Scottish Studies 42/1 (2026): 1–16

Catastrophe at St Kilda: Vulnerability and Resilience in an Island Community

ANDREW FLEMING

Abstract

A 'sea of islands' approach to the history of the Hebrides increases the possibility that aspects of St Kilda's relatively well-recorded ethnography may be productively extrapolated to the wider and less well documented Hebridean region. However, cultural continuity in the archipelago may have been affected by two 'catastrophes', after which depleted populations were augmented by people from throughout the MacLeods' domains. Island communities had low immunity to introduced diseases and were exposed to regionally endemic violence. In economic and political terms it made sense for chiefs (lairds) to re-populate islands demographically damaged by catastrophes, in order to continue the uplifting of food renders and other exports and to provide their travelling retinues with activities such as hunting, fishing and fowling; St Kilda would have presented abundant opportunities in this respect. In recent centuries, re-population may have introduced widespread Hebridean folklore and stories. The perpetuation of Norse words for seabirds and words connected with boats, and of toponyms particularly relating to the most important seascape features, may relate to the development of a *lingua franca* which would have aided cultural continuity during episodes of major population renewal.

Writing the history of Scottish Hebridean islands presents a series of interesting challenges for historians and archaeologists. One of these is the need to do justice to the history of individual islands and archipelagos while simultaneously recognising their membership of a wider cultural community integrated by traditions of maritime competence and connectedness. The latter perspective, originally developed by archaeologists working in the Pacific Ocean, is sometimes called the 'sea of islands' approach[1]; it is rarely deployed explicitly in a Hebridean context. Being located within a 'sea of islands' has arguably made Hebridean coastal and island communities more historically 'mainstream' than many inland communities in the Highlands and Islands. By the same token, however, exposure to approach by sea may well also have made island communities more vulnerable to external visitations of various kinds, and thus demographically more fragile in certain respects, as compared with their mainland counterparts. Although it may look like an uncompromising 'natural' boundary, the coast of an island is far from impermeable. The historian also needs to be alert to the possibility of past episodes of re-colonisation and cultural discontinuity of varying degrees of severity, including total 'wipeout', followed by the resetting of the local historical clock. In such circumstances, cultural change did not only arrive through the initial colonisation of a previously uninhabited island, or piecemeal in a 'sea of islands' context', but also by way of occasional re-colonisation after a

[1] E. Hau'ofa. 'Our sea of islands', in *A New Oceania: Rediscovering our Sea of Islands*, ed. E. Waddell et al. (Fiji: University of the South Pacific Press, Fiji, 1993), 2–16.; H. Kucklick, 'Islands in the Pacific: Darwinian Biogeography and British Anthropology', *American Ethnologist* 23 (1996): 611–38; Paul Rainbird, *The Archaeology of Islands* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

catastrophe, often followed by cultural hybridisation. In this article, I examine some issues of Hebridean continuity and discontinuity with reference to the community which once inhabited the small archipelago of St Kilda, some 60 km west of the Western Isles of Scotland.

In formal terms, the prehistory of Hirta, the archipelago's only seriously habitable island, lasted a long time, from the era when Neolithic pottery was made on the island (if not before) to the time when it was mentioned for the first time, in an Icelandic saga, and then occasionally and without much detail in the years before Martin Martin's visit in 1697. The archipelago contains numerous upstanding archaeological features, most of which have been mapped and documented.[2] In the settlement zone at Village Bay on Hirta there are noteworthy absences. There is a souterrain, but little or no trace of the high-status Iron Age building which should have accompanied it. There are three early Christian crosses carved on slabs in low relief, but no sign of the six (?) chapels which may once have been present. Two Norse burials and perhaps a large coin hoard were unearthed a long time ago. There are Norse elements in toponyms – but seemingly no surface traces of a Norse presence.[3] At Village Bay the archaeological landscape will have been seriously affected by the frequent recycling of constructional stone and of stone artefacts, and the re-use of structures and cultivation areas. Almost unbroken turf cover makes 'field-walking' virtually impossible. Furthermore, the restriction of excavation to threatened or peripheral sites has inevitably constrained research agendas. Thus many features and categories of features are still largely undated.

That said, the cultural history of St Kilda is illuminated by Martin's eloquent description of the lifeways and ethnography of the Hirta community which he encountered in 1697.[4] His characterisation of the people as pre-lapsarian innocents, and the growing quest for Sublime landscapes,[5] would guarantee that in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries St Kilda became an iconic travel destination. After steamship trips began in 1877 the fame and name of the archipelago spread more widely throughout Britain, as various collectors' items and souvenirs were sought by visitors; St Kilda tweed and the keeping of St Kilda sheep became fashionable among the higher echelons of society.[6] At the same time, discerning visitors were dismayed by the islanders' eager embrace of the tourist trade, and the decadence, as they saw it, of the St Kilda community. Many expressed concern for the wellbeing of a community largely *incommunicado* for eight months of the year, beset by the ravages of infantile tetanus and depleted by an ill-advised emigration to Australia in 1852. However, despite various reforms and improvements, the population, diminished by emigration after the First World War, declined to the point where the evacuation of the community's last 36 members became inevitable, and took place in 1930.

The fact that St Kilda was in the public eye for some two hundred years generated a mass of literature. In the latter half of the twentieth century, interest in St Kilda's history was stimulated by Tom Steel's highly accessible *The Life and Death of St Kilda*, first published in 1965. Several accounts of St Kilda's history have subsequently appeared, based to varying extents on documentary sources

[2] See Geoffrey Stell and Mary Harman, *Buildings of St Kilda* (Edinburgh: RCAHMS, 1988); Angela Gannon and George Geddes, *St Kilda: the last and outmost isle* (Edinburgh: RCAHMS, 2015).
[3] For the archaeological and toponymic detail, see Gannon and Geddes, *St Kilda;* also Mary Harman, *An Isle called Hirte: History and Culture of the St Kildans to 1930* (Waternish: Maclean Press, 1997).
[4] Martin Martin, *A Voyage to St Kilda* (Edinburgh: Mercat Press, 1986 [1698]).
[5] Fraser MacDonald, 'St Kilda and the Sublime', *Ecumene* 8 (2001): 151–74.
[6] Andrew Fleming, *The Gravity of Feathers: Fame, Fortune and the Story of St Kilda* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2024), 148–68.

and archaeological research.[7] In 2005 the cultural landscape of the archipelago was designated a World Heritage site. For historians, the persistence of St Kilda as an iconic place begs an important question: existentially, in terms of Hebridean history and culture, how 'special' *was* St Kilda? If the archipelago's exceptionality has been exaggerated – as a 'sea of islands' approach encourages us to believe – how far may St Kilda's remarkable ethnographic record[8] be extrapolated to other Hebridean communities where records are much scarcer - and indeed to the Hebridean sea area as a whole?

The disruption of cultural tradition

Martin depicts a culturally rich and lively culture shared by close on two hundred people, the maximum figure recorded for St Kilda. His account is of high historical importance, in that it portrays the community *before* the occurrence of a 'catastrophe' (in the old-fashioned sense of the word) which may have generated significant cultural change. St Kilda's historians need always to bear in mind that most of the archipelago's documentary record post-dates this episode. What happened was this. In 1720-1, a not very well documented epidemic of disease occurred, reducing the population by one third, to around one hundred and twenty. In 1727–8, two-thirds of the surviving population perished in another epidemic, which may well have been chickenpox.[9] Only nine men and ten women remained alive, along with twenty-three children and adolescents – 42 people in total.[10] The community was now no longer demographically viable; as Moisley noted, Hebridean islands have usually been abandoned when their populations fell to around this level.[11] In the case of St Kilda, Norman MacLeod of Dunvegan, the 23rd chief of the clan, sent in new settlers around 1730. In 1764 Hirta's population numbered ninety.[12]

The colonists included people convicted of crimes and misdemeanours in MacLeod's courts – and presumably in some cases their dependents. When John Sands later referred to St Kilda as 'MacLeod's prison', he used the phrase as a metaphor – shorthand for the exploitation of the islanders by their laird, as he saw it.[13] However, in Sands's time the MacLeods of Dunvegan were well aware of the origins of some of their tenants' ancestors, and were unabashed about referring to the means which their ancestor had used to re-populate Hirta.[14] By the 1920s, the canard was that every family was on the island 'for their sins' (though not that of Neil Ferguson, the holder of the hereditary post of ground officer, who was said to descend from the mate of a boat which brought the new settlers[15]).Thus the MacDonalds had been guilty of murder, the MacQueens of sheep-stealing and

---

[7] Charles Maclean, *Island on the Edge of the World* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1987 [1972]); Andrew Fleming, *St Kilda and the Wider World: Tales of an Iconic Island* (Oxford: Windgather Press, 2005); Jill Harden & Olivia Lelong. *Winds of Change: The Living Landscapes of Hirta, St Kilda* (Edinburgh: Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, 2011); Gannon and Geddes, *St Kilda*; Fleming, *The Gravity of Feathers*.

[8] Harman, *An Isle called Hirte*.

[9] Peter Stride, 'Limited biodiversity and the defects of the immune system in the inhabitants of the isles of St Kilda', in *Biodiversity loss on a changing planet*, ed. Oscar Grillo and Gianfranco Venova, 221–40. Rijek, Croatia: InTech, 2011.

[10] Fleming, *The Gravity of Feathers*, 48. Harman, *An Isle called Hirte,* 88–90; Michael Robson, *St Kilda: Church, visitors and 'natives'* (Balallan, Isle of Lewis: Islands Book Trust, 2005), 138, 140.

[11] H. Allan Moisley, 'The Deserted Hebrides', *Scottish Studies* 10 (1966): 44–68.

[12] Alison Rosie, 'An Island in Time: St Kilda and the 1764 census', https://www.scottisharchives.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/CoffeeTime6.pdf. Not dated.

[13] John Sands, *Out of the World: Or, life in St Kilda* (Edinburgh: MacLachlan & Stewart, 1878), 122.

[14] Harman, *An Isle called Hirte,*130.

[15] David Quine, *St Kilda Portraits* (privately published, 1988), 249.

shebeening (distilling illicit whisky), and the Gillieses of various crimes.[16] Doubtless visitors found such tales entertaining. The 'convict' past of the islanders' ancestors was regarded as historical fact; there seems no reason to question it today. The resettlement of Hirta took place in the same decade as the kidnapping of Rachel Erskine, née Chieseley (Lady Grange), an Edinburgh lady kidnapped and transported to Hirta in 1734 with the connivance of Norman MacLeod; she remained there for six or seven years.[17] MacLeod is also believed to have been implicated in the affair of the *William*, alias *Soitheach nan Daoine* (The Ship of the People), which put into Donaghadee (Co. Antrim) in 1739; she had evidently been commissioned to sail to America with a cargo of ninety-six Hebrideans, evidently to serve as slaves or perhaps indentured workers.[18]

Mary Harman has discussed the likely origins of the St Kildan families, noting that survivors of the 1720s epidemics included MacDonalds, MacQueens, and Morrisons – whose ancestors probably came respectively from South Uist, Ireland (according to oral tradition), and Lewis.[19] Following Lawson,[20] Harman suggested that the ancestors of the 19th century MacQueens probably came from North Uist, the Fergusons from Berneray (Harris), the Gillieses from Skye, and the MacCrimmons and MacKinnons also probably from Skye (though possibly from Harris). That the ancestors of the post-1730 islanders came from all over the domain of the MacLeods of Dunvegan would be entirely consistent with the 'convict' story. Those who survived the epidemic (eleven of whom were stranded on Stac an Armin and not rescued for nine months) presumably instructed the immigrants in certain local traditions, and more importantly the skills required to live in this particular archipelago. Such a major repopulation episode must have affected the cultural continuity of the Hirta community.

A late medieval catastrophe?

There may well have been a catastrophe in earlier times. In the light of the events of the 1720s, it is perhaps surprising that commentators seem not to have reacted to a statement made by Martin, which reads as follows:

> 'The inhabitants here are originally descended of those of the adjacent isles, Lewis, Harries, South and North Uist, and Sky: both sexes are naturally grave [heavy or ponderous? an archaic usage] and of a fair complection; such as are not fair are natives only for an age or two; but their off-spring proves fairer than themselves'.[21]

This implies, it seems to me, that St Kilda had probably undergone an earlier re-population episode comparable to that of 1730, in that the new colonists came from all parts of the lands controlled by the MacLeods (which included Lewis until 1597). From this perspective, it may be significant that the late 19th century *Hiortaich* believed that their island had been 'depopulated *more than once* and planted anew' (my italics).[22] The implication of Martin's statement may be that some traumatic event (or events) had occurred at St Kilda, such that (as in 1730) re-settlement was

[16] Anonymous, 'Island's desolation: quaint life of St Kilda', *Belfast Telegraph*, 22 May 1923.
[17] Margaret Macaulay, *The Prisoner of St Kilda: The true story of the unfortunate Lady Grange* (Edinburgh: Luath Press, 2010), 11.
[18] James Hunter, *Scottish Exodus: travels among a worldwide clan* (Edinburgh and London: Mainstream Publishing, 2005), 67–9.
[19] Harman, *An Isle called Hirte*, 130.
[20] Bill Lawson, 'Families of St Kilda', *St Kilda Mail* 5 (1981): 38–43.
[21] Martin, *A Voyage to St Kilda*, 37.
[22] Sands, *Out of the World,* 20.

necessary if the population was to maintain its demographic vitality (and viability), and Hirta its fiscal value. This was evidently achieved by 'crowd-sourcing' (also as in 1730) rather than colonisation from a single locality. Martin's comment on the emergence of 'Nordic' features from the gene pool implies that the re-population episode post-dated Norse settlement of the region, and took place after its 'Gaelicisation', probably at a time too early to have been highlighted as a recent event by sixteenth-century sources.

Are there alternative explanations for Martin's statement? Could the diverse origins of the islanders have resulted from piecemeal immigration by individual families at different dates, or the augmentation of the population in the *absence* of catastrophe? To accept this idea, one has to argue that such families must have had good reasons for leaving their present homes on their own initiative. One must also assume that, even in terrains as large as Lewis or Skye, and as distant from St Kilda as Skye, joining the St Kilda community would have seemed a more viable option for the discontented or dispossessed than moving to a more local site. Organising a transfer to St Kilda would have presented unusual difficulties for such people. There is also the question of the 'consent' or agreement of the laird and/or of the existing Hirta community – which in the 1830s was said to have killed two incomers (on different occasions) after believing them guilty of being the laird's spies or informers.[23] For these reasons I am reluctant to believe that Martin's statement related to piecemeal colonisation.

Another interpretation of Martin's text might be that the *Hiortaich* of his day were recalling the origins of ancestors imported in the Viking era as slaves, or people of dependent status. Alex Woolf has observed that the compliance of slaves is more easily secured if they have been transplanted; cut off from their homelands, they have to create a new 'community' with fresh social connections and loyalties.[24] In any case, by the later Middle Ages, the regional gene pool must have been seriously affected by the consequences of Norse settlement, including the sexual exploitation of female slaves, and various kinds of sexual relationships between people of varying ancestry – not to mention those which may have occurred during the annual visits of a sub-chief's retinue (see below).

If a late medieval 'catastrophe', followed by an organised re-population episode, is a plausible interpretation of Martin's statement, what kind of catastrophe might be envisaged? If we rule out the kind of sectarian strife which developed in the 1840s over which version of Christianity should prevail on Hirta, and which led to the emigration of one-third of the population, we may speculate that the *Hiortaich* were decimated by disease, or by a violent attack from overseas, or the abduction of people into slavery (the third event perhaps following the second). We will probably never know. What follows does not depend on the historical veracity of this apparent earlier catastrophe. Rather, I discuss St Kilda and comparable communities in relation to their vulnerability to catastrophe, the effects of re-colonisation, and related issues of cultural continuity.

Vulnerability to disease

At St Kilda, the islanders had reason to fear the arrival of strangers, especially in numbers. They maintained a lookout post, *Tigh an fhir faireadh* (The Watchman's House),[25] and had constructed

[23] James Mackenzie, *Episode in the life of Rev. Neil Mackenzie at St Kilda from 1829 to 1843* (privately published, 1911), 30.

[24] Alex Woolf, 'At home in the Long Iron Age: A dialogue between households and individuals in cultural reproduction', in *Invisible people and processes: writing gender and childhood into European archaeology*, ed. Jenny Moor and Eleanor Scott (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1997), 68–74.

[25] Harman, *An Isle called Hirte*, 50.

hiding-places in the screes of Mullach Sgar, on the south-western side of Village Bay. Some of these have been archaeologically investigated, without however providing usable dating material.[26] Martin recorded the notorious outbreaks of coughing (later known as the 'boat cold') which 'always' affected the islanders when the tacksman visited in early summer. Despite his scepticism, the *Hiortaich* insisted that it was an infection, noting that 'infants at the breast' picked up the cough from 'such as lodged in their houses'.[27] Kenneth Macaulay (who spent more time at St Kilda than Martin) once thought that the boat cold was brought on by exertion, but later deduced that it must be an infection.[28] Martin also noted a case of a man infected with smallpox 'on the arrival of the steward's retinue, who had not been well recovered of it'; he also claimed that smallpox had otherwise been unheard of 'for several ages'.[29]

Doubtless visitors sometimes introduced dangerous epidemics. In the final decades of the community's existence, tourists and visiting trawlermen were potential carriers of infectious diseases. There were serious bouts of influenza on Hirta in 1913, 1920 and 1926.[30] The 1920 infection was probably a late manifestation of the highly lethal pandemic which erupted after the First World War. However, the most damaging import by far was that of the bacillus *Clostridium tetani*, which was responsible for the demographically disastrous infantile tetanus. Since Martin does not mention this disease, we may infer that the bacillus was introduced during the 1730 re-colonisation,[31] possibly from Skye, where it has been argued that during the latter half of the nineteenth century infantile tetanus, though not mentioned in registers, was probably responsible for a death rate among newborn infants worse than that which prevailed in Glasgow's most disadvantaged districts.[32]

A potential cause of a late medieval catastrophe on Hirta would have been one of the epidemics of plague which erupted in the fourteenth century, including the so-called 'Black Death' in 1349–50. In Scotland, following the latter, there were further epidemics in 1361–2, 1379–80, possibly 1392, and 1401.[33] It has been argued that the Black Death was a form of viral pneumonia, described as 'transmitted from person to person without the need for an intermediary' and 'over 95 per cent fatal within a couple of days'.[34] Jillings has suggested that throughout Europe, 'the Black Death affected those living in rural areas to a far greater degree than did subsequent epidemics'.[35]

The tacksman's custom of 'sorning' – travelling and arriving with a retinue of several dozen (mostly) men – would also have substantially increased the risk of transmission of infections and viruses to the islanders. According to Martin, the tacksman's retinue numbered some forty to sixty persons; he described this figure as 'much retrenched'.[36] If not actually made 'illegal' by the Statutes

---

[26] Jill Harden, 'Smaller Structures in the Mullach Sgar Screes' in *Winds of Change: The Living Landscapes of Hirta, St Kilda*, ed. Jill Harden and Olivia Lelong (Edinburgh: Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, 2011), 55–69.
[27] Martin, *Voyage to St Kilda*, 39–41.
[28] Kenneth Macaulay, *The History of St Kilda* (Edinburgh: James Thin, 1974 [1764]), 206–9.
[29] Martin, *Voyage to St Kilda*, 39.
[30] Fleming, *The Gravity of Feathers*, 207, 213, 220.
[31] In 1764 Macaulay expressed his surprise at Martin's failure to mention infantile tetanus; see Macaulay, *History of St Kilda*, 200.
[32] Eilidh Garrett and Ros Davies, 'Birth spacing and infant mortality on the Isle of Skye, Scotland, in the 1880s: a comparison with the town Ipswich, England', *Local Population Studies* 71 (2003): 53–74; Alice Reid and Eilidh Garrett, 'Doctors and the causes of neonatal death in Scotland in the second half of the twentieth century', *Annales de Démographie Historique* 1 (2013): 149–79.
[33] Karen Jillings, *Scotland's Black Death: The Foul Death of the English* (Stroud: Tempus, 2007), 34–5.
[34] Jillings, *Scotland's Black Death,* 17– 24.
[35] Jillings, *Scotland's Black Death,* 31–2.
[36] Martin, *Voyage to St Kilda*, 48.

of Iona in 1609 and/or subsequent official decrees, by 1697 sorning was officially banned.[37] In practice, however, the tacksman's galley and any accompanying boats would have required a minimum number of crewmen to take to the oars when necessary – as on the trip described by Martin.[38] However silent our sources, no Hebridean community – including 'the last and outmost isle' – was immune from the spread of plague. The 'sailing season' for St Kilda was short, no longer than about four months, and Hirta may well have been less frequently visited than most other Hebridean islands. However, in terms of the potential spread of infectious diseases over the *longue durée*, 'isolation' was less salient than lack of immunity. Probably Hirta and the catchments from which its tacksman's boat crews/retinues were recruited (such as Pabbay in the Sound of Harris[39]) were more or less equally isolated, and thus relatively lacking immunity to those diseases which *did* arrive. Even when they were aware of the nature and potentially dangerous consequences of infectious diseases, the inhabitants of small islands would, by definition, have been less able to avoid them than those who lived on larger land masses.

From a world historical perspective, the spread of infectious disease has frequently had serious consequences.[40] Outcomes have often been affected by local circumstances, such as the degree of immunity (innate or developed) both in the recipient community and among those who spread the infection. Cultural practices, including standards of hygiene and cleanliness, have made a considerable difference; so also have population density, settlement patterns, and the frequency and timing of social intercourse. Before the establishment of separate crofts in the 1830s, the inhabitants of Hirta lived in a clachan, sharing close-packed and highly insalubrious houses with their cows in winter[41] – conditions which must have greatly favoured the spread of infectious disease, especially when the islanders accommodated visitors. The origin date of the clachan described and sketched by visitors in the early nineteenth century is unknown. By contrast, older dwellings – both the corbelled houses at Village Bay exemplified by 'Calum Mór's House' and the structures of the 'Amazon's House' type in Gleann Mór – display a more dispersed distribution.[42] Perhaps the 'hidey-holes' in the screes of Mullach Sgar may also have allowed their occupants to avoid being infected by imported diseases.

Tacksmen necessarily arrived mob-handed. At the end of the seventeenth century the members of their retinues came into daily contact with members of a community numbering some 180–200 persons. This was during 'King William's lean years', and the Little Ice Age, when the health of the islanders was apparently not at its best;[43] during the Climatic Optimum earlier medieval populations are unlikely to have been lower. All in all, it seems highly likely that over the long term many Hebridean coastal and island communities were seriously affected by catastrophic (if occasional) interventions of infectious

[37] Julian Goodare, 'The Statutes of Iona in Context', *Scottish Historical Review* 77, no. 203, part S (1998): 31–57; Alison Cathcart, "The Statutes of Iona: The Archipelagic Context", *Journal of British Studies* (2010): 4–27.
[38] Martin, *Voyage to St Kilda*, 6–7.
[39] Gannon & Geddes, *St Kilda: the Last and Outmost Isle*, 95–8; George Geddes, 'Ultima Thule? Reconnecting St Kilda and Pabbay', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* 154 (2025): 149–171.
[40] Jonathan Kennedy, *Pathogenesis: How Germs Made History* (London: Penguin Books, 2023).
[41] Mackenzie, *Episode in the life of Rev. Neil Mackenzie*; Andrew Fleming, 'St Kilda: the pre-Improvement *clachan', Proceedings of the Society of Antiquities of Scotland* 133 (2004), 375–89.
[42] Stell and Harman, *Buildings of St Kilda*, 21–3, 25–6; Andrew Fleming, 'The Islandness of St Kilda', in *Land and People: Papers in honour of John Evans,* ed. Michael Allen, Niall Sharples and Terry O'Connor (Oxford: Oxbow/The Prehistoric Society, 2009), 136–46.
[43] Harman, *An Isle called Hirte*, 128.

disease. According to oral tradition, the entire population of Mingulay, in the Western Isles, was once wiped out by plague.[44] Such catastrophes had the potential to damage such communities demographically, socially and culturally, even sometimes destroying them completely – though the survival of those stranded on Stac an Armin in 1727 over a very long 'winter' is a potent reminder of the resilience and tenacity of Hebrideans in the most severe circumstances imaginable.

Violence and slave-raids

One well-known downside of maritime connectivity was the vulnerability of island and coastal communities to seaborne attack. Recent explorations of the concepts of 'hydrarchy' and of diaspora in the Viking era have refined our views of the nature and consequences of maritime connectedness.[45] For the Vikings, slave-raiding was not only relatively commonplace but may also have been structurally necessary in order to supply the workers required by Viking lifeways – as has been argued, for example, in relation to the considerable amounts of labour required for the construction and fitting out of ships and their crews.[46] It has also been argued that the polygyny and concubinage practised by elite men 'motivated [lower status] men to obtain status, wealth, and captives, and to engage in 'risky behaviour' such as raiding in order to do so'.[47] To put it in the strongest terms:

> 'because polygynous marriage increases male–male competition by creating a pool of unmarried men, its occurrence within a society is predicted to increase risky status-elevating and sex-seeking behaviours among men, potentially leading to increased rates of murder, theft, rape, social disruption, kidnapping (especially of women), sexual slavery, prostitution, and – among high-status men – risky bids for political power…. for some young men, serving in a retinue would have allowed them to secure the wealth and reputation they needed to marry and achieve social advancement'.[48]

Neil Price, noting the scholarly literature on piracy, has argued that Viking raiders essentially constituted a 'hydrarchy', a term coined in the seventeenth century.[49] Like pirates of the early modern era, they developed distinctive forms of predatory organisation, unstable yet also fluid and resilient, operating outside the control of states. Although the St Kilda archipelago would not have constituted a convenient base for groups of Viking raiders, it might well have served as an occasional refuge, or a location where a force might re-group after a setback. The Hirta community would have represented a vulnerable target, especially for slave-raids.

In subsequent centuries, predatory behaviour and attitudes of clan chiefs meant that inter-clan disputes and rivalries could all too easily affect wider territories. Martin tells us that the St Kildans

---

[44] Ben Buxton, *Mingulay: An Island and its People* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 1995), 49–50.
[45] Neil Price, *Children of Ash and Elm: a History of the Vikings* (New York: Basic Books, 2020), 357–60; Judith Jesch, *The Viking Diaspora* (London & New York: Routledge, 2015).
[46] See, for example, Ingvild Øye, *Tracing Textile Production from the Viking Age to the Middle Ages: Tools, Textiles, Texts and Contexts* (Oxford: Oxbow, 2022), x, 24.
[47] Ben Raffield, Neil Price and Mark Collard, 'Male-biased operational sex ratios and the Viking phenomenon: an evolutionary anthropological perspective on Late Iron Age Scandinavian raiding', *Evolution and Human Behavior* 38 (2017): 315.
[48] Raffield, Price and Collard, 'Male-biased operational sex ratios', 318, 320.
[49] Neil Price, 'A matter of competitive control: negotiating landscapes of predation in the Viking Age', in *Landscapes of movement and predation: perspectives from archaeology, history and anthropology*, ed. Brenda Bowser and Catherine Cameron (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2024), 57–80.

had a rule which limited the number of visitors to ten unarmed persons; they would oppose those in breach of it 'with all their might'.[50] He recorded a recent case of visiting seamen offering money for sex with the island women. Although he asserted that there had been no instance of fornication or adultery in the community for many years, the men were 'reputed jealous of their wives'[51] and that the islanders had 'great prejudices…against seamen in general'.[52] It seems highly likely that their attitude was influenced by the community's historical experience of such visitors' behaviour. Right up to the end of the nineteenth century, the islanders had recourse to their hiding-places in the screes of Mullach Sgar.[53]

Incentives for re-population

The inclusion of the St Kilda archipelago within the economic and socio-political activity sphere of the Hebrides is illustrated by the re-population episodes under discussion here, where 'crowd-sourced' re-settlement reflected the possibilities created by the size and extent of the MacLeods' maritime domain. Robert Dodgshon has pointed out that dense and well-distributed local populations were essential to the maintenance of Hebridean chiefdoms:

> The reason why the increased labour value of food production increased its social value for chiefs lay in how they used their control over subsistence to build status. They did so in four inter-connected ways. First, the more tenants that could be settled by a chief, the more he could extend the number of his clansmen. Second, the more that could be settled, the more food could be gathered in as rent. Third, in a marginal environment, the more people that could be settled and the more pressure exerted on resources, the more a chief's control over food and subsistence acquired an ideological value. Fourth, the more food gathered in as rent by a chief, the more potential he had for translating it into status via various forms of display behaviour. Reduced to a strategy, these various sources of value meant chiefs had a vested interest in packing their estates, 'cultivating men as much as land'.[54]

From this perspective, the re-population of even 'the last and outmost isle' after a demographic disaster becomes highly likely, not to say inevitable. The annual summer visit of the tacksman and his large retinue is an indication of the value attached to St Kilda by external elites. Martin provided a list of 'exports' which they took away at the end of the season: down (feathers), wool, butter, cheese, cattle, horses, fowl (dried seabirds), oil, and barley.[55] The sorning of a retinue of several dozen or more from May to August – that is, from the season of early dairying and the gathering of seabirds' eggs to the harvesting of young birds fattened for their upcoming migrations[56] – was a considerable imposition on the islanders. However, it is also an indication of the amounts of surplus extractable

---

[50] Martin, *Voyage to St Kilda*, 66.
[51] Martin, *Voyage to St Kilda,* 38, 46.
[52] Martin, *Voyage to St Kilda*, 66.
[53] Jill Harden, 'Hovels or hidey-holes – the scree structures of Mullach Sgar', in *Winds of Change: The Living Landscapes of Hirta, St Kilda,* ed. Jill Harden (Edinburgh: Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, 2011), 56–69.
[54] Robert Dodgshon. *From Chiefs to Landlords: Social and Economic Change in the Western Highlands and Islands, c. 1493–1820* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 55–6
[55] Martin Martin, *A Description of the Western Islands of Scotland* (Edinburgh: The Mercat Press, 1981 [1703], 289–90.
[56] I.e., for the duration of the retinue's visit; see Martin, *Voyage to St Kilda*, 48.

food potentially available at St Kilda. Though the documentary evidence on the subject is scanty, members of the retinue must have spent a good deal of their time hunting, fishing and fowling. The archipelago is well known for possessing the most diverse list of breeding seabirds in the region, mostly in very high numbers.[57] It would also have been possible to hunt feral sheep on the isle of Soay, and seals in the caves on the west coast of Hirta. In the later Middle Ages, several annual hunting expeditions, led by chiefly or sub-chiefly figures, evidently took place on far-flung offshore islands. The best-documented of these involved the Flannan Isles, some thirty kilometers off the west coast of the Western Isles. In the early sixteenth century, the MacLeod sent men and dogs at certain times in the year to hunt the 'infinite wild scheip' there.[58] When on the islands, the men were required to observe a prescribed set of rituals and taboos; they took away not only sheep but also fish, fowls, eggs, down, feathers and quills.[59]

Feeding such a large retinue would have involved the mass conservation of eggs and the wind-dried meat of sheep and seabirds. On the island of Hirta there are about 1260 cleits – mostly small sheds made of stone, their corbelled or slabbed roofs topped with turf.[60] There are also numerous 'boat-shaped structures', best known in the zone above the 1830s head dyke at Village Bay, which are thought to represent dismantled cleits.[61] Although the cleits are for the most part undated, Martin's account indicates that 'hundreds' of them had apparently been constructed on Hirta by 1697.[62] All things considered, sustained efforts made in the past to re-populate St Kilda after a catastrophe are entirely understandable. The determination to maintain the island as a rich resource tends to give the lie to the miserabilist view of St Kilda as eternally 'marginal'.[63]

Catastrophe and cultural continuity

Catastrophes present historians with challenging issues of cultural continuity. In the case of St Kilda, the historian has to ponder the legitimacy of reconstructing the island's traditional culture by supplementing Martin's account of the community's lifeways in 1697 from documentary sources post-dating the 1730 re-settlement. Although most of St Kilda's superabundant literature describes the culture of the island after 1730, commentators concerned with ethnography have rarely addressed issues of cultural continuity and hybridisation. And now anyone seeking to reconstruct or re-imagine 'Norse' St Kilda needs to consider the possibility that most of the ethnographically relevant literature is separated from the era of interest by *two* post-catastrophe re-settlements. Any cultural institution recorded by Martin which went back to the age of the Vikings is likely to have survived a phase of change and partial discontinuity. Such a statement is interesting in the light of Niall Sharples' view

[57] John Morton Boyd and Ian Boyd. *The Hebrides: A Natural History* (London: Collins, 1990), 202 and table 11.1.
[58] Robert Munro, *Munro's Western Isles of Scotland and genealogies of the clans* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1961), 81.
[59] Martin, *Western Isles,* 16.
[60] Stell & Harman, *Buildings of St Kilda,* 29.
[61] Harman, *An Isle called Hirte,* 60, figures 24 and 25.
[62] Martin, *Western Isles*, 281.
[63] Best exemplified by M. Barry Cottam, 'Archaeology', in *A St Kilda handbook*, ed. Alan Small (Edinburgh: National Trust for Scotland, 1979), 36–61.

that: 'the evidence suggests a gradual development of a regional economy and culture that evolves organically from the Scandinavian culture introduced in the ninth century.'[64]

St Kilda was not subject to clearance, a process which created many abandoned settlement sites in other parts of the Hebrides in the nineteenth century. Clearances apart, however, Hebridean communities other than St Kilda's may well have suffered earlier, often undetected, episodes of catastrophe and re-settlement. Perhaps a few of these may eventually be discerned from pollen analysis. In the meantime, however, we may ask some questions. What kind of continuities or discontinuities, hybridisation or cultural merging, increments or losses, might we expect following a catastrophe? How far did survivors succeed in persuading new arrivals to learn and adopt time-hallowed lifeways and traditions? In which areas of activity and perception was it important for 'local' beliefs and practices to be maintained? Some tentative answers to these questions may emerge from Martin's account of his visit, and from the rich documentation available for St Kilda after the catastrophe of the 1720s.

The most obvious point to make in relation to St Kilda is that good stories are highly infectious. New storytellers change the settings of their tales for the benefit of local audiences. Versions of several St Kildan traditional stories and legends recounted by Harman have been current in other localities.[65] Some may be based on real historical events which happened elsewhere, but as accounts of local history they are largely irrelevant. Such dramatic stories stand in contrast to tales of real events which took place at St Kilda, a few of which Martin re-tells in their largely credible detail. It is easy, then, to imagine survivors of catastrophes enjoying and accepting new stories told by immigrants, perhaps to the detriment of historical truths preserved in the tales which they may have replaced. The difficulty of deciding which story to believe is exemplified by uncertainties over the historical veracity of, for example, newspaper accounts of the killing of a great auk (or auks) at St Kilda in the mid-nineteenth century.[66] As we know, oral history is subject to various caveats; perhaps especially on islands, its veracity would have been compromised by major episodes of re-settlement. At the same time, we should note that around 1900 Rachael McCrimmon (1832–1914) could recount the history of the epidemic of the late 1720s, recalling 'all the names of the youthful survivors of the plague..,how the plague came, and at what season of the year'.[67] Oral history, then, could constitute a collective memory bank of considerable value, supplementing and augmenting experience and understanding gained by an individual during the brief span of his or her life, and sometimes at least transcending the rupture created by a catastrophe.

Colonists brought up in most parts of the MacLeod domains, whether they arrived in the eighteenth century or the fourteenth, would have relatively little experience of seabird fowling. Thus perhaps it should cause no surprise that significant elements of the fowling-related vocabulary of the Hirta community in its final decades were of Norse derivation. By my reckoning these words survived *two* catastrophes, and presumably formed part of the crash course in St Kilda speech and lifeways taken by new immigrants. Roderick MacDonald has noted the presence of 460 Old Norse loanwords in Irish (Old, Middle and Modern), Scottish Gaelic and Manx, along with a further 170 possibles.

---

[64] Niall Sharples, 'Discussion', in *The economy of a Norse settlement in the Outer Hebrides: excavations at Mounds 2 and 2A at Bornais, South Uist,* ed. Niall Sharples (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2021), 466.
[65] Harman, *An Isle called Hirte,* 230–6.
[66] Andrew Fleming, 'The Last of the Great Auks: Oral History and Ritual Killings at St Kilda', *Scottish Studies* 40: 29–40.
[67] Christina MacDonald MacQueen, *St Kilda: My Island Home* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2025), 29.

These include twenty-four loanwords for seabirds (twenty-one of which only occur in Scottish Gaelic), twenty-two for fish and fish products (fourteen in Scottish Gaelic alone) and thirty-five for the marine environment (twenty-one in Scottish Gaelic).[68] He proposes that the these loanwords probably date mostly from 'the earlier period when the Scandinavian settlers were present', and that the specific bird types indicated by the loanwords were 'of some cultural or economic importance to those who were settling and living in the Hebrides and coastal regions of western Scotland'. He continues:

> The rich vein of sea-bird loanwords in Scottish Gaelic indicates a strong likelihood that the harvesting of these birds became more significant in the presence of the Scandinavians, for whom these resources can be expected to have been highly valued, and who may have been more systematic in their fowling activities. It is noteworthy that many of the sea-bird loanwords that I include here have been specifically attested from St Kilda.[69]

MacDonald also notes that the word 'cleit' is derived from Old Norse *klettr* (a rock). When John Sands stayed on Hirta in 1875 and 1876–7, he was trying to improve his Gaelic, and so was interested in the local lexicon. In a newspaper article written later, he noted that:

> a boat is called a *Baad* in the Norse, and a *bata* in St Kilda, where the word *Sko* is also used. The latter is the Norse for shoe, but it may mean a boat in some northern dialects. The sail is called the *seòl* in St Kilda, which is probably a defective pronunciation of *seil*. The helm is called the *stivir*, which is from the Norse *styr-aare* or steering-oar….The sheet in St Kilda is called the *sgòd* (the g in Gaelic having the sound of k) and *skjod* in the Norse. *Pyntelhage* is a fish-hook in Danish, and *Pynter* is the name of the rope (armed with horse-hair nooses) with which the girls of St Kilda catch the coulter-nebs [puffins].[70]

Kenneth Macaulay, writing in the mid-eighteenth century, described St Kildan Gaelic as having been 'adulterated' 'with a little mixture of the Norvegian tongue', since it included 'many words and cant phrases quite unintelligible to their neighbours'.[71] If so, his comment suggests not only that the language had once had more Norse content, but that much of that local lexicon had survived the re-settlement of Hirta c. 1730, after the population had been reduced to a demographically unviable forty-two. Perhaps old ways of speech had a good chance of survival as the *lingua franca*, given that the new settlers came from diverse parts of the MacLeod realm. In Macaulay's day the linguistic persistence of Norse words was also seen in the recorded names of 'fields', or different zones of land use.[72]

In the Sound of Harris (the 'portal' for St Kilda) and adjacent islands, preserved Norse or part-Norse toponyms may be regarded as relics of a former Norse hegemony. However, they are also reminders of sea-oriented communities' need for an agreed and unchanging vocabulary for marine

---

[68] Roderick McDonald, 'Vikings in the Hebridean Economy: Methodology and Gaelic language evidence of Scandinavian influence," *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* 62/1 (2015): 107–8.
[69] McDonald, 'Vikings', 110–11.
[70] John Sands, 'Norse echoes in St Kilda', *The Glasgow Herald*, 5 December 1885.
[71] Macaulay, *History of St Kilda*, 215.
[72] Mary Harman, *An Isle called Hirte,* 53; Alexander Taylor, 'The Norsemen on St Kilda', *Saga Book of the Viking Society* 17 (1967): 127–9; Richard Coates, *The Place-names of St Kilda* (Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), 149–52.

features which might be regularly discussed throughout an extensive sea zone. Such names were the geographical currency of a voyaging maritime community; it was important for them to survive linguistic change and the arrival of new colonists relatively unscathed. Sea-lore needs continuity: MacKillop has noted that the 'local system' of naming every shoal, rock and island is vital in matters of life and death ('no national grid reference can improve on it').[73] Thus most islands have kept their Norse names, ending in 'ay' or 'um/am' (*holmr*) and with the adjective before the noun. On Scarp, an island just off the west coast of Harris, some thirty-five Norse names have been detected, thirteen of which relate to marine and coastal features, including 'pure' Norse names such as *sandr* + *vik* (sandy bay) and *hlao-berg* (natural pier). Several indicate potential hazards, such as *bodi, sker, rif,* and *brim* (respectively a usually submerged rock, skerry, reef, and sea rock).[74] Such (international) names have usually been qualified by Gaelic adjectives. It has also been argued that toponyms which contain two (or occasionally even three) elements which mean the same thing, such as *Tobar Childa* ('Wellwell') on Hirta, are not tautologous, but rather pleonasms – components of a hybrid language.[75] Such pleonasms stand as metaphors for cultural hybridisation. Cultural renewal following catastrophe and recolonisation will intensify and complicate the local language, which may already contain more multiple meanings than the innocent outside researcher may realise.[76]

Past episodes of catastrophe and re-population may have been far from uncommon in the Hebrides, even if their historical visibility is a difficult issue. Apparent gaps, discontinuities, and eccentricities in the archaeological record may be better explained by catastrophes and their variable consequences than by 'marginality'. The study of Hebridean ethnography often involves the accumulation of information derived from various dates and contexts, an essential procedure which, however, may privilege the construction of a kind of 'ethnographic present', and the strengthening and embellishment of the concept of 'cultural tradition' – possibly at the cost of recognising change and discontinuity. Hebridean islands, however 'remote', were probably particularly vulnerable to catastrophe and its consequences; in cultural evolution, equilibrium was always liable to be 'punctuated'. Whatever happened in the St Kilda archipelago in the later Middle Ages, I suggest that episodes of discontinuity and the effects of differential survival may be of greater significance than historians and archaeologists have hitherto assumed.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Anonymous. 'Island's desolation: quaint life of St Kilda'. *Belfast Telegraph*, 22 May 1923.
Boyd, John Morton, and Ian L. Boyd. *The Hebrides: A Natural History.* London: Collins, 1990.
Buxton, Ben. *Mingulay: An Island and its People.* Edinburgh: Birlinn, 1995.

[73] D. MacKillop, 'Rocks, skerries, shoals and islands in the Sounds of Harris and Uist and around the island of Berneray', *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness* 56 (1991): 443.
[74] J. MacLennan. *Place-names of Scarp* (Stornoway: Stornoway Gazette, 2001).
[75] MacKillop, 'Rocks, skerries, shoals and islands', 465–6.
[76] Kevin J. Edwards, Rolf Guttesen, Petur Jacob Sigvardsen and Steffen Stummann Hansen, 'Language, Overseas Research and a Stack of Problems in the Faroe Islands', *Scottish Geographical Journal*, 126:1 (2010), 1–8.

Cathcart, Alison. ‘The Statutes of Iona: The Archipelagic Context’. *Journal of British Studies* (2010): 4–27.

Coates, Richard. *The Place-names of St Kilda.* Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 1990.

Cottam, M. Barry. ‘Archaeology’, in *A St Kilda Handbook*. Edited by Alan Small, 36–61. Edinburgh: National Trust for Scotland, 1979.

Dodgshon, Robert. *From Chiefs to Landlords: Social and Economic Change in the Western Highlands and Islands, c. 1493–1820.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998.

Edwards, Kevin J., Rolf Guttesen, Petur Jacob Sigvardsen and Steffen Stummann Hansen. ‘Language, Overseas Research and a Stack of Problems in the Faroe Islands’. *Scottish Geographical Journal*, 126/1 (2010): 1–8.

Fleming, Andrew. ‘St Kilda: The Pre-Improvement *Clachan’*. *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquities of Scotland* 133 (2004): 375–89.

Fleming, Andrew. ‘The Islandness of St Kilda’, in *Land and People: Papers in Honour of John Evans.* Edited by Michael Allen, Niall Sharples and Terry O’Connor, 136–46. Oxford: Oxbow/The Prehistoric Society, 2009.

Fleming, Andrew. ‘The Last of the Great Auks: Oral History and Ritual Killings at St Kilda’. *Scottish Studies* 40 (2024): 29–40.

Fleming, Andrew. *St Kilda and the Wider World: Tales of an Iconic Island.* Bollington: Windgather Press (now Oxbow Books), 2005.

Fleming, Andrew. *The Gravity of Feathers: Fame, Fortune, and the Story of St Kilda.* Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2024.

Gannon, Angela, and George Geddes. *St Kilda: The Last and Outmost Isle.* Edinburgh: Historic Environment Scotland, 2015.

Garrett, Eilidh, and Ros Davies. ‘Birth spacing and infant mortality on the Isle of Skye, Scotland, in the 1880s: a comparison with the town of Ipswich, England’. *Local Population Studies* 71 (2003): 53–74.

Geddes, George. ‘Ultima Thule? Reconnecting St Kilda and Pabbay’. *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* 154 (2025).

Goodare, Julian. ‘The Statutes of Iona in Context’. *Scottish Historical Review* 77, no. 203, part 1 (1998): 31–57.

Harden, Jill and Olivia Lelong. *Winds of Change: The Living Landscapes of Hirta, St Kilda*. Edinburgh: Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, 2011.

Harden, Jill. ‘Hovels or hidey-holes – The scree structures of Mullach Sgar’, in *Winds of change: The Living Landscapes of Hirta, St Kilda*, ed. Jill Harden, 56–69 (Edinburgh: Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, 2011).

Harden, Jill. ‘Smaller Structures in the Mullach Sgar Screes’ in *Winds of Change: The Living Landscapes of Hirta, St Kilda*. Edited by Jill Harden and Olivia Lelong, 55–69. Edinburgh: Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, 2011.

Harman, Mary. *An Isle called Hirte: History and Culture of the St Kildans to 1930.* Waternish: Maclean Press, 1997.

Hau’ofa, E., ‘Our Sea of Islands’, in *A New Oceania: Rediscovering our Sea of Islands.* Edited by E. Waddell, V. Naidu, E. and E. Hau’ofa, 2–16. Fiji: University of the South Pacific Press, 1993.

Hunter, James. *Scottish Exodus: Travels among a Worldwide Clan.* Edinburgh and London: Mainstream Publishing, 2005.

Hunter, James. *Scottish Exodus: Travels Among a Worldwide Clan.* Edinburgh and London: Mainstream Publishing, 2005.

Jesch, Judith. *The Viking Diaspora.* London & New York: Routledge, 2015.

Jillings, Karen. *Scotland's Black Death: The Foul Death of the English.* Stroud: Tempus, 2007.

Kennedy, Jonathan. *Pathogenesis: How Germs Made History.* London: Penguin Books, 2023.

Kucklick, H. 'Islands in the Pacific: Darwinian Biogeography and British Anthropology'. *American Ethnologist* 23 (1996): 611–638.

Lawson, Bill. 'Families of St Kilda'. *St Kilda Mail* 5 (1981): 38–43.

Macaulay, Kenneth. *The History of St Kilda.* Repr. Edinburgh: James Thin, 1974 [1764].

Macaulay, Margaret. *The Prisoner of St Kilda: The true story of the unfortunate Lady Grange.* Edinburgh: Luath Press, 2010.

MacDonald, Fraser. 'St Kilda and the Sublime'. *Ecumene* 8 (2001): 151–174.

Mackenzie, James. *Episode in the life of Rev. Neil Mackenzie at St Kilda from 1829 to 1843*. Privately published, 1911.

MacKillop, D. 'Rocks, skerries, shoals and islands in the Sounds of Harris and Uist and around the island of Berneray'. *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness* 56 (1991): 428–502.

Maclean, Charles. *Island on the Edge of the World*. Edinburgh: Canongate, 1987 [1972].

MacLennan, J. *Place-names of Scarp.* Stornoway: Stornoway Gazette Ltd, 2001.

MacQueen, Christina MacDonald. *St Kilda: My Island Home* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2025).

Martin, Martin. *A Description of the Western Islands of Scotland.* Edinburgh: The Mercat Press, 1981 [1703].

Martin, Martin. *A Voyage to St Kilda*. Edinburgh: Mercat Press, 1986 [1698].

McDonald, Roderick. 'Vikings in the Hebridean economy: Methodology and Gaelic language evidence of Scandinavian influence'. *Zeitschrift fűr celtische Philologie* 62/1 (2015): 97–182.

Moisley, H. Allan. 'The Deserted Hebrides'. *Scottish Studies* 10 (1966): 44–68.

Munro, Robert. *Munro's Western Isles of Scotland and Genealogies of the Clans.* Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1961.

Øye, Ingvild. *Tracing Textile Production from the Viking Age to the Middle Ages: Tools, Textiles, Texts and Contexts.* Oxford: Oxbow, 2022.

Price, Neil. 2024. 'A matter of competitive control: Negotiating landscapes of predation in the Viking Age', in *Landscapes of Movement and Predation: Perspectives from Archaeology, History and Anthropology*. Edited by Brenda Bowser and Catherine Cameron, 57–80. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2024.

Price, Neil. *Children of Ash and Elm: A History of the Vikings.* New York: Basic Books, 2020.

Quine, David. *St Kilda Portraits.* Privately published, 1988.

Raffield, Ben, Neil Price and Mark Collard. 'Male-biased operational sex ratios and the Viking phenomenon: An evolutionary anthropological perspective on Late Iron Age Scandinavian raiding'. *Evolution and Human Behavior* 38 (2017): 315–24.

Rainbird, Paul. *The Archaeology of Islands.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Reid, Alice and Eilidh Garrett. 'Doctors and the causes of neonatal death in Scotland in the second half of the twentieth century'. *Annales de Démographie Historique* 1 (2013): 149–79.

Robson, Michael. *St Kilda: Church, visitors and 'natives'*. Balallan, Isle of Lewis: Islands Book Trust, 2005.

Rosie, Alison. ‘An Island in Time: St Kilda and the 1764 census’. https://www.scottisharchives.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/CoffeeTime6.pdf. n.d.

Sands, John. ‘Norse echoes in St Kilda’. *The Glasgow Herald*, 5 December 1885.

Sands, John. *Out of the World: Or, Life in St Kilda*. 2nd edn. Edinburgh: MacLachlan & Stewart, 1878.

Sharples, Niall. ‘Discussion’, in *The Economy of a Norse Settlement in the Outer Hebrides: Excavations at Mounds 2 and 2A at Bornais, South Uist*, ed. Niall Sharples. Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2021.

Steel, Tom. *The Life and Death of St Kilda*. National Trust for Scotland, 1965.

Stell, Geoffrey and Mary Harman. *Buildings of St Kilda.* Edinburgh: Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, 1988.

Stride, Peter. ‘Limited biodiversity and the defects of the immune system in the inhabitants of the isles of St Kilda’, in *Biodiversity Loss on a Changing Planet*. Edited by Oscar Grillo and Gianfranco Venova, 221–40. Rijek, Croatia: InTech, 2011.

Taylor, Alexander. ‘The Norsemen on St Kilda’. *Saga Book of the Viking Society* 17 (1967): 106–14.

Woolf, Alex. ‘At home in the Long Iron Age: A dialogue between households and individuals in cultural reproduction’, in *Invisible People and Processes: Writing Gender and Childhood into European Archaeology*. Edited by Jenny Moor and Eleanor Scott, 68–74. Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1997.