

The Viking raids around the Scottish coast began in the closing years of the eighth century, with devastating attacks on Iona Abbey and the Isle of Skye. These vikings were Norwegian adventurers who sailed to the Hebrides via Shetland and Orkney in search of wealth, and later, land, as the raiding gradually gave way to colonisation over the course of the ninth century. The Vikings would control the Hebrides for the next four hundred years, with the islands officially coming under Norwegian rule in 1098. The islands were known in the Old Norse language as the *Suðreyar* the Southern Isles to distinguish them from the *Norðreyjar* or Northern Isles of Shetland and Orkney which had also been ceded to the Norwegian crown.

This Kingdom of the Isles lasted into the second half of the thirteenth century, until the collapse of Norwegian power on the western seaboard of Scotland in the aftermath of the Battle of Largs in 1263. Three years later, the Treaty of Perth

isle , *Fladda* flat isle , *Ensay* ewe isle , *Shillay* seal isle , *Kearstay* hart isle , *Langay* long isle and *Pabbay* priest isle .

However, the Vikings also left their mark in another way, as many of these Old Norse place-name elements were borrowed and adapted by the Gaelic-speakers of the Hebrides. These loan words reflect the importance of the sea to this remote archipelago, with many borrowings relating to coastal features.

Examples include the Gaelic word *òb* meaning a bay, a cove which was borrowed from Old Norse *hòp* a small land-locked bay . Names featuring this element include *Òb nam Portan* bay of the crabs (Skye), *Òb Dubh* black bay (South Uist), *Òb nam Feusgan* bay of the mussels (Skye), *An t-Òb* the bay (Harris) and *Òb a Deas* south cove (Skye). This word was also borrowed from Old Norse into Scots in the form *hope*, meaning a small bay or haven and features in place-names such as *St Margaret s Hope* and *Chalmers Hope* in Orkney.

a rocky eminence from Old Norse *klettr* a rock, a cliff. Names featuring this element include *Cleite na h-Uamha* rock of the caves (Lewis), *Clett na Cairidh* rock of the weir (South Uist), *Clett Ruadh* red rock (Lewis), *Clette an Iasgaich* rock of the the fishing (Harris), *Cleite nan Uan* rock of the lambs (Lewis), *Cleit Mhor* big rock (South Uist), *Clette nan Luch* rock of the mice (Harris) and *Cleite Beag* small rock (Tiree). This word also found its way into Scots in the form *clet*, *clett* a detached rock by way of the Vikings who settled in the Northern Isles and the adjacent mainland, with examples such as *The Cletts of Ramnageo* in Shetland and *Little Clett* in Caithness.

Gaelic *sgeir* a rock or reef in the sea, a tidal rock was borrowed from Old Norse *sker* a rock in the sea. The word was also borrowed into English and Scots as *skerry*. Examples of Gaelic place-names include *Sgeir nan Crubag* crab skerry (Lewis), *Sgeir nan Gall* skerry of the foreigner (Jura), *Sgeir Liath* grey skerry (Islay), *Sgeir Mhòr* big skerry (Barra), *Sgeir a Chaisteil* castle skerry (Skye), *Sgeirean na Sròine Riabhaich* skerries of the brindled point (Jura), *Sgeir Bhiorach* sharp skerry (Colonsay), *Sgeir nan Caorach* sheep skerry (Harris) and *Sgeirean Uaine* green skerries (Islay).

The Gaelic speakers also borrowed words for wildlife from the Vikings, such as Gaelic *sgarbh* cormorant from Old Norse *skarfr* with the same meaning. Examples include *Sloc nan Sgarbh* hollow of the cormorants (Colonsay), *Geodha nan Sgarbh* cove of the cormorants (Lewis), *Druim nan Sgarbh* ridge of the cormorants (Skye), *Cnoc nan Sgarbh* hill of the cormorants (Tiree), *Rubha nan Sgarbh* promontory of the cormorants (Harris) and *Stac nan Sgarbh* cliff of the cormorants (Jura). The word was also borrowed into Northern Scots in the form *scarf*, and is found in names such as *Scarf Point* in Orkney and *Scarf Water* in Shetland.

These are only some of the many words which Scottish Gaelic owes to the Vikings, but they do give some insight into the ways in which these Scandinavian settlers helped to shape both the Gaelic language and the toponymy of the Hebridean landscape.

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W.F.H. Nicolaisen, *Scottish Place-Names* (John Donald, 2001).

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Another Old Norse word *gjá* meaning chasm, cleft, gully was borrowed into the Gaelic language in the form *geodha* which can be translated as inlet, cove, gully . Examples include *Geodha Grannda* nasty cove (Lewis), *Geodha na Bà Ruaidh* cove of the red cow (Islay), *Geodha nan Ceann* headland cove (Colonsay), *Geodha a Sgadain* herring cove (Lewis), *Geodha Garbh* rough cove (South Uist), *Geodha Ruadh* red cove (Lewis), *Geodha nan Damh* cove of the stag (Islay), *Geodha Mhor* big cove (Lewis), *Geodha Dubh*

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