PLACING PAPA STOUR IN CONTEXT

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The question of placing all the papar names in context has already been intensively addressed by Barbara Crawford and her team of researchers who have contributed, and are still contributing, to the Papar Project, the preliminary results of which can be viewed on the RCAHMS website. The project is most impressive in its extent and has thus far included archaeology, history, geography, ecclesiastical evidence, environmental evidence including soil analysis from the sites, and linguistic and place-name evidence. In her introduction to the website, Barbara Crawford says that ‘the purpose of this part of the project has been to provide what evidence there is as a basis for future research’ and to make some ‘preparatory comments’. The really exciting aspect of this project lies in Crawford’s vision of an extensive multi-disciplinary study which can reveal so much more than the single-discipline investigation. The latter is, of course, valuable but much more limited in scope and, occasionally, blinkered by the narrowly subject-defined parameters set. The multi-disciplinary approach is one which Barbara Crawford had already adopted in the research programme of excavation at the Biggings (HU1760), Papa Stour, where she found that ‘it is very important that we (that is specialists in various disciplines) learn to talk each other’s language, and appreciate the various contributions to our better understanding of the past, which—particularly for historians of the medieval north who have very few written records to study—can lead to fuller illumination of past society’ (Crawford 2002, 15).

The aim of this paper is to add some more evidence from the field of place-name studies and to consider Papa Stour (HU1660), Shetland, in the context of the neighbouring islands of Vementry (HU2960), Papa

1 ON papi m., papar (pl.) priest(s) or monk(s), described in the Dictionary of the Old Norse Language as ‘...Christian men, and men who devoted their time to contemplation...’ (‘...menn kristnir, ok hyggja menn...’) (Fritzner 1954, 929) and in the later supplementary edition as ‘den fornorske befolkning på Island og de nordskotske øyene’ or ‘the pre-Norse inhabitants of Iceland and the northern islands of Scotland’ (Fritzner 1972, 274).

2 http://www.rcahms.gov.ac.uk/papar
Little (HU3360) and Muckle Roe (HU3466), all of which lie close to the mainland of Shetland on the south side of the deep indentation known as St Magnus Bay (HU2170) (Illus. 47). Mention will also be made of Little Roe (HU4079) which lies at the mouth of Sullom Voe (HU3775) and which seems to pair toponymically with Muckle Roe in much the same way that Papa Little pairs with Papa Stour, but note that the order of elements in these compounds differs, at least in their modern forms. It should also be noted that most Shetlanders from the Westside of Shetland where I spent my childhood in the 1950s and where Papa is located, would not regularly have used the full description, Papa Stour or ‘large island of the priests’. Reference was to Papa and everyone understood that to mean the island recorded on the map as Papa Stour. It is interesting, therefore, to observe that the very first mention of the island is also in the form Papey in the 1299 document (Ballantyne and Smith 1999, 1) which was given prominence by Barbara Crawford in 1999 when she organised a conference to commemorate the 700th anniversary of this, Shetland’s first document (Crawford and Ballin Smith 1999, Preface). The form Papa Sithora is first recorded in Vendo (Windhouse, Yell, Shetland) in 1452 in a document written in Middle Norwegian, the printed texts of which are described as containing ‘major errors’ (Ballantyne and Smith 1999, 16–17). The form Papa Meikill does very occasionally occur as, for example, in a document produced in Edinburgh, dated 1615, which is of great interest to place-name scholars because it records a particularly large number of place-names from all parts of Shetland including ‘the isle of Papa Meikill and lands of the same’ and ‘the isles of Vehemendrie and Papa Litill’ (NAS, RH7/15 (1615/1). More reference will be made to this useful source later.

The islands of Muckle Roe and Little Roe display the same large/small partnership, with Muckle Roe being the large red island, with reference to the red sandstone rock of the island, and Little Roe its smaller equivalent which lies, as noted above, at the entrance from Yell Sound (HU4192) into Sullom Voe. The two isthmuses of Mavis Grind (HU3468) and Brae (HU3667), located at the inner end of Sullom Voe,

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3 The place-names and four-figure references have been extracted from Robin A. Hooker’s Pathfinder Gazetteer of Scotland which, as the instructions accompanying the database say, was compiled so as to be a natural companion to the Ordnance Survey Pathfinder (1:25 000 scale) map series.