997) developed a model for the stages of Norse settlement and interaction with the Picts in Orkney. According to this model, three phases—pioneering, consolidation, and establishment—took place during their takeover of Orkney. In the pioneering stage, raiding and trading took place and winter camps may have been established. This stage left little archaeological evidence. In the consolidation stage, the Norse began to make permanent settlements but did not encroach greatly on the Pictish ways of life. In the establishment stage, the Norse would have dominated, abolished, and absorbed the Pictish people and culture (Buteux 1997:262). Independent literary, place name, and archaeological evidence indicate that the first Norse settlements were not on Pictish sites, indicating that, not only were the Picts present at the time of Norse arrival, but that the three phase model may also apply to Shetland.

There is only limited evidence from Jarlshof that indicates interactions between the Picts and the Norse. Thus, to gain an understanding of the nature of their contacts, Orkney sites were examined. The evidence at several sites indicated some sort of interaction with the natives. Pictish pottery sherds were found in the Norse levels at Buckquoy and at Brough of Birsay. Other Pictish artifacts came from the Norse levels of the Brough of Birsay, where the Vikings appear to have immediately appropriated one of the buildings after its abandonment by the Picts. There was a mixture of native and Norse artifacts at Pool; the artifacts at Pool were found in a building that could not be established as Pictish or Viking. Similarly, at Skaill, two buildings were excavated that could not be assigned to either of these peoples. This is similar to the evidence from Building 1D. This structure was built using a combination of Pictish and Norse techniques and contained a mixture of Pictish and Norse artifacts.

The presence of Pictish bone combs on Norse sites may indicate that amicable trading relationships or possibly even intermarriage existed between the two peoples. Assuming that evidence from the Orkneys can be applied to Shetland, and taking into account the apparent separation of Pictish and Norse sites at the beginning of Norse occupation, the only evidence for Norse hostility to native Shetlanders is their almost complete disappearance (assuming they were there in the first place). Jarlshof is the only Shetland site with any evidence indicating that Picts were residing at the site at the time of Norse take-over. Perhaps Jarlshof was subject to particularly aggressive Norse activities.

In Chapter 5, Jarlshof itself was examined in detail. This site experienced a series of excavations from the end of the nineteenth century to the beginning of the second half

of the twentieth century. These excavations revealed a multicomponent site. The first occupation was by a Late Bronze Age people. The next two settlements were by Proto-Pictish and Pictish Iron Age peoples. The Vikings followed thereafter.

During their settlement at Jarlshof, the Vikings constructed a long and complex series of buildings, a series that is broken into seven phases by Hamilton. In the first phase, a house (House 1, Period I) and several outbuildings (Building 1A, Building 1B, Building 1C, Building 1D) were constructed. In the second, another house (House 2) was added, as well as two more outbuildings (Building 1E, Building 1F). In the third, yet another house (House 3) was built, another outbuilding was constructed (Barn south of Building 1B), and an addition was made to one of the previously existing houses (House 2). In the fourth phase, an outbuilding was added (Outhouse 4).

In the fifth phase, all of the houses were altered. One was turned into a compound for livestock (House 2 Period II); another, along with the outhouse built in the third phase (Outhouse 4), was turned into a byre (House 3, Period II); and the original house was turned into a longhouse (House 1, Period II). Three new houses (House 6, House 7, House 8) were also constructed in Phase V. Several outbuildings (Building 1A, Building 1E, Building 1F, Building 1B) had gone out of use between Phases II-V.

In Phase VI, the houses of Phase II (House 2) and III (House 3) and the outbuilding of Phase IV (Outhouse 4) also went out of use. Also during this phase, the original house experienced several additions (House 1, Period II with additions, including House 1G), one of the later houses was turned into a longhouse (House 6, Period II), and another was attached to a preexisting barn so that the complete structure created another longhouse (House 7, Period II). In Phase VII, these buildings were severely contracted

(House 1), added onto (House 6), and contracted and added onto (House 7), (to become House 1, Period III; House 6, Period III; House 7, Period III). Several other buildings (House 8, Building 1C, Building 1G) went out of use.

On the basis of comparison of artifacts from Jarlshof with others from outside of Shetland, Hamilton stated that the Norse occupation extended from ca. 800 C.E. to the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century. The Medieval Farm, which followed the Viking occupation, may also be considered a part of the Viking occupation, as there was no discernible change in lifestyle. If so, then the Norse occupation lasted until approximately 1500 C.E. After this time, one historical occupation took place at the site. This was when the building dubbed “Jarlshof” was constructed in the sixteenth century.

Hamilton has come under attack because field methods in archaeology were not as well developed at the time Jarlshof was excavated as they have come to be. Hamilton’s work itself, however, is highly detailed but also clear and concise. Any problems that exist are strictly due to the relatively unsophisticated field methods of his time. Indeed, Hamilton appears to have made the most of the methods that were available at the time of his excavation.

Some investigations of the site have taken place since its last excavation in 1956. Several of the buildings or parts of buildings have been reanalyzed (Bigelow 1985; Bigelow 1987). Portions of House 1, Period II and House 6, Period II have been reaffirmed as byres, and the northernmost rooms of House 5 and House 7, Period III, which were not given a function by Hamilton, are now considered to be byres. House 2 and House 3 are no longer considered to contain byres. If true, this further supports the hypothesis that the longhouse came into use in Phase V. The living areas of Houses 5, 6,

and 7 have been reaffirmed. Some of the exterior rooms of these houses may have been privies and some may have been for storage of food. In the latter case, this includes a late room of House 1 (part of the 1G complex) and a late addition to House 7. The interpretation of Outbuilding 1A as a hof has been discredited. It may have indeed been a bathhouse, but there is no evidence to prove or disprove this.

Two other studies have been conducted on materials from Jarlshof. One of these (Forster 1998) reanalyzed the chronology of the site on the basis of the comparison of the steatite from Jarlshof with that of other Viking sites in Britain. It reaffirmed Hamilton's chronology as far as possible. Another study (Morrison 1973) searched for underwater remains of the site. While no remains were found, data was recovered that contributed to understanding the minimum and maximum extent of the land in the past.

Some questions concerning Jarlshof will either have to be answered in the future or may never be answered. For instance, lack of Viking Age Shetland sites and the dearth of historical records make conjectures regarding class speculative at best. Various buildings at Jarlshof may also be subject to new interpretations with an increase in knowledge of other sites.

Much has been revealed regarding Viking Age Jarlshof and its place in the Viking era since the publication of Hamilton's monograph in 1956; additional excavation is adding important new data with which to interpret the site. To state that more information is needed from other sites has become a maxim in archaeology. For the reasons just stated, as well as topics of concern not approached in this paper, a demand for more information about Viking Age Jarlshof will be made for a long time to come.

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