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# Ethnicity and the origins of local identity in Shetland, UK – Part II: Picts, Vikings, Fairies, Finns, and Aryans

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**Abstract** The population of the North Sea archipelago of Shetland, UK possesses a distinct sense of ethnic identity, which connects the island's present-day community to that of its Old Norse/Viking settlers from Scandinavia. This sense of Viking ethnicity, however, is relatively recent, first arising in the 19th Century. This paper argues that Shetland's cultural identity must be understood in terms of the islands' historical interconnectedness with trends in literature and scholarship in mainland Scotland, Britain, and Europe as a whole. Part II of this two-part paper looks at how the rise of nationalism and philological research into race and ethnicity in the 1800s both drew upon and contributed to Shetlanders' understanding of their history and culture. In the 1890s, Edinburgh scholar David MacRitchie promoted a theory to explain European and Asian fairy folklore. This theory was grounded in the history of Orkney and Shetland and eventually made a significant impact in Shetland itself, being used by the author Jessie Saxby to promote a distinctive local identity concept. MacRitchie's work also contributed to later research connected to the development of neopaganism and racist Nazi ideology. The conclusion concerns the role of isolated island communities within flows of cultural development and exchange.

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### Introduction

Part I of this paper (Grydehøj, 2013) explored how conceptions of the history of the North Sea archipelago of Shet-

land, UK changed over time (from the Medieval Period to the 1890s) partially as a result of a complex interplay of descriptive, popular historic, fiction, and scholarly writing regarding Shetland. From the early 19th Century, there was a growing tendency for authors and researchers from mainland Scotland, the remainder of the British Isles, and Continental Europe to overlay the landscape and people of Shetland with a heroic Old Norse/Viking past. That such a past could be deemed important in the pursuit of wider cultural and political objectives is a sign of the increasing importance of ethnicity over the course of the 1800s, as philology transformed from an academic discipline concerning linguistic history into a sort of universal discipline that

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served various processes of identity construction across Europe.

Part II of this paper will continue the analysis of how the combination of interaction with *and* isolation from the outside world can make cultural development in a peripheral island community distinctive.

### Racism, Aryanism, and the New Philology

Developments in Shetland's local identity cannot be understood without knowledge of how the islands' identity construction interacted with wider European trends, particularly in the field of philological research.

In Europe, racism is a relatively recent phenomenon. Although there were a host of political, religious, and philosophical motivations for 17th- and 18th-Century British writers to champion the Saxons, Celts, Norsemen, or whatever peoples they pleased, these motivations were ethnic (i.e. cultural) rather than racial. Even at the start of the 19th Century, biblically informed scholarly tradition was still emphasising the essential unity of the European peoples and – to some extent – of peoples around the globe (Kidd, 1999). A shift, however, occurred in 1786 when Sir William Jones brought widespread scholarly attention to the similarities between Sanskrit and the European languages, providing linguistic evidence for the existence of a common Indo-European (otherwise known as *Aryan*) culture (Arvidsson, 2006: 41).

Notwithstanding the negative connotations that the term *Aryan* has accrued due to its use by certain racist movements, it is important to recall that the existence of Aryans/Indo-Europeans as a broad cultural-linguistic group is not in dispute: Numerous modern languages (for instance, Czech, English, German, Hindi, Italian, Persian, Romani, Russian, and Scots Gaelic) do indeed possess common roots. Nor can it be debated that the existence of Aryans presupposes non-Aryans. Where modern scholarship diverges from that of the past is in where the lines can be drawn between various cultural-linguistic groups and the extent to which race and genetic relationship can be associated with them.

In the beginning, the emerging theories of Aryanism provided scientific support for the biblically informed notion of European unity for it was clear that the vast majority of European languages possessed a common origin. Over the course of the 19th Century, however, research in the rapidly expanding discipline of philology increasingly identified the non-Aryans relevant to the European experience with the Finno-Ugric or hypothesised Turanian/Uralo-Altaic peoples, and it was theorised that the dominance of Indo-European languages in Europe meant that Aryans at one point conquered the continent's previously dominant peoples. This created a kind of foundation myth for the various European nations, with each nation positing that its ancestors defeated one or more particular non-Aryan peoples (Arvidsson, 2006: 57). In time, as nationalism developed along cultural rather than politico-legal lines, the concept of Aryanism was turned against itself, and competition mounted among scholars of various nations to prove that their own nation was the most pure inheritor of Aryan culture and, in some cases, to prove that competing nations were not Aryan at all. Eventually, as we shall see, even the hypothesised Turanian peoples came to be

conflated with what were regarded as the savage peoples of Africa.

### David MacRitchie's euhemerist theory on the origins of fairy belief

A fundamental and as-yet-unresolved problem in the academic study of folk belief is how to explain the existence of belief to begin with. A wide range of theories have been proposed from a variety of disciplinary perspectives. Some of these theories assume that the supernatural beings in question (fairies, mermaids, ghosts, etc.) do not themselves exist in any objective sense while other theories seek to identify spiritual or material bases for the beliefs. We do not aim here to promote any one theory but will instead concentrate on considering a theory – a particular version of the so-called euhemerist theory – that was eventually conclusively proved incorrect by archaeology but that has had certain impacts in Shetland and farther afield.

It was within the blossoming of 'the New Philology' that David MacRitchie (1861–1925), an educated accountant and native of Edinburgh, underwent his intellectual development. In his 1890 *Testimony of Tradition*, MacRitchie argues that legends concerning supernatural beings across Europe and Asia could be explained by experiences with races of diminutive people who lived alongside the ancestors of today's Europeans. Though similar versions of this euhemerist theory had been voiced by earlier writers like Sir Walter Scott, Sven Nilsson, and J.F. Campbell, MacRitchie is the first writer to set forth the theory systematically and seek to provide evidence for it. Because MacRitchie's work is so important for the development of Shetland identity, we will consider it in some detail, though we will not attempt to reproduce the entirety of his complex argument.

The evidence at the heart of MacRitchie's theory originates from Orkney and Shetland. MacRitchie takes his point of departure in a theory proposed by Karl Blind in 1881. As we saw in Part I of this paper, Blind – with little or no evidence – conflates Shetland traditions of supernatural merfolk/seal people with those of sea-trows. He then conflates these again with Early Modern descriptions of non-supernatural 'Finns' in Orkney, suggesting that these represent a folk memory of heroic Vikings (Grydehøj, 2013: 46). It is important to recall that Blind is our earliest source for the presence of Finns in Shetland (as opposed to in Orkney alone).<sup>1</sup>

MacRitchie takes a different approach to Blind's Early Modern sources, which state that Finns in little boats had been seen off the coast of Orkney near the end of the 17th Century. MacRitchie (1890: 7–8) argues that "the Finns of the

<sup>1</sup> There is toponymic and dialect evidence that the concept of Finns has a long presence in Shetland, but as I have discussed in detail elsewhere (Grydehøj, 2010: 128–134), this is only very uncertain proof that there existed a concept of Finns *per se* in Shetland prior to the late 1800s. The silence of all our earlier sources regarding Finns in Shetland as well as the tendency of our 19th- and 20th-Century sources to borrow concepts from one another (as illustrated in this paper) mean that we cannot take at face value the numerous late references to the Finns. I feel that it is likely that exposure to written sources caused 20th-Century Shetland writers to apply the name of 'Finns' to beings that they would otherwise have called by other names. It should be noted that my opinions here conflict somewhat with those of the highly knowledgeable Northern Isles folk belief scholar Andrew Jennings (2010).

Shetlandic story’ formed a branch of the ‘Ugrian race of the Finns’” and had travelled over from Norway in skin-covered canoes. MacRitchie’s reasoning contains a fascinating chunk of genuine history: The Early Modern accounts *do* suggest that the ‘Finns’ sighted near Orkney were men in kayaks, despite the seeming impossibility of rowing a skin kayak from Greenland to Orkney. The problem here is that MacRitchie views the North American Eskimos (Inuit) as close relatives of the Ugrian Lapps/Finns (Sámi) of Scandinavia, thereby permitting him to posit that the latter used kayaks.

MacRitchie (1890: 56) then engages in etymological sleight of hand to argue that the *fianna* (a mythical people of Ireland, conveniently termed *Feens* by MacRitchie) are identical to trows and Finns and that all of these beings/races were of small stature. MacRitchie (1890: 14) reinforces this link and overcomes the fact that the Early Modern sources do not regard the Finns as supernatural by connecting Blind’s statement about the Finns wearing ‘skins’ with Brand’s 1700 statement about Orkney fairies “dancing and making merry, and sometimes seen in Armour” (qtd. in Grydehøj, 2013: 46). Through this series of topical juxtapositions, MacRitchie can speak of trows, fairies, *fianna*, merfolk, seal-people, and Finns interchangeably.

Over the course of *Testimony of Tradition*, MacRitchie pulls together further strands, especially involving the Picts (including in Shetland; MacRitchie, 1890: 58). As he points out, pre-Norse and pre-Scots structures are often attributed to the Picts and said to be built or inhabited by either fairies or diminutive humans. Lacking the archaeological knowledge available today, MacRitchie speaks of many souterrains and chambered mounds as subterranean houses, rather than as storage places and burial mounds as was in fact the case.

MacRitchie’s scholarship has a place within the cultural evolutionism of Tyloristic anthropology. For instance, his 1884 book *Ancient and Modern Britons* hypothesises a doomed Gypsy/Pictish rearguard action against progress. By the time of *Testimony of Tradition* though, MacRitchie is anything but a cultural evolutionist. His non-Aryan dwarfs are neither servile, particularly barbaric, nor inferior to the races that replace them. Instead, MacRitchie (1890: 23) suggests “that those straggling ‘Finn-men’ of the year 1700 were really the representatives of a decayed caste of conquerors. The fact that they are remembered as wearing armour places them before us as a distinctly military race.” Indeed, his hypothesised dwarfs are in many ways *superior* to the peoples that rule present-day Britain: Following popular tradition, MacRitchie (1890: 73–74) asserts that – at their purest – the Picts “must undoubtedly have been remarkable for a prodigious strength of body, a strength that may well be spoken of as ‘superhuman,’ if it is to be compared with that of any existing race of men.”

With this, MacRitchie’s thesis goes beyond a mere renaming of various tribes living in prehistoric, Medieval, and Early Modern Britain. It becomes a vast re-evaluation of European and Asian history. For MacRitchie (1890: 35) cannot stop in Scotland and Ireland: His Picts and Finns are, after all, Norwegian immigrants, who came from what he regards as the Mongoloid stronghold of the Bergen area and had previously been the dominant population of the Eastern Baltic. Thus it is that MacRitchie (1890: 166–70) travels East, tracing the circumpolar history of his hairy, diminutive originators of fairy belief all the way to Japan. By the end of *Testimony of Tradition*, he has drawn connections between, among others, Ainos,

brownies, Chukches/Chukchi, Cruithné, dwarfs, Druids, Eskimos, *fianna*, Finns, giants, Hebridean pirates, Lapps, merfolk, Onkilon/Yupik, Picts, Scric-Finns, Skraelings, Tshuds, Santa Claus, selkie-folk, social fairies, trows, Tuatha De Danann, and witches.

Ultimately, MacRitchie is sympathetic to his dwarfish Ugrian races, crediting them with pride, wisdom, and extraordinary ability. Furthermore, both *Ancient and Modern Britons* and *Testimony of Tradition* seem to suggest that racial interbreeding or miscegenation is beneficial for both Aryan and non-Aryan peoples. In not linking cultural evolution with racial evolution, MacRitchie was genially out of step with his times.

MacRitchie’s theory would eventually be conclusively disproved by advances in archaeology, which failed to turn up material evidence that Scotland – much less the rest of Europe and large swathes of Asia – had been home to a race of pygmies. In the start, however, *Testimony of Tradition* received a fair hearing, garnering support from a number of reputable scholars (most notably Jacob Jacobs) while receiving criticism from others. Prominent critics included Alfred Nutt and Edwin Sidney Hartland, the latter of whom attacks the failure of MacRitchie’s argument to account for the true universalism (rather than just Eurasianism) of fairy belief (Sidney Hartland, 1914 [1890]: 349–351).

Despite early criticism, MacRitchie’s euhemerism did not die quietly. The combination of MacRitchie’s learned arguments, accounts of races of pygmies encountered by European explorers over the previous two decades (for example, George Schweinfurth’s Akka people and E.H. Man’s Andaman islanders), and the exaggerated importance given to the discovery of a number of small skeletons near Schaffhausen (Kollmann, 1896) formed the basis for a particularly unsavoury branch of research (Silver, 1999: 45–47). British writers such as John Stuart Stuart-Glennie and R.G. Haliburton began constructing a racialised history of Europe. Haliburton, for instance, envisioned the Akka as having migrated into prehistoric Europe. Considering MacRitchie’s continued adherence to a theory that stressed fairies’ dwarfish ‘Mongoloid’ (and kayak-using) identity rather than any possible pygmy ‘Negroid’ identity, it is strange to find him collaborating with Haliburton in search of a race of European dwarfs in 1890s. Writers like Haliburton regarded the continued existence of pygmies as proof of polygenesis (i.e. of different races of humans having distinct evolutionary origins). They argued that, prior to the rise of modern man, pygmy savages had inhabited all of Europe and that some of these ape-like non-Aryan savages still inhabited Europe today, representing a threat to civilisation (Silver, 1999: 137–139).

It is in this period that British popular culture, taking inspiration from MacRitchie and other scholars, began racialising fairies. At the same time as the concept of tiny, dainty flower fairies became cemented in popular culture, other fairies were cast as barbaric, dwarfish savages with ‘Negroid’ and/or ‘Mongoloid’ attributes. Such major fiction authors as William Morris, Arthur Machen, and John Buchan make use of the idea of murderous, rapacious, ape-like, and distinctively racialised races of dwarfs. MacRitchie’s vision of civilisation conquering savagery in part through intermarriage did not prove popular. For instance, Morris’ *Roots of the Mountains* (1889) – a major inspiration for *Lord of the Rings* novelist J.R.R. Tolkien and his portrayal of the Orcs – warns of the dangers of miscegenation. Consider one scene in *Roots of the*

*Mountains* in which a character explains the fate of those noble Dalesmen who have been enslaved by the vicious, bestial Dusky Men (Morris, 1912 [1889]: 136):

“When a Dusky Carle mingles with a woman of the Dale, the child which she beareth shall oftenest favour his race and not hers; or else shall it be witless, a fool natural. But as for the children of these poor thralls; yea, the masters cause them to breed if so their masterships will, and when the children are born, they keep them or slay them as they will, as they would with whelps or calves. To be short, year by year these vile wretches grow fiercer and more beastly, and their thralls more hapless and down-trodden.”

Besides encouraging literary racial monsters, MacRitchie's euhemerism had a further significant offshoot through its promotion by the Egyptologist-turned-witchcraft scholar Margaret Murray. Murray never names MacRitchie in her two most influential books *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe* (1921) and *The God of the Witches* (1933), yet specifically his ideas are nevertheless evident. In *Witch-Cult*, Murray (1921: 14) closely follows MacRitchie, suggesting that witches and fairies were one and the same, were a dwarf race pushed ever farther into the peripheries of Europe and eventually feared by the peoples who conquered them. In *God of the Witches*, Murray (2005 [1933]: 38–40) notes parallels between fairies, “the wild tribes of India,” and “the people of the Asiatic steppes” as well as describes how the fairies were eventually conquered by the ‘Kelts’ of the Iron Age. It was Murray's ironic fate that her scantily evidenced and often misleading de-supernaturalisation of European witchcraft traditions served as a partial basis for Gerald Gardner's neopagan Wicca movement (Simpson, 1994), ensuring that MacRitchie's work continues to make an indirect impact in Wiccan covens today.

The naivety and over-reaching nature of MacRitchie's scholarship made it vulnerable to exploitation by frauds, textual manipulators, amateurish theorists, and strident Aryans. The latter would eventually evolve into today's white supremacists. First though, the branch of racial anthropology for which MacRitchie's research provided intellectual justification ended up forming a basis for the Aryan ideology of the Nazis, the practical application of which during World War II eventually turned both MacRitchie's type of racial research and Morris' Dusky Men into scholarly and literary taboos. Such was the tragic development that saw the research by MacRitchie – author of the pro-Roma (Gypsy) *Ancient and Modern Britons* and founding member and later president of the Gypsy Lore Society – contribute to the genocide of this same people by Germany's Nazi regime.

### Race and ethnicity in Shetland

We will now pick up the strands of scholarship within Shetland where we left them at the end of Part I of this article.

The last work from Shetland that we considered was Jessie M.E. Saxby's 1888 *Home of a Naturalist*. Until this point, Shetland writers had kept more or less up to date with developments in British scholarship. This was partially because writers and scholars from Britain and Continental Europe frequently visited and wrote about Shetland and partially because many prominent Shetlanders spent time in Scotland. For example, the Shetlanders living in Edinburgh in 1888 included

Saxby, Gilbert Goudie, and the poet J.J. Haldane Burgess, the latter of whom later played a significant role in the development of Shetland's Norse identity through his involvement in the Up-Helly-Aa festival.

We saw in Part I of this paper (Grydehøj, 2013: 44) that Goudie was correct in attributing Orkney and Shetland's broch towers to a Celtic people, rather than to a Norse/Teutonic/Germanic people as many other scholars argued. Goudie (qtd. in B.J. Cohen, p. 438) was also a racial romantic who described the Celts/Scots as a lazy, exploitative people, in contrast to the Norsemen of Orkney and Shetland, who valorously pursued self-sufficiency. This dynamic Norseman versus lethargic Celt idea was common even among the Lowland Scots themselves for, at this point in time, Viking Romanticism was popular in England and Scotland too. Indeed, as noted in Part I (Grydehøj, 2013: 42), Shetland's Viking Romanticism actually originated in Scotland, itself functioning as an offshoot of an initially more politico-legal (rather than ethnic) form of Saxon Romanticism in England.

This presented difficulties for constructing a distinctive Shetland identity that was, by the 1880s, rooted in both Viking Romanticism and antagonism to Scots. In 1888, Saxby innovatively attempts to solve this identity stalemate by severing Shetland's ethnic and racial links with the rest of Britain (Edmondston and Saxby, 1888: 11–12):

The Shetlanders continue to ‘take pride’ in calling themselves a distinct people, quite alien to Celt or Saxon, and bound to Scotland by few ties of kinship. Their habits, tastes, accent, physiognomy, are Scandinavian, and they have little sympathy with Celtic traits of character. Doubtless these marked differences were weakened at the time that Patrick Stuart and a horde of Scottish thieves infested Shetland, but the Norse element soon asserted its superiority again, and [...] the islanders never became Scotchmen.

We might compare this with a statement made by Saxby's mother Eliza Edmondston, 1856: 14–15 three decades earlier:

The two most distinct races of men, from which the British nation has sprung, are well known to be the Gael, and the Sassenach or Teuton. In Wales, in Ireland, and in the North and West of Scotland, we find obvious traces of the former, and of their language. But the *Gael* seems never to have inhabited Orkney and Shetland; which were perhaps *first*, and at all events, *finally* peopled by the genuine sons of the *Northmen*.

Whereas Eliza Edmondston merely contrasts the Germanic peoples with the Celts, Saxby shifts the terms of the debate. Saxby is the first Shetland writer to take a blatantly anti-Celtic, anti-Lowland Scottish, and anti-English tone. Similarly, Saxby writes in 1888 of the “connecting chain between the modern Shetlanders and the Norsemen, whose blood is still the reddest drop of that mixed fluid which permeates British veins” (Edmondston & Saxby, p. 186). In other words, by racialising the people of Britain (Highland and Lowland Scots are all Celts, the English are Saxons, and the Shetlanders are Norse), she is able to carve out conceptual space for a distinctive Shetland identity.

MacRitchie's theory was rooted in evidence from Orkney and Shetland, and he visited Shetland sometime in the mid-to late 1880s, prior to writing *Testimony of Tradition* (MacRitchie, 1890: 58–59). He most likely was in personal contact with schoolmaster Robert Jamieson, a letter from whom, posthumously published by Spence (1899: 55–56) in *Shetland Folk-Lore*, represents the first instance of unquestionably



MacRitchie-inspired scholarship in a Shetland book. Jamieson states that the Finns built Shetland's brochs but were eventually forced by the Vikings to leave the islands. The brochs were then inhabited by the Picts:

"In time the Finn owners were forgotten, and the mound-dwellers, or *Pechts*, became associated in the public mind with the brochs. [...] Unless old men and women in several parishes wilfully lied, or were more liable to be deceived than we are, the mound-dwellers existed in Shetland up to the beginning of the present century."

Although Jamieson's chronology differs from that of MacRitchie by differentiating between the Finns and the Picts/mound-dwellers, his implicit identification of Picts with trows is significant.

The florid brand of Viking Romanticism promoted by Saxby made a significant impact on Shetland writers such as W. Fordyce Clark, whose 1906 *The Story of Shetland* also shows inspiration from MacRitchie. Clark, 1906: 26–36 posits that Scotland's (and later, Shetland's) earliest-known inhabitants were short, dark, dolichocephalic Iberians – possibly identical to the Picts or "the traditionary Finns of Shetland" – who fled to the wilds of Britain after being conquered by "the Celtic Aryans," eventually constructing brochs.

As the 19th Century became the 20th and as Shetland's Norse character became more and more widely accepted locally, Shetland publications paid increasing attention to folklore of the supernatural. This contrasts with mainland British trends, where both academic and amateur research into folk belief fell slowly out of fashion after the turn of the century. MacRitchie's theory finds direct though summary expression in John Nicolson, 1920 *Some Folk-Tales and Legends of Shetland* (11–12), where it is argued that a particular story "is of interest because of the support that it gives to the euhemeristic theory that the Picts, or Pechts, and the Trows were one and the same, and that the popular conception of Trows as supernatural beings was simply imagination working on a basis of reality."

By the time of Nicolson's writing, British scholarship was in near-universal agreement that MacRitchie's euhemeristic theory was incorrect. Shetland's scholarly links with Edinburgh had, however, declined sharply in the early-20th Century. This is evident in Shetland books, which generally either cease citing their sources or cite only very out-of-date sources. It may thus be that MacRitchie's theory continued making an impact longer in Shetland than it did elsewhere in the British Isles in part because the theory referred specifically to Shetland and in part because the heyday of Shetland–Edinburgh scholarly exchange was also the heyday of MacRitchie, with Shetlanders 'missing' the eventual conclusive rejection of this variety of euhemerism.

Following her return to Shetland in 1898, Jessie M.E. Saxby wrote but few books, which made her 1932 *Shetland Traditional Lore*, published when she was 90 years old, all the more influential. It is here that Saxby first links Shetland's supernatural traditions to the Viking narrative she had helped establish four decades earlier. *Shetland Traditional Lore* is full of subtle literary manoeuvres that turn the Highlanders into hapless Celts and the rest of the British population into overbearing but cowardly Anglo-Saxons (for instance, Saxby, 1932: 5, 40, 60).

An obvious problem for Saxby's attempts to utilise MacRitchieism is that MacRitchie seeks to explain the

entirety of European and northern Asian fairy folklore. Saxby, meanwhile, seeks to prove Shetland's uniqueness (1932: 88–90):

We have the tradition of two races who inhabited our Isles before either Kelt or Viking; one of these was the 'peerie Hill-men' akin to Finns or 'Yaks' (Esquimaux). That race probably became the thralls of the fighting Kelts and masterful Sea-kings. Many words of ours relating to menial duties which cannot be traced to Keltic or Norse sources doubtless had their origin with the 'peerie Hill-men.' From them comes without doubt our tradition of Trows. How did they find their way to our Isles? Were they fishing in their tiny canoes; or were they flying from enemies and found the sea their refuge? Wind and wave would carry them far from Norway or Denmark, and so they would drift aimlessly until cast upon our shores. [...]

We have legends of Pechs or Picts. The Shetlanders spoke with dread of the fighting Picts, but there was contempt, even pity, in allusion to the 'puir peerie Pechen.' They were said to carry burdens, to be ingenious and clever in working with metals. [...] They dug out homes like rabbit-warrens. These were so constructed that one large stone covered the opening, and we don't know how far in the earth those rooms and passages went. [...] Pechen were never spoken of as masters. They sneaked about the hillsides. They seemed willing to work for the 'Mukle Maisters,' but were malicious and dishonest servants, resenting the power of a stronger race.

They seem to have lingered some time as thralls.

Saxby then retells a shortened version of the 'Heather Ale' story from *Home of a Naturalist* (see Grydehøj, 2013: 45) before continuing her narrative of conquest (Saxby, 1932: 91–92):

The Mukle Men were said to be Finns. I have heard them spoken of as Denschmen. Karl Blind tells that Finn is an old Germanic word and was applied to all Northmen. [...] Scholars say that the Finns were a prehistoric race, Mongoloid or Turanian. In our legendary lore the Picts and Finns were often opposed to each other; both fierce and overbearing, both endowed with enormous strength, both striving for the mastery of our Isles. [...] The Finns were endowed with supernatural powers, and were sometimes talked of as allied to the Trows in this respect.

I think we may say that our Isles were inhabited all along by people from *North* lands. First the peerie Hill-men, Lapps and Eskimo. Then the Mukle Maisters, Finns and Picts (shall we call *them* different tribes of Kelts?). Next came the Vikings, rebels from Scandinavia, robbers and conquering heroes. Lastly the Scots, who won our Isles by fraud and violence.

A careful reading reveals the internal logic in this narrative of conquest in which all races but the Vikings are types of Celts, who are of "Mongoloid or Turanian" origin:

- 1) The diminutive hill men (Lapps/Eskimos) arrive in canoes/kayaks and eke out a living while dwelling in simple caves dug into the sides of mounds and hills.
- 2) The closely related Picts arrive, bringing with them a more advanced material culture, with the result that they live in complex subterranean homes.

- 3) The Finns arrive, conquering and enslaving the various mound-dwellers.
- 4) The Vikings defeat and eradicate the Finns.
- 5) The Scots take over Shetland “by fraud and violence”. Even though these, historically, were Lowland Scots, Saxby seems happy to label them as Celtic. She has said earlier that Hill-men and Finns lived in Shetland prior to “Kelt or Viking.”

This narrative is clearly based on MacRitchie’s theory, to the extent that tradition successively turns multiple races into fairies. Saxby, however, never hints that this story is not limited to Shetland. Not even Orkney receives mention.

For Saxby (1932: 93–94), the true tragedy is the Scottish conquest:

When Shetland came under Scottish rule much of the Scandinavian character became coloured, of course, by the new influences, although the folk hated their oppressors. The Scots, who forced their religion, their mode of life, and their laws upon our Isles, did not change the *character* of our people, but later, grasping lairds and tyrannical clergy changed a conservative people into determined Liberals. [...]

No wonder they resented the wholesale seizure of their land which they passionately loved. No wonder they resented the insolent airs of authority and superior rank affected by the illegitimate scions of Scottish nobility who swarmed over their Isles, grasping everything from the helpless natives!

The overall effect of *Shetland Traditional Lore* is to differentiate Shetland by means of creating a unified narrative for the islands. Saxby takes the ‘us versus them’ philosophy previously expounded in Shetland Romanticism and extends it to the realm of supernatural tradition. Just as the Norse are superior to the Scots, Saxby (1932: 141–142) sees trows as superior to English, Scottish, and Irish fairies:

Dainty little fairies of greenswards and woodlands, of moonlight dance, and gossamer wing never seem to have visited our Isles: frightened no doubt by the rude winds, the cold snow, and the uncertain climate; also the over-bearing, masterful character of all the native supernatural beings.

One of Saxby’s great innovations, then, was to make Shetland’s supernatural legends part of the islands’ Viking narrative. Previously, impressive pre-Viking structures such as the brochs had impeded the building of a unified Shetland narrative: If the Vikings exterminated the Picts, it was difficult for Shetlanders to claim both Pictish and Viking heritage. MacRitchie’s euhemerism, with some alteration, provided a way out by virtually dehumanising the broch builders. By limiting MacRitchie’s theory to Shetland, Saxby transforms trows into something more than just a local variety of Scottish fairy (*à la* George Low and Arthur Edmondston) or even Norwegian troll (*à la* Samuel Hibbert) (see Grydehøj, 2013: 44–45). By making them the sole property of Shetland, she heightens Shetlanders’ claims to cultural distinctiveness.

*Shetland Traditional Lore* became the most significant book on Shetland supernatural tradition, both because of its genuinely valuable contents and because of the influence it exercised over later writing and thought. Saxby died in 1940 and is rarely read today. However, her construction of what amounts to a Shetland ‘foundation myth’ was immediately taken up by her successors. Peter A. Jamieson (1933: 32–33) writes of the Scottish invasion of Shetland by “hordes of ‘broken men,’ rapacious adventurers, and unscrupulous ministers” as well as of

how “the traditionary Finns, or Lapps” came to Shetland from Norway in “skin canoes.” (We might note that the copy of MacRitchie’s *Testimony of Tradition* now held in the Shetland Archives formerly belonged to Peter A. Jamieson’s brother, Willie Jamieson.) Meanwhile, MacRitchiean–Saxbyean Picts/trows entered Shetland fiction in William Moffatt, 1936 *Rough Island Story* (19–20, 294–295), which features highly racialised mound-dwelling Picts: a small, strong, long-armed, hirsute, and dark-skinned people and who later become trows in Shetland tradition. Moffatt expands on this idea in his 1939 novel *Twilight over Shetland*, which concerns the interactions of Vikings, Pictish slaves, and free Picts/trows. Moffatt (1939: 266) summarises the MacRitchiean–Saxbyean stance thus:

So persistent and effective were these raids [by the free Picts on Viking settlements] that a time came when people were inclined to ascribe these visitations to spiritual beings or Trows [...]. It was during that twilight hour of a dying race that the hidden people became ghostly or spiritual beings in the minds of the new race who suffered from a cause they could not see.

In 1951, A.T. Cluness (1951: 111–112) ponders in non-fiction form about the Lappish kayakers encountered by the Picts, and a fiction story in Cluness’s *Told Round the Peat Fire* (1955: 132–133) relates how fugitive Picts live as subterranean trows for decades after the Viking settlement, citing Brand in a non-fiction epilogue to suggest that Picts remained underground “for many generations” after 1700. Cluness (1967: v; 114) is still propounding on Picts, kayaking Finns, and trows in his 1967 *Shetland Book*, which was commissioned as a Shetland school text book by the Education Committee of the County Council. So strong was this trend for subterranean Pict writing that Samuel S.S. Polson gets in on the game with his a 1963 short story ‘Trollawater: A Tale of the Pictish Resistance Movement’. Even in the 1980s, James R. Nicolson, 1981: 84–85 is still following A.T. Cluness’ lead.

Strikingly, MacRitchie’s ideas have played nowhere near as strong a role in Orkney. The Orcadian folklorist Marwick (2000 [1975]: 13) devotes but one not-entirely favourable sentence to the theory in his 1975 *Folklore of Orkney and Shetland*, and although the 19th-Century Orcadian antiquarian Walter Traill Dennison to some extent associates Picts with trows (Henderson and Cowan, 2004: 21), he also argues implicitly against the forms of euhemerism laid out by Blind and MacRitchie (Traill Dennison, 1995: 33–38).

In contrast, ever since Saxby’s 1932 *Shetland Traditional Lore*, some version of Saxby’s MacRitchie-inspired narrative of conquest has been present in virtually every local book involving supernatural tradition. Many major Shetland writers have since supported the theory, and there has not, to our knowledge, been a single published rejection of the theory from within Shetland, either implicit or explicit – despite the fact that MacRitchieism has played almost no role in folklore research (as opposed to fiction and racial anthropological writing) outside of Shetland since the early 1900s.

As ethnographic fieldwork has shown, the Viking Romanticism rooted in Saxby’s Shetland foundation myth of a historical succession from lowly Pict to noble Viking to duplicitous Scot remains a dominant trope in conceptions of local identity. In addition, the Pict-trow association that makes this foundation myth possible remains deeply engrained in popular conceptions of both Picts and trows among Shetlanders of all backgrounds and ages (Grydehøj, 2010, 2011).

## Conclusion

Generally speaking, Shetland identity has developed significantly over the past two centuries, as a feeling of cultural distinctiveness was gradually complemented by self-identification with Scandinavia. Despite the archipelago's geographical isolation from mainland Britain and Scandinavia, its identity-building process has followed wider societal developments, reflecting peaks and troughs of 'the New Philology', nationalism, racial anthropology, political liberalism, socialist-tinged ideology, and countless other trends on a European level. Efforts at self-identification have also contributed to these wider trends, with Shetlanders writing about or communicating their conceptions of local identity with the outside world.

This two-part paper has sought to present a case of complex island-mainland cultural interaction. Many other cases could have been selected, even within the same subject matter involving Shetland. One could, for instance, trace the mutually influential intellectual exchange between Shetlanders such as Arthur Laurenson, Gilbert Goudie, and J.J. Haldane Burgess on the one hand and international scholars such as Gudbrand Vigfússon, Jakob Jakobsen, Sir George Dasent, and Karl Blind on the other, which strongly influenced local concepts of ethnicity. Alternatively, one could consider how, in a later period, the group of intellectuals involved in *The New Shetlander* magazine was able to guide public discourse concerning culture and nationality during Shetland's rush into modernisation. In other words, as influential as the intellectual meeting of MacRitchie and Shetland writers has been for the formation of Shetland identity and for international scholarship and – unfortunately – practice, it is just one influential intellectual meeting among many.

In fact, it is the kind of intellectual meeting at which small islands excel. MacRitchie's project was made possible by the small size of the communities in which it was rooted. Only in places like Orkney and Shetland do Early Modern sources like Wallace and Brand remain staples of research, to which scholars return and which they reinterpret again and again, simply because the geographical isolation and easy delimitation of these communities leads to a limited scope of literature. In contrast, MacRitchie's theory was vast in scope. It was also fundamentally incorrect. But its geographical and conceptual expansiveness was held together by its rootedness in small places. The fateful reports by Wallace and Brand gained their prominence because they were insular, and they retained their power for the same reason: With no other literature to contradict them, they could later be reshaped to form the cores of immense and monumental narratives of self and place. Due to the efforts of writers like Blind and MacRitchie, such narratives could, in fact, be so monumental as to even cause Shetlanders to imagine in retrospect that their islands possessed traditions of supernatural Finns. As "sites of creative conceptualization" imbued with "fallacious simplicity" (Baldacchino, 2010: 14–15), small islands have the potential to intensify the power of the cultural, scholarly, and political logics to which they are subjected both from within and from without.

In common with MacRitchie's research, the present two-part paper is a conspicuously insular project, representing a form of scholarship that is only possible through a comprehensive reading of the literature relating to a place. Although I have greater resources and a more sophisticated scholarly

apparatus at my disposal than did MacRitchie, both of our projects have been dependent on the acquisition of as complete as feasible an overview of a single place. These projects are specifically possible in small, geographically distinct places like Shetland, like Korčula (Orlić, 2013), like Guernsey (Johnson, 2012), like Amami (Johnson and Kuwahara, 2013).

To say that peripheral island communities possess relatively few external cultural inputs is not to say that they are therefore any less influenced by the inputs they receive. Without contradicting ourselves, we can simultaneously assert that many small islands serve remarkably well as theoretical testing grounds (without this service necessarily saying anything about the wisdom of the theory being tested) and that they are thoroughly integrated into the cultural flows of wider society.

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