

**MONASTERIES IN THE ARCHDIOCESE OF NIÐAROS  
MONASTICISM IN ICELAND REPORT  
JENNIFER GRAYBURN, JULY 2015**

**REPORT OVERVIEW**

The medieval Archdiocese of Niðaros controlled ten bishoprics that, today, would span six different countries across the North Sea and North Atlantic, including Norway, England, Scotland, the Faroe Islands, Iceland, and Greenland. These regions are fragmented by geography, language, religion, national interests, political and heritage policies, academic pursuits, and documentary and archaeological preservation; it should, therefore, not be surprising that the research and history in each region varies widely and that a comprehensive study of this entire archdiocese is lacking. Lately, there has been increasing interest in cross-sea connections between these distant bishoprics and their personal, literary, aesthetic, and institutional relationships. In order to better understand the possible relationships between monastic institutions within the Niðaros Archdiocese, this report considers architectural and archaeological remains of possible monastic sites to better contextualize the Monasticism in Iceland project.

The main obstacles of this study are a lack of documentary evidence and inconclusive archaeological evidence for many of the regions under consideration. In the Faroe Islands (Diocese of Kirkjubøur), for example, there is tantalizing evidence for early Irish ecclesiastical sites, yet no evidence for monastic activities after the Norse settlement. Shetland (Diocese of Kirkjubagr), too, was likely the location for Irish or Pictish *papar*, yet there is no definitive evidence for later monastic establishments. It is possible that there was monastic activity on these islands, but at this time, these regions offer little information for understanding later Norse monasticism under the Archdiocese of Niðaros.

Alternatively, there is a fair amount of evidence for the Isle of Man (Diocese of Suðreyjar), though monasteries there show clear English influence. Rushen Abbey, as the most powerful Manx monastery, was a Cistercian monastery and the daughter house of Furness Abbey in Cumbria, England. While only a chapel tower stands today, the monastery was constructed of stone and built around the standard cloister arcade commonly found in Britain and Europe. Furness Abbey's influence extended beyond the monastic community, however, to the right to nominate Suðreyjar bishops. Most monasteries were patronized by the Celtic-Norse Manx kings, yet the Cistercian houses answered directly to the Pope, rather than a bishop or archbishop.<sup>1</sup> Such relationships do not preclude influence from Niðaros, as some documents reveal, but there is currently little material evidence to supplement these ties.<sup>2</sup>

The most promising comparisons for Icelandic monasteries come from Orkney (with Shetland, part of the Diocese of Kirkjubagr) and Greenland (Diocese of Garðar). There are

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<sup>1</sup> A.W. Moore, *A History of the Isle of Man*, vol. 1 (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1909, reprinted 1977), 164-175.

<sup>2</sup> As one example, *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* shows an interesting interaction between Suðreyjar and Norway. The saga mentions the presence of John, earl of Orkney, and Simon, the bishop of the southern islands and abbot of Iona, at Hákon's court. Simon's presence as both bishop and abbot shows the ties between the bishopric, an important monastery in the Outer Hebrides, and Norway. John Mooney notes that many translations of the text associate these two titles incorrectly with two different men (one being Simon, the other unnamed). Although it began as an Irish monastery, Iona was located in the Diocese of Suðreyjar until Scotland regained control of the islands in 1266. Iona's relationship with the Norse world would be an interesting topic for further research. John Mooney, *Eynhallow: The Holy Island of the Orkneys*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Kirkwall: W. R. Mackintosh, 1949), 45-46.

documentary clues for monastic communities in both territories, though the location of these monasteries is open to debate. Since architectural and archaeological evidence is so important for the monastic discussion, this report will focus on presenting as much information as possible about their identification. In some cases, sites recognized by scholars as monastic show no conclusive evidence for this identification; alternatively, some sites that are not currently considered monastic show enticing similarities to each other and Icelandic monasteries like Skriðuklaustur.

## MONASTICISM IN THE NORTHERN ISLES

Unlike Iceland, the Northern Isles were already populated when the Norse invaders arrived, and the nature of the Norse conquest is still debated. Early accounts like *Historia Norwegiæ* describe a violent genocide, with Norse invaders killing the established Picts and *papar*. Dominantly Norse place names and an abrupt disappearance of Pictish artifacts seem to support this narrative. Yet, archaeologists have recently focused on instances of Pictish and Norse material overlap and proposed at least a limited continuity between Pictish and Norse populations.<sup>3</sup> This debate is directly related to the Northern Isles' medieval monasteries, for place names, architectural remains, and hagiographical accounts of Celtic monks all evince monastic activity in Orkney and Shetland prior to the invasion. The existence of any monasteries would have been threatened by the influx of pagan settlers. If the existing Christian population was killed or fled (as the established narrative suggests), the islands would have changed abruptly from a Christian to a pagan land. If there was some level of Pictish continuity, though, it is possible that some monastic sites continued normally under Norse control until the pagans adopted Christianity themselves. Christopher Morris has recently proposed this latter scenario, arguing that the Norse invaders retained their pagan faith for only a short time.<sup>4</sup>

One of the main obstacles for any scholar of monasticism in the Northern Isles is the lack of concrete evidence to identify possible monastic sites. Documentary evidence is rare and incomplete. *Orkneyinga saga* references monks or monasteries explicitly only three times: first, Earl Rögnvaldr Kali Kolsson sees 16 men with shaved foreheads while on the island of Westray and composes a satirical poem about them; second, Earl Páll Hákonarson suggests that he remove himself from power and join a monastery to avoid his enemies; and third, Sveinn Ásleifarson steals a boat belonging to monks.<sup>5</sup> In addition to the saga, a few Scottish documents testify to the importance of monastic patronage for the Orcadian earls in adjacent lands. The first is a brieve to Earl Rögnvaldr of Orkney and Earl Haraldr Maddaðarson of Caithness from King David I of Scotland: "As you love me, I command and order you to love the *manaig* [monks] dwelling at Dornach and their tenants and maintain them wherever they may journey

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<sup>3</sup> Anna Ritchie, "Birsay around AD 800," in *Orkney Heritage, Vol. 2: Birsay: A Centre of Political and Ecclesiastical Power*, edited by William P.L. Thompson, 46-66 (Kirkwall: Orkney Heritage Society, 1983).

<sup>4</sup> Christopher Morris points to an account of an Irish saint, St. Findan, who escaped from Viking captors in Orkney to a bishop's *civitas* on a neighboring island. Christopher Morris, "From Birsay to Brattahlíð: Recent Perspectives on Norse Christianity in Orkney, Shetland, and the North Atlantic Region," in *Scandinavia and Europe 800-1350: Contact, Conflict, and Coexistence*, Medieval Texts and Cultures of Northern Europe 4, edited by Jonathan Adams and Katherine Holman, 177-196 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), 184.

<sup>5</sup> *Orkneyinga saga*, chapters 72, 75, and 95.

through your domains.”<sup>6</sup> The second is a charter to Scone Abbey from Earl Haraldr Maddaðarson: “Harald, earl of Orkney, Shetland and Caithness for Scone Abbey; has given 1 mark of silver, by weight of Scottish mark. He wishes that every year aforesaid alms will be paid to that house by himself, his son Turphin and his heirs in perpetuity, for souls of himself, his wife and his ancestors.”<sup>7</sup> While these records reveal nothing about monasticism in Orkney or Shetland proper, they nevertheless preserve the reality of monastic communities in the surrounding territories and the role of the earls as their protectors and patrons. The emphasis on mainland Scotland, furthermore, indicates possible influences for the Orcadian institutions.

Some medieval chronicles specify that Orkney had at least one medieval monastery as well. *Chronica de Mailros*, a chronicle from Melrose Abbey, a Cistercian monastery in Scotland, records that a certain Lawrence, formerly an abbot in Orkney, was elected as abbot at Melrose in 1175. In 1201 and 1296, *Origines Cistercienses* also refers to an Orcadian community named “Apenma, Apenna insula Orchardra, or Orchates in Insula.”<sup>8</sup> Such references suggest that the Cistercians at least were present on the Orkney Islands, but it is not clear where. As a result, scholars must rely on archaeology and place names to identify possible monastic activity in the landscape. The archaeology is especially ambiguous, and different scholars have different opinions regarding possible monastic sites and dates. R. G. Lamb, on one hand, hypothesizes that structures on island broughs and stacks at Kame of Isbister, Durness, and Yell in Shetland and Corn Holm in Orkney are earlier Pictish monastic sites due to their isolated location and cluster of small square ruins. Sites at Strandibrough and Maiden Stack off Papa Stour in Shetland and Deerness in Orkney share this same isolated location, but have the traditional oblong-shaped ruins typical of Norse settlement and could suggest Norse monastic activity.<sup>9</sup> Christopher Morris, on the other hand, focuses on St. Ninian’s Isle and Papil on West Burra in Shetland and the Brough of Deerness and the Brough of Birsay in Orkney as possible Pictish monastic sites, with little discussion of Norse sites.<sup>10</sup> James Barrett, though, argues that many of these sites are not definitively monastic and may have been watchtowers or defensive positions instead.<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately, many of these sites have not been thoroughly investigated, and it is impossible to say more about their date and form. While the Brough of Birsay, the Brough of Deerness, Eynhallow, and Papa Stronsay have all been proposed as likely sites of Pictish and/or Norse monasteries due to their isolated locations, architectural forms, and place names, some archaeologists have recently noted the lack of decisive monastic evidence. Nevertheless, these four sites will be addressed below in order to describe and compare possible monastic landscapes in Orkney. While archaeology at Papa Stronsay and the Brough of Deerness do not support the claim that these sites were Norse monasteries, records and archaeological evidence for the Brough of Birsay and the small island of Eynhallow reinforce their status as monastic communities.

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<sup>6</sup> G. W. S. Barrow, *The Charters of King David I: The Written Acts of David I King of Scots, 1124-53 and of His Son Henry Earl of Northumberland, 1139-52* (Rochester: Boydell Press, 1999), 9.

<sup>7</sup> “Document 3/13/1 (*Scone Lib.*, no. 58),” *People of Medieval Scotland Database*, 1093-1314, accessed 27 May 2015, <http://db.poms.ac.uk/record/source/2400/#>.

<sup>8</sup> Mooney, *Eynhallow*, 124.

<sup>9</sup> R. G. Lamb, “Coastal Settlements in the North,” *Scottish Archaeological Forum* 5 (1973): 76-98.

<sup>10</sup> Christopher Morris, “Church and Monastery in Orkney and Shetland: An Archaeological Perspective,” in *Nordsjøen: Handel, Religion og Politikk*, edited by J. F. Krøger and H. Naley, 185-206 (Kopervik: Karmøy Kommune, 1996).

<sup>11</sup> James H. Barrett, “New Excavations at the Brough of Deerness: Power and Religion in Viking-Age Scotland,” *Journal of the North Atlantic* 2 (2009): 85.

### Brough of Deerness

The ruins on the Brough of Deerness were long thought to be part of a monastery. The location is difficult to reach today (connected only at beach level and a steep cliff path) and was likely so during the middle ages.<sup>12</sup> The ruins of a chapel and some 30 buildings are not clear, and identifications range from an early monastery to a chiefly stronghold.<sup>13</sup> In the mid-twentieth century, 18 circular “monkish cells” around the southeast corner of the standing chapel were recognized and compared to ones on the island of Kirk Holm (Figure 1). These circular huts suggested to scholars that this was a Celtic monastic site before the Norse arrived and built the visible church ruins.<sup>14</sup>

Descriptions of Orkney from the sixteenth century and later reinforce the holy status of the brough, as there was a long-standing tradition for pilgrims to crawl up the brough on their hands and knees to pray at the chapel.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, the name “Deerness” is thought to mean the ‘ness of diars’ or ‘ness of priests.’<sup>16</sup> Yet, the circular forms mentioned above were not monastic cells at all, but rather crater holes from wartime shelling; the brough was actually used as target practice during WWI and WWII! Excavations of the chapel in the 1970s revealed two phases of the church, one timber and the other stone. Directly above the timber church, archaeologists discovered an Anglo-Saxon coin of King Eadgar dating between 959 and 975 AD. While this coin could have been old when it was deposited, the first phase is tentatively dated to the late tenth century. The later stone chapel was set within a trapezoidal churchyard with an entrance to the south. Two graves, covered with stone slabs, were found to the south of the chapel. The clay soil greatly eroded the skeletons, but scholars can still identify one as an adult male between 24 and 39 years old and the other as a youth between eight and nine years old. The stone church phase is dated between 990-1260 AD and 1021-1207 AD based on radiocarbon dating of the adult human bones.<sup>17</sup> Medieval pottery and imported steatite found at the site agree with these dates. Two more graves are situated east of the stone chapel, each containing an infant and one including a headstone.<sup>18</sup> The site was abandoned as an active chapel by the thirteenth century.<sup>19</sup>

The most recent 2008 trial excavation uncovered a number of domestic artifacts in the surrounding oblong structures, including a loom weight, spindle whorls, beads, clay and steatite vessels, and pins (Figure 2).<sup>20</sup> With little other evidence to support a monastic identification, the revised interpretation today is that Deerness was a stronghold of a powerful chieftain, not a monastic center for either Pictish or Norse populations.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Barrett, “New Excavations at the Brough of Deerness,” 81.

<sup>13</sup> Barrett, “New Excavations at the Brough of Deerness,” 82.

<sup>14</sup> Mooney, *Eynhallow*, 9.

<sup>15</sup> The earliest of these accounts is by Rev. Joseph Ben in 1529. Joseph Ben, “Description of the Orkney Islands, written in Latin by Joseph Ben, a native, in the year 1529,” translated in *The Belfast Monthly Magazine*, vol. 2, edited by Eilliam Drennan (Belfast: Smyth & Lyons, 1809), 268-269.

<sup>16</sup> Mooney, *Eynhallow*, 86.

<sup>17</sup> Barrett, “New Excavations at the Brough of Deerness,” 82. Christopher Morris, *Church and Monastery in the Far North: An Archaeological Evaluation* (Jarrow: Jarrow Lecture, 1989), 25.

<sup>18</sup> Christopher Morris, “Church and Monastery,” 25.

<sup>19</sup> Barrett, “New Excavations at the Brough of Deerness,” 82.

<sup>20</sup> Barrett, “New Excavations at the Brough of Deerness,” 89-91.

<sup>21</sup> Barrett, “New Excavations at the Brough of Deerness,” 92.

### Papa Stronsay

Papa Stronsay, which has been the site of the Golgotha Monastery and home to the Sons of the Most Holy Redeemer (Transalpine Redemptorists) since 1999,<sup>22</sup> is also thought to be a medieval monastic site. The name itself, including *papar*, suggests an early Celtic monastic presence, while the ruins of successive churches indicate multiple phases of occupation at least into the twelfth century. To some, including the present monks, a scene in *Orkneyinga saga* records monastic activity on site. In this scene, Earl Rögnvaldr Brusason went to *papey minii* to collect ale for his Christmas feast. As his men warmed themselves around the hearth, their enemy surrounded the house and set fire to it. All men were allowed out except Rögnvaldr, but he dressed as a deacon and escaped.<sup>23</sup> The potential presence of a deacon, however, is not evidence for a monastic site.

Excavations of what is now known as St. Nicholas Chapel were recently conducted in advance of coastal erosion (Figure 3). The earliest layers were found under the visible ruins of a church nave and contained a coastal path made of large flat stones and lined with narrow edge-set stones; a circular, likely corbel-roofed building; a stump of an upright stone; and green porphyry. The latter would have carried symbolic links to Rome. Archaeologists thus concluded, “the building was of some importance, possibly of ritual significance. It clearly predates the [visible] nave, the construction of which possibly represents a feature of the 11<sup>th</sup> century. It may represent an element of the pre-Norse monastic settlement on the site.”<sup>24</sup> A rectangular building with a large central hearth was also discovered in the same strata and may be part of a pre-Norse monastic settlement.

Above this cell is an eleventh-century chapel with twelfth-century additions, showing that the site was still in use after the Norse conquest. This building was deconstructed in the eighteenth century, though records indicate that the chancel was barrel vaulted.<sup>25</sup> Inside the nave, archaeologists discovered the fragments of a cross-incised stone (Figure 4). No graves in either layer were located, and it is possible that associated cemeteries already eroded into the sea or are situated outside the excavation zone.

Overall, the name of the island and the circular structure offer the strongest evidence for a monastic identification. Both, however, reinforce only the presence of a Pictish monastery, with little to suggest that the later stone church was anything more than a private chapel.

### Brough of Birsay

*Orkneyinga saga* states that Birsay was the site of Earl Þorfinnr Sigurðarson’s first Orcadian cathedral. While Stewart Cruden argues that the little church structure on the Brough of Birsay was the cathedral before it was granted to a monastic order,<sup>26</sup> Barbara Crawford argues

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<sup>22</sup> *Golgotha Monastery Island*, accessed 21 May 2015, <http://www.papastronsay.com/>.

<sup>23</sup> *Orkneyinga saga*, chapter 18.

<sup>24</sup> C. E. Lowe, S. Buteux, and J. Hunter, “St Nicholas Chapel, Papa Stronsay,” in *Discovery and Excavation in Scotland*, vol. 1, edited by Robin Turner (The Council of Archaeology, 2000), 68.

<sup>25</sup> Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, “Papa Stronsay, St Nicholas’ Chapel,” *Canmore*, accessed 27 May 2015, <http://canmore.rcahms.gov.uk/en/site/3291/details/papa+stronsay+st+nicholas+chapel/&biblio=more#books>.

<sup>26</sup> Stewart Cruden, “Earl Thorfinn the Mighty and the Brough of Birsay,” in *The Third Viking Congress*, edited by Kristján Eldjárn, 156-165 (Reykjavik: Hið íslenska fornleifafélag, 1956). Stewart Cruden, “Excavations at Birsay, Orkney,” in *The Fourth Viking Congress (York, August 1961)*, edited by Alan Small, 22-31 (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1965). C. A. Radford, “Birsay and the Spread of Christianity to the North,” in *Orkney Heritage, Vol. 2: Birsay: A Centre of Political and Ecclesiastical Power*, edited by William P.L. Thompson, 13-35 (Kirkwall: Orkney Heritage Society, 1983).

that this church is a later monastic church built on the site of Þorfinnr's church.<sup>27</sup> However, R. G. Lamb and Christopher Morris point to the existence of monumental foundations in the village of Birsay to argue that the cathedral was situated under the existing parish church, Magnus Kirk, just across the bay (Figures 5 and 6).<sup>28</sup> The church and surrounding buildings on the brough are now interpreted as a twelfth-century monastery, complete with an open cloister to the north of the church. A Pictish presence on the site has been established by archaeological finds, including an elaborate picture stone (Figure 7) and underlying foundations of a different alignment (Figure 8), but it is not clear if this presence was monastic as well. A Celtic bell discovered across the bay on Saevar Howe and the foundations of an Irish-styled oratory under Magnus Kirk might indicate that monks were present before the twelfth-century (Figure 9).<sup>29</sup>

According to a parish report from July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1627, there was a visible church ruin on the brough at that time. According to the report, "there is lykewyse ane littill holme within the sea callit the brughe of Birsay, quhilk is thought be the elder sort to have belongit to the reid frieris, for there is the fundatione of ane kirk and kirkyaird thair as yet to be seine."<sup>30</sup> If this account is accurate, the site was home to the Red Friars or Trinitarians. Eighteenth-century drawings of the Birsay area reinforce the documentary account by depicting the ruins of a church on the brough (Figures 10 and 11). St. Peter and St. Colm are recorded as possible church dedications, with some scholars arguing that Colm was short for Columba of Iona and others that Colm was a Pictish missionary.<sup>31</sup>

In the mid-nineteenth century, Sir Henry Dryden traveled to Orkney, cleared the debris in the church, and studied its formal qualities. He described and drew the nave, chancel, and apse of the church in detail (Figure 12), but he found a few features particularly interesting: a solitary western doorway, whose jambs lacked rebates for a door; two circular spaces flanking the chancel arch that he thought were stairways; a stone bench along the nave walls; and a single remaining double splayed chancel window to the north. Of interest, Dryden connects the presence of an aumbry in the eastern side of the northern chancel wall to similar recesses in the churches of Deerness and Eynhallow (likely also a monastic site; see below). As an interesting postscript, Dryden adds that a Mr. Leask of Boardhouse cleared more debris from the church to see if there was evidence of walls to enclose the circular spaces (still presuming they were staircases). They discovered plaster rather walls and a door in the north nave, a position he

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<sup>27</sup> Barbara Crawford, "Thorfinn, Christianity and Birsay: What the saga tells us and archaeology reveals," in *The World of the Orkneyinga saga: The Broad-Cloth Viking Trip*, edited by Olwyn Owen, 88-110 (Kirkwall: Orkney Islands Council, 2006).

<sup>28</sup> Christopher Morris, *Birsay Bay Project: Sites in Birsay Village and on the Brough of Birsay, Orkney*, vol. 2. University of Durham Department of Archaeology Monograph Series Number 2 (Durham: University of Durham, 1996), 31. R. G. Lamb, "The Cathedral and the Monastery," in *Orkney Heritage, Vol. 2: Birsay: A Centre of Political and Ecclesiastical Power*, edited by William P.L. Thompson, 36-45 (Kirkwall: Orkney Heritage Society, 1983), 37-44.

<sup>29</sup> J. W. Hedges, "Trial Excavations on Pictish and Viking settlements at Saevar Howe, Birsay, Orkney," *Glasgow Archaeological Journal* 10 (1983): 73-124.

<sup>30</sup> There is likewise a little holm within the sea called the Brough of Birsay, which is thought to be the elder sort to have belonged to the red friars, for there is the foundation of a kirk and kirkyard there as yet to be seen. Alexander Peterkin, *Rentals of the Ancient Earldom and Bishoprick of Orkney; with some other explanatory and relative documents* (Edinburgh: John Moir, 1820), 98.

<sup>31</sup> Lamb, "The Cathedral and the Monastery," 41.

describes as “very unusual.” He dates the church to c. 1100 and, having read *Orkneyinga saga*, proposes Earl Erlendr Þorfinnsson as its patron.<sup>32</sup>

While the location of this northern door was surprising to Dryden, an excavation in the 1930s revealed that it led to a complex of other buildings not visible during Dryden’s visit (Figure 13). This complex (designated Area I, Figure 14) was interpreted as a monastic cloister when the excavation was first described in the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland’s 1946 report and inventory.<sup>33</sup> The structures enclosing the cloister on three sides are identified as a chamber to the west, a kitchen and frater with reredorter pit to the north, and a chapter house and vestibule to the east. The eastern and northern ranges were constructed first; the western range was added and the kitchen expanded at a later date. Both the kitchen and frater were paved roughly with flagstones. A western pathway between the church and chamber led to the cloister and northern church door. A whalebone game piece and a potsherd were uncovered in the western range.<sup>34</sup>

This excavation also expanded the information available about the church and churchyard of the complex. Benches lined both northern and southern walls of the nave, and the circular recesses, rather than stairways, were circular niches possibly for altar settings. The apse itself was extended at a later date. In the fifteenth century, then, the apse opening was narrowed and a sandstone altar set against it. The foundations of a western compartment, presumably a tower, were laid, but the structure was never completed (Figure 15).<sup>35</sup> Artifacts discovered inside the church include a bone object (now lost) and antler game piece (perhaps a chessman). Archaeologists also excavated a grave in the center of the nave that was topped by a large stone block. Inside, fragments of a wooden coffin and a few bones remained.<sup>36</sup> Finally, three runic inscriptions were discovered around the church, including one in the northern face of the chancel wall that read, “Philippus carved [these] runes.”<sup>37</sup>

The southern churchyard was used as a cemetery and revealed multiple grave slabs. Supposedly, the Pictish picture-stone was discovered in pieces between two upright stones and with three skeletons beneath it. This account, however, was ill recorded, and there is now some doubt that the stone was repurposed in such a way. Still, some grave slabs were ornamented, including one marked with double crosses that covered the skeleton of a young person in a wooden coffin. Two upright stones were placed at the top and bottom of the grave. Another grave just south of the apse was covered with a cross-marked slab (Figure 16). Two small cists, a child’s grave, and burnt bone/ash were also discovered.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Sir Henry E. L. Dryden, “The Ruined Church on the Brough of Birsay, 1866,” reprinted in *Birsay Bay Project: Sites in Birsay Village and on the Brough of Birsay, Orkney*, vol. 2, edited by Christopher Morris, 267-268 (University of Durham Department of Archaeology Monograph Series Number 2 (Durham: University of Durham, 1996).

<sup>33</sup> Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, *Inventory of Orkney*, vol. 2, Twelfth Report with an Inventory of the Ancient Monuments of Orkney and Shetland (Edinburgh: H.M. Stationery Office, 1946), 1-4.

<sup>34</sup> Norman Emery and Christopher Morris, “Excavations on the Brough of Birsay, 1934-9,” in *Birsay Bay Project: Sites in Birsay Village and on the Brough of Birsay, Orkney*, vol. 2, edited by Christopher Morris, 209-255 (University of Durham Department of Archaeology Monograph Series Number 2 (Durham: University of Durham, 1996), 224-225.

<sup>35</sup> Emery and Morris, “Excavations on the Brough of Birsay, 1934-9,” 251.

<sup>36</sup> Emery and Morris, “Excavations on the Brough of Birsay, 1934-9,” 217-218.

<sup>37</sup> Emery and Morris, “Excavations on the Brough of Birsay, 1934-9,” 218.

<sup>38</sup> Emery and Morris, “Excavations on the Brough of Birsay, 1934-9,” 221.

Finally, a number of detached structures are scattered around the brough to the north, west, and east of the monastic core (refer to Figure 14). There is no secure dating for these structures and no satisfactory interpretation of their relationship. The western structures (Area III) appear to be Viking-Age longhouses, while the northern structures show evidence of iron smelting and other industrial activity, perhaps also from the same era. Cruden believed that the eastern cluster (Area II) was an earl's 'palace,' but there is no documentary or archaeological evidence to support this. This cluster of buildings show extended occupation and reconstruction through the later Norse era; perhaps these structures supplemented the main cloister to meet the needs of the monastery.<sup>39</sup> Whether or not this was a Trinitarian monastery, however, is not clear. Despite the parish record, Ian Cowan and David Easson cite dissenting opinions and classify it as a "supposed" foundation; they conclude that it is a monastery, but with too little evidence to prove which order established it.<sup>40</sup>

Regarding the relationship between Birsay and other possible monastic sites, Birsay is frequently compared to Deerness, especially concerning its brough location and later status as a pilgrimage site. In fact, the Scottish minister George Barry reported of Birsay as late as the early nineteenth century, "There remains of it a chapel, said to be dedicated to St Peter, which, like its fellow in the burgh of Deerness, was, till of late, a place of pilgrimage, and the receptacle of many a devout obligation."<sup>41</sup> Such a comparison can be misleading, however, for Deerness did not have a monastic foundation on it, nor was it inhabited after the thirteenth century. Birsay, moreover, is easily accessible; it was highly visible and easily reached from earls' political center in the Birsay village by boat or possibly by foot during low tide, as it is today. The proximity to Porfinnr's cathedral in the village, which was converted into a parish church in the twelfth century, supports the dual church system proposed in this project for Iceland.

The small size, arcade-less church nave, and general plan of the Birsay monastery are also formally linked to churches in Norway, especially at the monastery of Selje.<sup>42</sup> Reconstructions of other Norwegian monasteries, including Nonneseter Abbey in Oslo, propose a similar cloister plan; yet, Birsay is unique in that its cloister is north of the church, rather than south. The architectural connections between Birsay and Norway, however, are perhaps most clear when considering non-monastic churches. The same nave, chancel, and apse plan with flanking chancel niches can be found at Bø gamle kirke and Kviteseid gamle kirke in Telemark.<sup>43</sup>

### Eynhallow

The island of Eynhallow is less than a mile long and has been uninhabited since a fever broke out among its four residing families in 1851. By the time it was abandoned, it was an isolated island with few resources for even animals to survive. When the landlord of the site unroofed the empty crofts following the fever, he was surprised that one of the dwellings showed the Norman and Gothic features of an ancient chapel. Around the turn of the century, the debris was removed from the interior to provide clearer access to the medieval fabric.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Emery and Morris, "Excavations on the Brough of Birsay, 1934-9," 254.

<sup>40</sup> Ian B. Cowan and David E. Easson, *Medieval Religious Houses: Scotland, with an Appendix on the Houses in the Isle of Man*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Longman, 1976), 111.

<sup>41</sup> George Barry, *The History of the Orkney Islands* (Edinburgh: Archibald Constable and Company, 1805), 33.

<sup>42</sup> Crawford, "Thorfinn, Christianity and Birsay," 99-104.

<sup>43</sup> Øystein Ekroll, Morten Stige, and Jiri Havran, *Middelalder i Stein*, vol. 1, Kirker i Norge (ARFO: 2000).

<sup>44</sup> Mooney, *Eynhallow*, 9-11.



The minutes of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland record that there was a church on the island as late as 1586. It is not clear when this church was converted to crofters' dwellings, but the holy status of the island was retained in its name (holy island). There is little documentation to illuminate the history of the island, but L. Dietrichson and Johan Meyer first argued its monastic status in 1906. Dietrichson and Meyer connect the record of Abbot Lawrence in *Chronica de Mailros* to the Eynhallow chapel and its surrounding buildings (Figure 17).<sup>45</sup> They argue that the triangular arch (Figure 18) leading into the western church porch is comparable to eleventh-century Anglo-Saxon architecture and, therefore, the oldest extant architecture. The church is largely twelfth century, though there were additions and improvements in the fourteenth century, including a pointed archway (Figure 19) and belfry (Figure 20). These additions also include the ornamentation of church doorways with mouldings of ashlar masonry (Figure 21). The space was divided and altered when it finally became a residence.<sup>46</sup>

Although there has been no comprehensive excavation of the site, the ruins were eventually cleared of debris and Mooney expanded and corrected Dietrichson and Meyer's argument in what is still the most authoritative account of the ruins (Figure 22). He embraces the Cistercian identification of the monastery and makes note of other constructed features and place names on the island. These include a circular structure, as well as place names like Monkerness and Grange (Figure 23). The circular cell is very close to Monkerness (Figure 24), while the Grange name is often connected to Cistercian agricultural activity.<sup>47</sup> The place name Keldamuray might also stem from a religious site, as it combines *kelda*, the Norse word for well, and a Celtic form of Mary (Mary's Well).<sup>48</sup> Mooney argues that a burial discovered in what he and Dietrichson identify as the chapter house supports a monastic identification, for abbot burials appear in other chapter houses throughout Europe.<sup>49</sup> Two ancient barns are also present on the island and might have been part of the original monastic complex (Figure 25).<sup>50</sup>

Mooney also links Eynhallow with Rögvaldr Kali Kolsson's poem in *Orkneyinga saga*. Scholars had previously connected Rögvaldr's poem to the island of Ellyar Holm, but Mooney argues that Eynhallow's location fits the saga description better. He argues that the saga's account of Sveinn Ásleifarson's theft of a boat belonging to monks also occurred on Eynhallow.<sup>51</sup> Although Mooney admits in the second edition of his analysis that there were some objections to his conclusions, especially concerning the irregular (non-monastic) form of the plan, Mooney cites *Origines Cistercienses*, which also records the presence of a Cistercian site in Orkney in both 1201 and 1296.<sup>52</sup> Mooney's Cistercian proposal for Eynhallow, however, was believed too tenuous to be included in the 1946 RCAHMS report and inventory. Rather, the report favors an association with the Benedictine order. Cowan and Easson, consequently, label it as an "uncertain foundation" for the Benedictines.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Mooney, *Eynhallow*, 11-13.

<sup>46</sup> L. Dietrichson, *Monumenta Orcadica: The Norsemen in the Orkneys and the Monuments They Have Left* (Kristiania: Alb. Cammermeyers Forlag, 1906), 36-43. Mooney, *Eynhallow*, 67-70, 97-98.

<sup>47</sup> Mooney, *Eynhallow*, 30-32, 61.

<sup>48</sup> Mooney, *Eynhallow*, 29.

<sup>49</sup> Mooney, *Eynhallow*, 71-72.

<sup>50</sup> Mooney, *Eynhallow*, 73-74.

<sup>51</sup> Mooney, *Eynhallow*, 35-40.

<sup>52</sup> Mooney, *Eynhallow*, 124-125.

<sup>53</sup> RCAHMS, *Inventory of Orkney*, 233-234. Cowan and Easson, *Medieval Religious Houses*, 61-62.

It is important to emphasize the similarities between Eynhallow and Birsay. As Dryden noted, both have an aumbry in the same location in the chancel of the church. Also, both churches were constructed around simple nave and chancel plans and expanded over the centuries into more sophisticated complexes. They are additionally located on islands that were not isolated, but rather highly central to Orcadian travel. Eynhallow, too, is adjacent to not just one other church, but two churches directly across the water. Mooney speculates that the monks would have served the local Rousay and Mainland populations in these churches.<sup>54</sup> It is also interesting to note the similarity of Eynhallow's 'irregular' plan and the plans at Skiðuklaustur and possible monastic sites at Þykkvabæjarklaustur and in Greenland (below).<sup>55</sup> In all of these cases, the living quarters are clustered west of the church and attached directly to the churchyard wall.

#### A Final Note on Orkney

Although many sites have been proposed as monasteries in Orkney based on location, place names, and post-medieval documents (not all of them covered here in detail), Birsay and Eynhallow are the only Norse sites with both medieval documentation and archaeological evidence to support the claim. There is an interesting example, however, that can only be mentioned in passing due to limited information and study. In his *Eynhallow* study, Mooney cites A. W. Johnston, who states that the Inverness volume of General Hutton's Collection includes a relevant record from 1439: "Inst. of Sasine in favors of the friers of the Ile of Cavay." This passage suggests that there was a small community on the island of Cava that paid an annuity to the Blackfriars of Inverness.<sup>56</sup> While there is a small chapel and churchyard still on the island of Cava, it has not been possible to locate this source or discover additional information on the Cava identification. If this record exists as stated, it offers an interesting lead for future study and another relevant comparison for the island monasteries of Birsay and Eynhallow.

### MONASTICISM IN GREENLAND

Greenland is first mentioned in two Papal Bulls from 1053 and 1055 as part of the Archdiocese of Adalbert, Archbishop of Hamburg-Bremen. Yet, it is likely that the inclusion of Greenland within the archdiocese does not reflect direct contact or control; references to Greenland in Adam of Bremen's *Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesiae Pontificum* (c. 1075) indicate that continental knowledge of Greenland was secondary, incomplete, and framed using classical rhetoric and models. While Adalbert ordained a certain Albert for the "Oceanic Islands," it is not clear if he was the bishop of Greenland or if he (or any other representative from Hamburg-Bremen) ever went there. Henrik Jansen believes that Adalbert included these distant and

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<sup>54</sup> Mooney, *Eynhallow*, 131.

<sup>55</sup> Dietrichson argues that Eynhallow shares the same plan as Norwegian monasteries and uses Hovedøen as a model to identify the monastic chambers. He suggests that only the orientation is different, with Hovedøen's cloister to the south of the church and Eynhallow's to the west. The Eynhallow site is sloped and therefore not level enough to have a similar southern cloister, he argues. This comparison, however, is unconvincing. Like Birsay, the cloister at Hovedøen is connected to the church, with the southern wall of the church enclosing one whole side of the cloister square. Eynhallow and other North Atlantic examples are unique in that the church is *not* directly connected to the cloister; rather, the churchyard wall is used to enclose the cloister to the east and the clustered monastic buildings project perpendicularly from it. Dietrichson, *Monumenta Orcadica*, 40-42.

<sup>56</sup> Mooney, *Eynhallow*, 58, 110.

perhaps heathen lands within his archdiocese to increase his territorial influence and, consequently, his own patriarchal privileges.<sup>57</sup> Greenland's own bishopric at Gaðar was not established until 1126. It was then placed under submission of Niðaros when the latter was elevated as an archdiocese in 1152/3.

There is little documentary evidence regarding Greenland's churches and monasteries. The earliest reference to monastic activity is a letter from the bishop of Bergen to the bishop of Greenland in 1308 that references the existence of *klaustranna* in Greenland.<sup>58</sup> Church properties are also outlined in a description of Greenland by the Norwegian king's representative, Ívar Bárðarson (1341-1368),<sup>59</sup> and church names are listed in *Flateyjarbók* (1387-94).<sup>60</sup> Unfortunately, the former only survives in seventeenth-century manuscripts, and additional content may have been added during the intervening centuries. These lists are supplemented by general references in two seventeenth-century manuscripts: *Gripla*<sup>61</sup> and *Grönlandiae vetus chorographia*.<sup>62</sup> These sources, however, do not always agree, and it is possible that there were between 10 and 14 churches in the Eastern Settlement and one and four churches in the Western Settlement.<sup>63</sup> There seems to be particular confusion regarding the churches listed near the monasteries described by Ívar. While there are 14 different sites, Aage Roussell argues that these numbers should be revised to 12 *total* churches (i.e. 10 churches and 2 monasteries). He argues that the Vatzdalr and Petrsvik churches listed in different sources are, in fact, the same church, because they appear in the same Ketilsfjord area. Roussell wonders if the confusion stems from the existence of a monastery in this area. A similar overlap of names occurs in Siglufjord, which is believed to be the site of a convent. Here, Hrafnarfjord and Vagar might refer to the same church.<sup>64</sup> Orri Vésteinsson notes that some sources only list ten churches (without the monasteries). He believes that Ívar's account and the Icelandic monastic model prove that

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<sup>57</sup> It is possible that Greenland was part of the Icelandic diocese or that Iceland was the conduit for any attempted contact. Adam of Bremen, for example, records that Adalbert gave letters to Isleif Gizzurson for the people of Iceland and Greenland. Henrik M. Jansen, *A Critical Account of the Written and Archaeological Sources' Evidence Concerning the Norse Settlements in Greenland* (København: C. A. Reitzels Forlag, 1972), 12-25.

<sup>58</sup> "Diplomatarium Norvegicum, b.10 nr. 9," *Dokumentasjons-prosjektet*, accessed 9 June 2015, [http://www.dokpro.uio.no/perl/middelalder/diplom\\_vise\\_tekst.pr1?b=8958&s=n&str=](http://www.dokpro.uio.no/perl/middelalder/diplom_vise_tekst.pr1?b=8958&s=n&str=) (accessed 9 June 2015).

<sup>59</sup> Ívar mentions eight churches and two monasteries: Aros church, Petrsvik church, monastery in Ketilsfjord, convent in Hrafnarfjord, Vagar church in the estuary of the fjord, Gaðar in Einarsfjord, Hvalsey church in Hvalseyfjord, Dynes church in Eriksfjord, Solarfjöll's church, and Brattahlíð church in the same place. Stensnes [Sandnes?] in the Western Settlement, then, was supposedly a cathedral at some point. Jansen, *A Critical Account*, 72.

<sup>60</sup> Flateyjarbók lists 12 churches, including the cathedral: *Sva margar eru kirkjur a Groenlandi: Herjolfsnes er austast, ok er þar kirkja i Herjolfsfirði, önnur i Vatsdali i Ketilsfirði, hin iij i Vik, enn i Ketilsirði, hin iiij Vogum i Siglufirði, hin v undir Höfða i Austfirði: him iv biskudsstóllinn i Gördum i Einarsfirði; him vij at Harðsteinabergi; hin viij I Brattahlíð, enn i Eiriksfirði; hin ix undir Solarfjöllum i Isafirði (ok) him x; hin xi I Hvalseyjarfirði; xij á Garðanesi i Midfjörðum. Þessar eru i vestri bygð: á Sandnesi i Lysufirði; önnur i Hopi i Agnafirði, þridja i Anavik i Ragnafirði.* Jansen, *A Critical Account*, 68.

<sup>61</sup> No specific churches are listed in *Gripla*, but it does state: *XII kirkjur eru á Grænlandi i hinni eystri bygð, IIIar i vestri bygð.* Jansen, *A Critical Account*, 69.

<sup>62</sup> Here we learn only seven churches from the Eastern Settlement: *Herjulfsfjarðarkirkja, Ketilsfjörðr, tvær kirkjur, Siglufjörðr kirkja, Ófundinnfjörðr, þar er biskupsstoll, þa Eyreks fjarðar kirkja, and Austkars fjörðr kirkja.* Jansen, *A Critical Account*, 69.

<sup>63</sup> Orri Vésteinsson, "Parishes and Communities in Norse Greenland," *Journal of the North Atlantic*, Special Volume 2 (2009): 144-145.

<sup>64</sup> Aage Roussell, *Farms and Churches, Farms and Churches in the Medieval Norse Settlements of Greenland* (København: I Kommission Hos C. A. Reitzels Forlag, 1941), 11, 97.

monastic foundations could also be parish churches.<sup>65</sup> As a result, Orri counts the monasteries *as* parishes in their own right to reach a total of 14.<sup>66</sup> These fundamental disagreements reveal both scholars' dependence on contradictory documentary sources and the challenges of church identification.

Further compounding the problem of identification, more churches exist in the landscape than in documentary sources. Likely, the documentation lists parish churches only.<sup>67</sup> Generally, size and form are used to differentiate between the ruins: larger churches may have functioned as public or parish churches, while smaller churches (often with round dykes) were probably established as farm chapels during the earliest phases of church building.<sup>68</sup> Evidence from the 'Church, Christianity and magnate farmers in Norse Eastern Settlement' project confirms that some of the smaller churches date to the *landnám* period (c. 1000), while the size and number of the structures and cemeteries suggest that these were family churches. Jette Arneborg believes that these churches are chronologically distinct from the larger parish churches, with the parish churches (owned by powerful magnates) replacing the private churches.<sup>69</sup> Orri Vésteinsson, however, argues that the private churches and parish churches were contemporary at least until the thirteenth century and that they indicate two tiers of wealth-status.<sup>70</sup> If Orri's theory is correct, parish churches and private chapels overlap chronologically and may not be as easily distinguishable as previously anticipated.

The relationship between documented sites and physical ruins is not clear for the listed monasteries either. Of the sources given above, Ívar Bárðarson's description is the only one to list any specific monastic sites, and he appears to do so only to establish their boundaries for tithes.<sup>71</sup> According to his report, there was an Augustinian monastery and a Benedictine convent located in Greenland's Eastern Settlement. The former was in Ketilsfjord (now Tasermiut Fjord) and dedicated to St. Olaf and St. Augustine. He set the latter, which was dedicated to St. Olaf, in Ramsnes Fjord.<sup>72</sup> Regarding the convent, Ívar says:

Next after Ketilsfjord lies Ramsnes Fjord, and far up this fjord there is a convent *ordinis Benedicti*: that convent owns everything up to the innermost part of the fjord and out from Vage [Vagar], which is consecrated to Olaf Saint and King. Voge [Vagar] church owns all the land along the outside of the fjord; in the fjord there are many small islands, and the convent owns them all, with the episcopal seat. In these islands there is much warm water, which is so hot in wintertime that no one can approach; but in summer it is

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<sup>65</sup> Orri Vésteinsson, "Parishes and Communities in Norse Greenland," 144-46.

<sup>66</sup> Orri Vésteinsson, "Parishes and Communities in Norse Greenland," 149-50.

<sup>67</sup> Orri Vésteinsson, "Parishes and Communities in Norse Greenland," 144-145.

<sup>68</sup> Jette Arneborg, "Churches, Christianity and magnate farmers in the Norse Eastern Settlement," in *Challenges and Solutions: Northern Worlds-Report from workshop 2 at the National Museum, 1 November 2011*, edited by Hans Christian Gulløv, Peter Andreas Toft, and Caroline Polke Hansgaard, 167-170 (Copenhagen: The National Museum, 2012), 167.

<sup>69</sup> Arneborg, "Churches, Christianity, and magnate farmers," 170.

<sup>70</sup> Orri Vésteinsson, "Parishes and Communities in Norse Greenland," 147-148.

<sup>71</sup> Although the surviving manuscript is much later than the original account and may have been added to at a later date, Ívar's descriptions are generally considered trustworthy. Kirsten A Seaver, *The Frozen Echo: Greenland and the Exploration of North America* (Stanford: Stanford University Press), 91-94.

<sup>72</sup> C. L. Vebæk, "The Church Topography of the Eastern Settlement and the Excavation of the Benedictine Convent at Narsarsuaq in the Uunartoq Fjord," *Meddelelser om Grønland, Man & Society* 14 (Copenhagen, 1991) 13.

moderately warm, so people may bathe there, and many people are cured of their illnesses and recover good health again.<sup>73</sup>

While such specific locations should help with the identification of monastic sites, elements do not appear to correspond correctly. The fjord landscape he describes does exist, but in Siglufjord (now Uunartoq Fjord), not Ramsnes Fjord.<sup>74</sup> Poul Nørlund believes that Ívar misnamed the fjord and chosed to look for the convent in the place that matches the description. As a result, he identifies the sites at Ø105 in Ketilsfjord and Ø149 in Siglufjord as monastic. Despite no archaeological evidence to support monastic activity, scholars generally accept these identifications, even while disagreeing on the locations of other churches.<sup>75</sup>

#### *Ø105: Augustinian Monastery, Ketilsfjord*

Based on Ívar's description, the Ø105 ruins on the east bank of Ketilfjord have been identified as the Augustinian monastery. The site itself, however, has not been excavated or studied extensively. Roussell's survey of the site tentatively identifies a church within a six-sided dyke, two small houses to the north, a storehouse, a byre, and three pens (Figure 26). The dwelling houses do not appear to be attached to the church and are only visible as large mounds. Compared to European monasteries and the larger farms of Greenland magnates (like the 60-building farm at Brattahlíð), the site does not appear particularly large or grand. Roussell explains the lack of continuity between the Greenland site and European monasteries as the result of Greenland's unique monastic conditions: "The brotherhood in Greenland must simply have lived on an ordinary farm, where the prior was master, but where, in addition to the dual farm duties, they lived according to precepts which perhaps were not observed too strictly."<sup>76</sup> This belief, that the region's distance from Europe caused an essentially different type of monasticism to develop, lingers in Icelandic scholarship as well.

Still, the complete lack of evidence is surprising for such a confident identification. The church (Figure 27) is small and separated by some distance from the living quarters. It has a stone foundation, yet is open in the west. This western side was likely completed with wood planking as seen on the Valþjofsstaður door. The entire church is 11.75 meters long, with a narrow chancel and nave measuring 8.2 meters in length and 8.85 meters in breadth on the outside. There is a door in middle of south wall facing away from the farmhouse.<sup>77</sup> According to Roussell's architectural chronology, the nave and chancel dimensions are based on the Roman foot and should therefore be dated to c. 1200.<sup>78</sup> Given the ambiguity of Ívar's other descriptions and lack of any material evidence, there is little reason to accept this monastic identification uncritically.

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<sup>73</sup> Vebæk, *The Church Topography of the Eastern Settlement*, 13-14.

<sup>74</sup> Vebæk, *The Church Topography of the Eastern Settlement*, 13-14.

<sup>75</sup> Many scholars still attempt to locate "all the churches" in Greenland (i.e. those documented). Vebæk's most recent evaluation agrees with Finnur Jonsson's assessment that there were twelve churches and 2 monasteries: Herjolfsnes in Herjolfsfjord (Ø111), Vik in Ketilsfjord (Arós = Vik) (Ø139/140), Vatsdal in Ketisfjord (Ø108/109), Vagar in Siglufjord (Ø162), Undir Höfði in Austfjord (Ø66), Garðar in Einarsfjord, (Hardsteinaberg = Dyrnes), Brattahlíð in Eiriksford (Ø29), Undir Solarfjöllum in Eiriksford, Isafjord (perhaps in middle settlement), Gardanes in Midfjords, Hvalsey Fjord Church in Hvalsey Fjord (Ø83). He agrees with Nøland's identification for the monasteries. Vebæk, *The Church Topography of the Eastern Settlement*, 6-19, 23.

<sup>76</sup> Roussell, *Farms and Churches*, 48-50.

<sup>77</sup> Roussell, *Farms and Churches*, 106-107.

<sup>78</sup> Roussell, *Farms and Churches*, 135.

### Ø149: Benedictine Convent at Siglufjord

According to Ívar's description, the Benedictine convent has been identified with the ruins of Ø149 in Siglufjord. The complex is much larger than the proposed Augustinian monastery, with approximately 21 ruins enclosed by a low fence (Figure 28). Only the church and adjacent dwelling structures have been excavated. Generally, the condition of the site is poor and all buildings likely collapsed due to high winds.<sup>79</sup>

Despite its identification as a convent, none of the artifacts discovered in the church or domestic spaces point to a specifically Christian function. The church has a low foundation of stone, with an open western wall like the church in Ketilsfjord (Figure 29). No doorways were discovered in the foundation, suggesting that the only entrance would have been in the western wall. Mortar was not used to bind the stones, but sandy clay and turf sealed some of the gaps. A burnt layer under the northern end indicates there was an earlier church on that site. Vebæk argues that the first church was from the *landnám* period and the second was built around 1300 as the convent.<sup>80</sup> Inside the church, ten graves held 20 skeletons (Figure 30).<sup>81</sup> An unusual grave was also discovered on the top of the northern churchyard wall (Figure 31). Unfortunately, the conditions were too poor to accurately date the skeletons, but both sexes and a variety of ages are represented. The features of at least one skeleton suggest an Inuit may have been buried there as well.<sup>82</sup> This variety, as well as the presence of one child, suggests to Vebæk that the convent was also used as a parish church.<sup>83</sup> Nevertheless, no crosses were discovered in the graves or on the gravestones, despite the frequency of such artifacts in other medieval cemeteries in Greenland. Fragments of bronze church bell and its clapper, though, were discovered in the churchyard.<sup>84</sup>

The poor quality of the house makes the differentiation between layers and rooms difficult (Figure 32).<sup>85</sup> For example, it was impossible to locate any fire pit, doorways, or other spatial features.<sup>86</sup> Some barrels were found in the northern room under a later layer and were likely food containers from the *landnám* era. They were eventually filled with stones, perhaps during a second construction phase.<sup>87</sup> Other artifacts from the house include a chain of iron, bone needles, a rope of juniper withies, two glass beads (which were likely dropped by visitors in the seventeenth century), and an assortment of wooden objects (e.g. a game piece, circular disk interpreted as a sun compass, a scoop, wood tubs, and a wooden spoon with unintelligible runes).<sup>88</sup> Unfortunately, many of these artifacts appear in the lower, earlier occupational phase.

Although Vebæk believes that his excavations proved Poul Nørlund's theory that this site is indeed the monastery, there is little evidence to support this. Most artifacts date to an earlier *landnám* period and represent general household goods. The burial variety and presence of a bell,

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<sup>79</sup> Vebæk, *The Church Topography of the Eastern Settlement*, 22.

<sup>80</sup> Vebæk, *The Church Topography of the Eastern Settlement*, 24-27.

<sup>81</sup> Vebæk, *The Church Topography of the Eastern Settlement*, 28.

<sup>82</sup> Vebæk, *The Church Topography of the Eastern Settlement*, 42, 44-46.

<sup>83</sup> Vebæk, *The Church Topography of the Eastern Settlement*, 31.

<sup>84</sup> Seaver, *The Frozen Echo*, 97.

<sup>85</sup> Vebæk states that the condition was so poor that he never would have excavated the site if it was not a monastery. Such preliminary assumptions about the site's identity may have skewed his conclusions. Vebæk, *The Church Topography of the Eastern Settlement*, 46.

<sup>86</sup> Vebæk, *The Church Topography of the Eastern Settlement*, 48.

<sup>87</sup> Vebæk, *The Church Topography of the Eastern Settlement*, 54.

<sup>88</sup> Vebæk, *The Church Topography of the Eastern Settlement*, 58-71.

moreover, do little to distinguish this site from parish churches or even private chapels. Janse, for one, doubts that Ø105 is a monastery at all.<sup>89</sup>

### Ø66, Undir Höfða

Undir Höfða is currently thought to be a large farm site with a parish church, not a monastery. Interestingly, Ívar does not mention this particular church, though it is possible that it is the royal farm called Foss.<sup>90</sup> Unfortunately, it has not been studied extensively and information is limited. The way the living quarters connect directly to the western part of the churchyard, though, resembles the monastery complexes at Eynhallow and Skriðuklaustur more than other farmsteads (Figure 33).

The site is well preserved, with thick foundations in wavy striated patterns. Jansen hypothesies that the thick stone walls of the church were built to protect a wooden interior rather than bear the structure itself. The church's importance is testified by the presence of imported glass both inside and outside the east gable. A layer of charcoal beneath the church and three graves under the west gable suggest that there was an earlier church on site.<sup>91</sup> Given its similarity to two other confirmed monastic sites, this complex merits further study.

### Ø1, Ruin Group 545

Another plan that resembles a monastic complex is Ø1 (ruin group 545), which has an enclosed church on a diagonal alignment within the churchyard (Figure 34). The churchyard is situated directly to the west of a house structure and byre. Scholars have proposed that it is the church mentioned by Ívar at Garðanes,<sup>92</sup> but its form, again resembling Eynhallow and Skriðuklaustur, warrants closer analysis.

### A Final Note on Greenland

Despite the identification of Greenland's monasteries using documentary sources, the plans and material remains at Ketilsfjord and Siglufjord do not support these claims. So far, there is no evidence of the standard monastic plan situated around an open cloister; however, unexplored sites in Greenland do match monastic sites in Orkney and Iceland. This distinctive plan, with the church enclosed and connected directly to the houses, can be found at Eynhallow, Skriðuklaustur, and maybe even Þykkvabæjarklaustur. Excavations are needed to determine conclusively whether or not these proposed Greenlandic sites are monastic, but the formal relationship between them and other northern territories is exciting.

Scholars have long argued that Iceland might have been the source of Greenland's architecture. However, Roussell emphasizes the relationship between Greenland's architecture and other buildings in the North to argue that Greenland's churches did not necessarily derive from Icelandic models directly.<sup>93</sup> For example, Greenland's most complex medieval structure is the cathedral at Gaðar, which shows two phases: Garðar I and Garðar II, with the latter dated to c. 1200. Ornamental details and artifacts, including a small carved pillar and moulding, a glass sherd, and bishop's crosier, show clear links to broader European trends and networks.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Jansen, *A Critical Account*, 119.

<sup>90</sup> Vebæk, *The Church Topography of the Eastern Settlement*, 14.

<sup>91</sup> Jansen, *A Critical Account*, 108-109.

<sup>92</sup> Ole Guldager, Steffan Stummann Hansen, and Simon Gleie, *Medieval Farmsteads in Greenland: The Brattahild Region 1999-2000* (Copenhagen: Danish Polar Center Publications, 2002), 88.

<sup>93</sup> Roussell, *Farms and Churches*, 111-117.

<sup>94</sup> Jansen, *A Critical Account*, 116.

Architecturally, the eastern chapels are similar to those at Munkeby and Lyse in Norway.<sup>95</sup> The church at Hvalsey, on the other hand, shows similarities to Eidjord in Norway<sup>96</sup> and displays some of the most sophisticated masonry in the country, especially the eastern window. The window's flat arch consists of two triangular springers and a triangular keystone to create a form that matches contemporary European trends. Interestingly, the only other church that uses this method of masonry is the Eynhallow monastery in Orkney (Figure 19).<sup>97</sup> The rectangular churches in Greenland from c. 1200 and later, including those at Brattahlið, Hvalsey, and Anavik, also show clear geometrical planning based on the square, with 2:1 dimensions. Roussell points out that these proportions embrace the "ad quadratum" rule used frequently in medieval European construction.<sup>98</sup> Such links to current trends in Europe encourages a broader approach to the architecture and monasteries not only in Greenland, but also the entire North Atlantic. These material relationships, moreover, indicate that Iceland and Greenland were not as far removed from Europe as traditionally assumed. The idea that monasticism in these regions was fundamentally different from the mother houses of Europe needs to be reevaluated.

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<sup>95</sup> Hamar has similar chapels, but they were not built until the thirteenth century. Roussell, *Farms and Churches*, 119-120.

<sup>96</sup> Roussell, *Farms and Churches*, 124-125.

<sup>97</sup> Roussell, *Farms and Churches*, 108-109.

<sup>98</sup> Roussell, *Farms and Churches*, 118-119.



## FIGURES:



Figure 1: The Brough of Deerness showing the stone chapel and church yard (black) and surrounding structures (hatched lines). Areas A and B show the location of the 2008 excavations. The circular cells (shelling craters) are depicted below the SE corner of the chapel. From: Barrett, "New Excavations at the Brough of Deerness," 83.



Figure 2: Some of the domestic artifacts discovered in House 20 on the Brough of Deerness, including an eleventh- to twelfth- century copper pin, soapstone spindle whorl, and potsherd. From: Barrett, "New Excavations at the Brough of Deerness," 90.

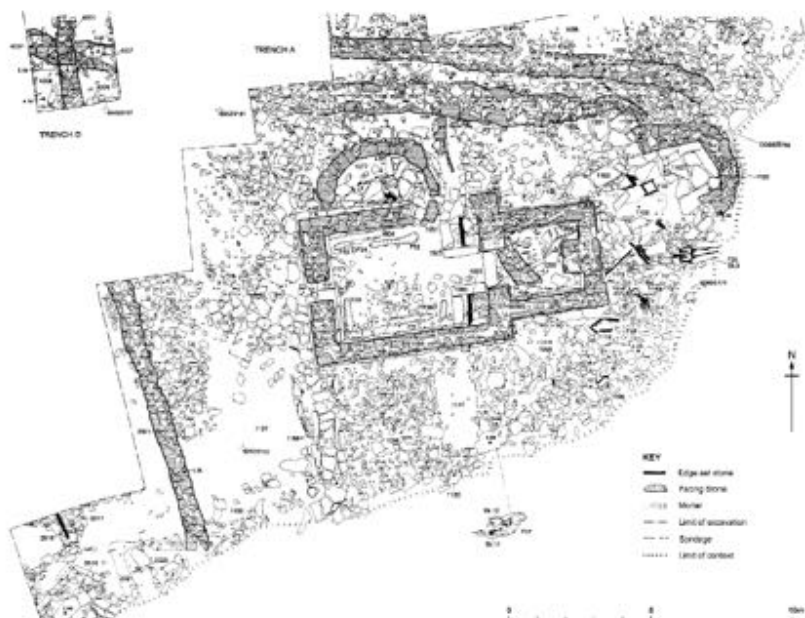


Figure 3: Plan of St. Nicholas Chapel, Papa Stronsay, showing the visible remains of the nave and chancel chapel and part of the underlying circular structure. The surrounding wall and path can be seen to the north. From: Lowe, et. al., "*St Nicholas Chapel*," 67.

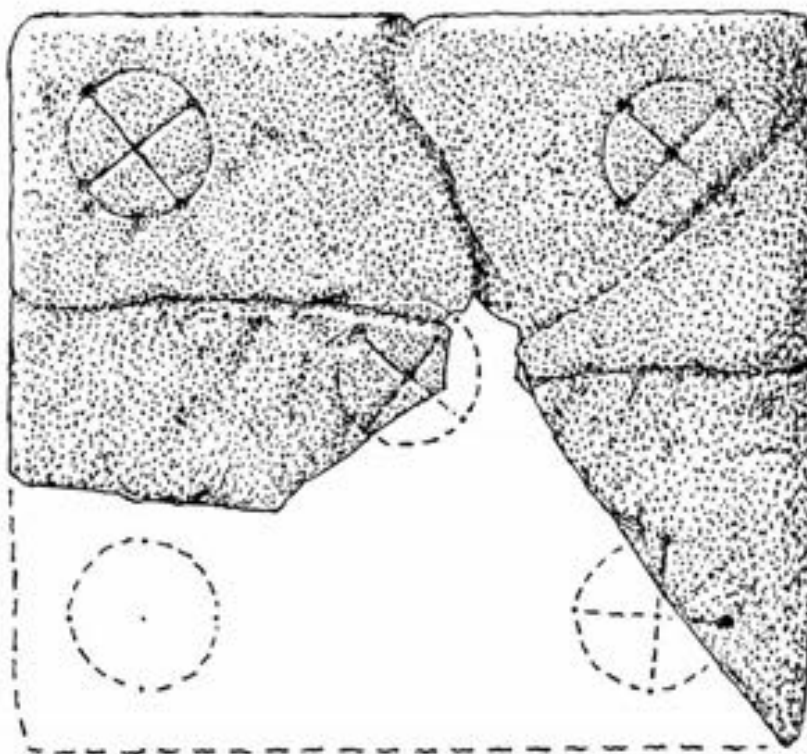


Figure 4: Stone fragments with 5 ensircled crosses discovered in the nave of the stone chapel. From: "Papa Stronsay, St Nicholas' Chapel," <http://canmore.org.uk/collecti on/1349792>.

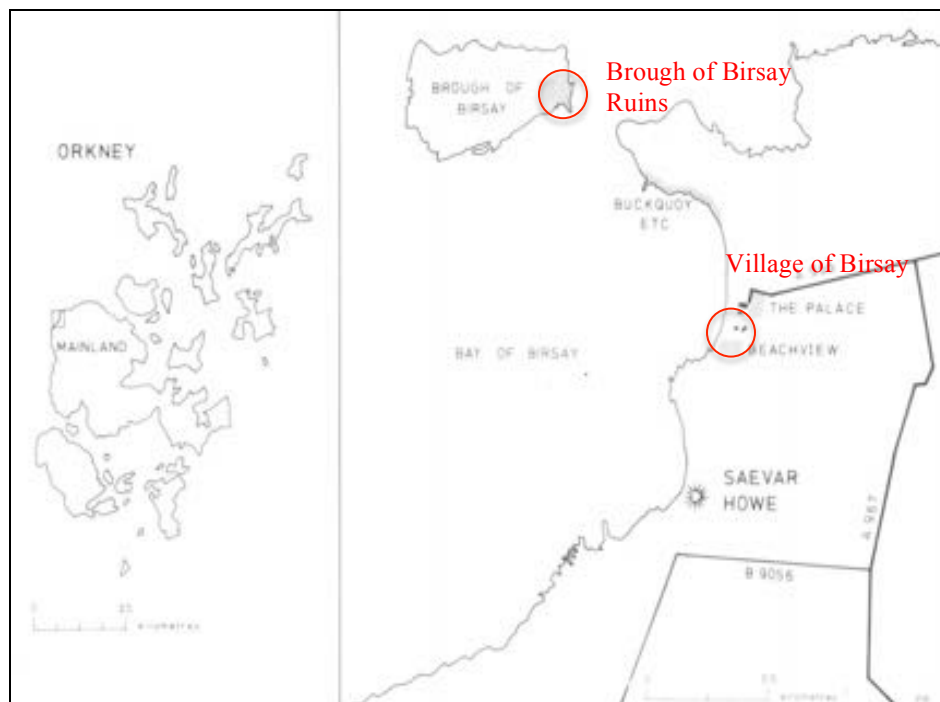


Figure 5: Map of the Birsay Bay area, including the Brough of Birsay monastic ruins and the village of Birsay on Mainland. From: Hedges, "Trial Excavations," 74.

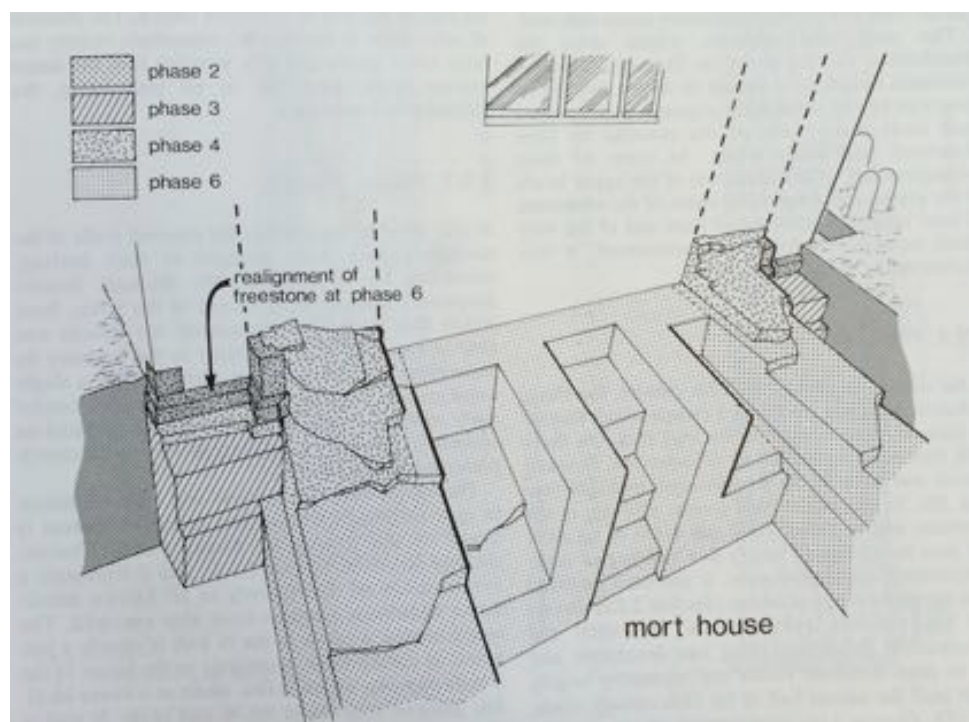


Figure 6: Foundations under Magnus Kirk, the parish church in Birsay. This was likely the site of Porfinnr's Christ Church. From: Morris, *Birsay Bay Project*, vol. 2, 27.



Figure 7: Pictish picture stone discovered on the Brough of Birsay. From: "Brough of Birsay," CANMORE, <http://canmore.org.uk/site/1796/brough-of-birsay?display=image>.

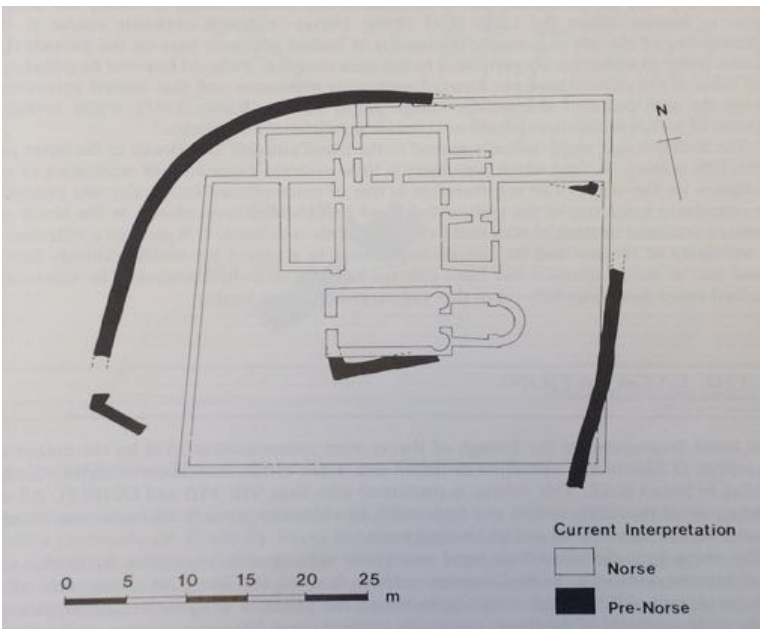


Figure 8: Foundations of the underlying structures on the Brough of Birsay (black). They are presumed to be an earlier church and churchyard, perhaps from the Pictish occupation of the Brough. From: Cruden, "Excavations at Birsay, Orkney," fig. 1.



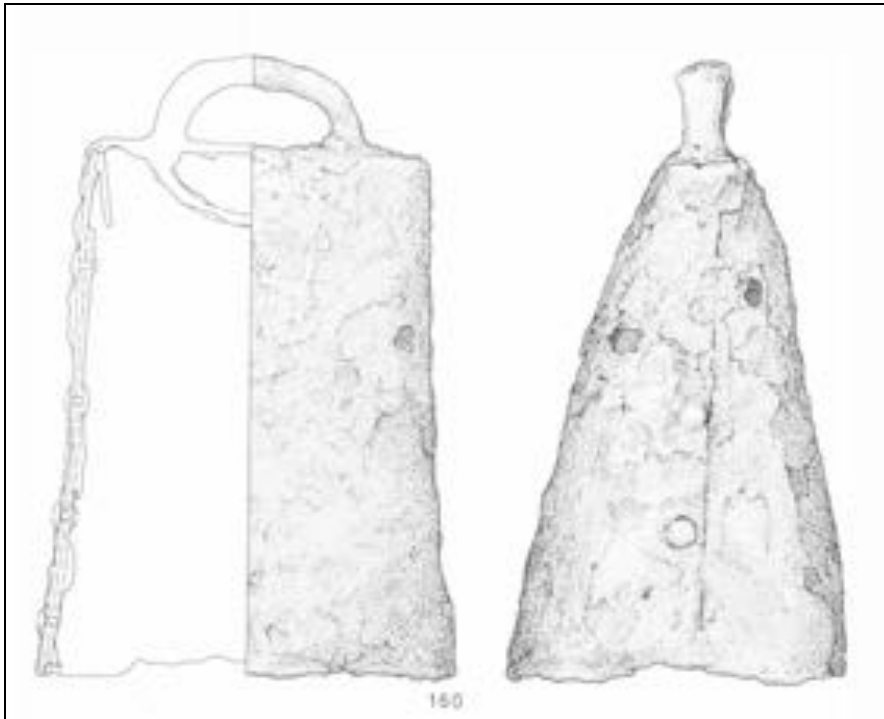


Figure 9: Celtic bell discovered across the Bay of Birsay at Saear Howe. From: Hedges, "Trial Excavations," 97.

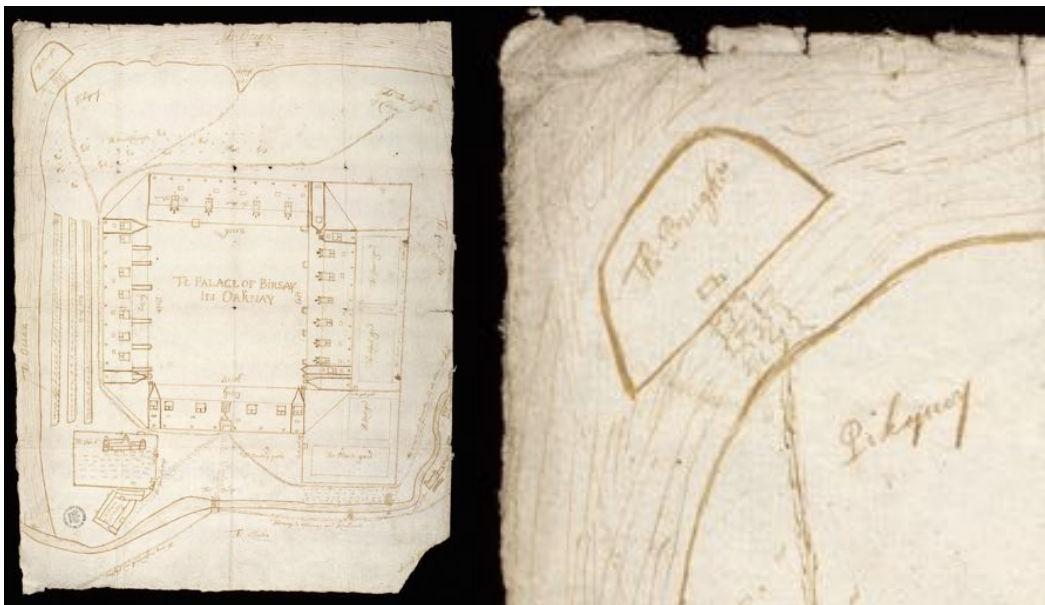


Figure 10: Drawing from 1680-1700 of the sixteenth-century earl's palace in Birsay (left) with a detail of the Brough of Birsay (right). The drawing of the Brough of Birsay includes faint ruins of a church with nave and chancel. From: "The Palace of Birsay in Orkney [sic]," The University of Edinburgh Image Collections, <http://images.is.ed.ac.uk/luna/servlet/detail/UoEcha~1~1~279602~100493:The-Palace-of-Birsay-in-Orkney--i-e#>

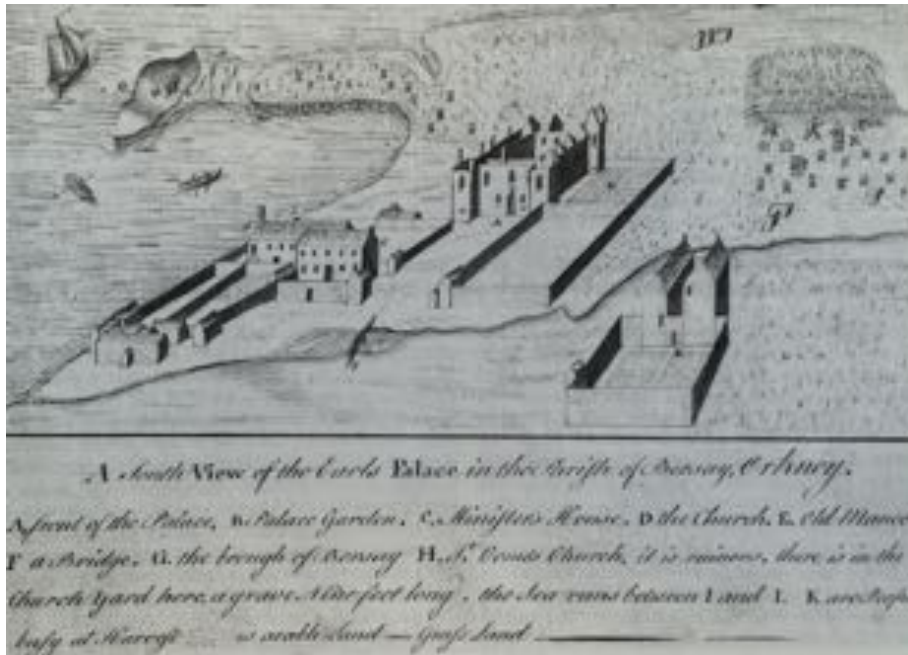


Figure 11: Eighteenth-century drawing of the earl's palace with the Brough of Birsay in the upper left corner. The church ruins are labeled 'H' and the key reads, "S. Come's [sic] Church, it is ruinous, there is in the church yard here a grave Nine feet long." From: Morris, *Birsay Bay Project*, vol. 2, 207.

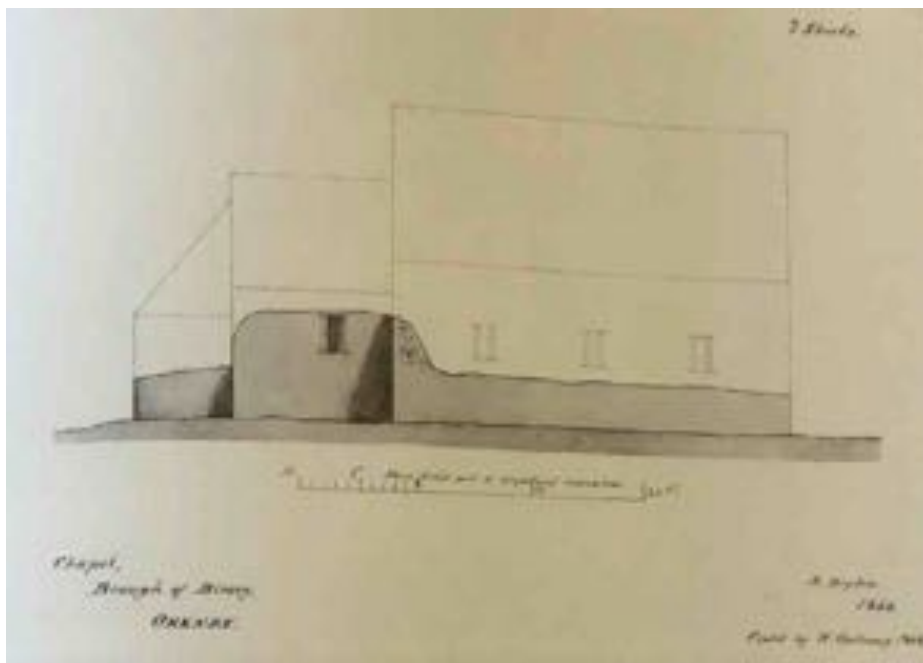


Figure 12: Drawing of the Brough of Birsay church ruins by Sir Henry Dryden (1866). From: Dryden, *Birsay Bay Project*, vol. 2, 213.

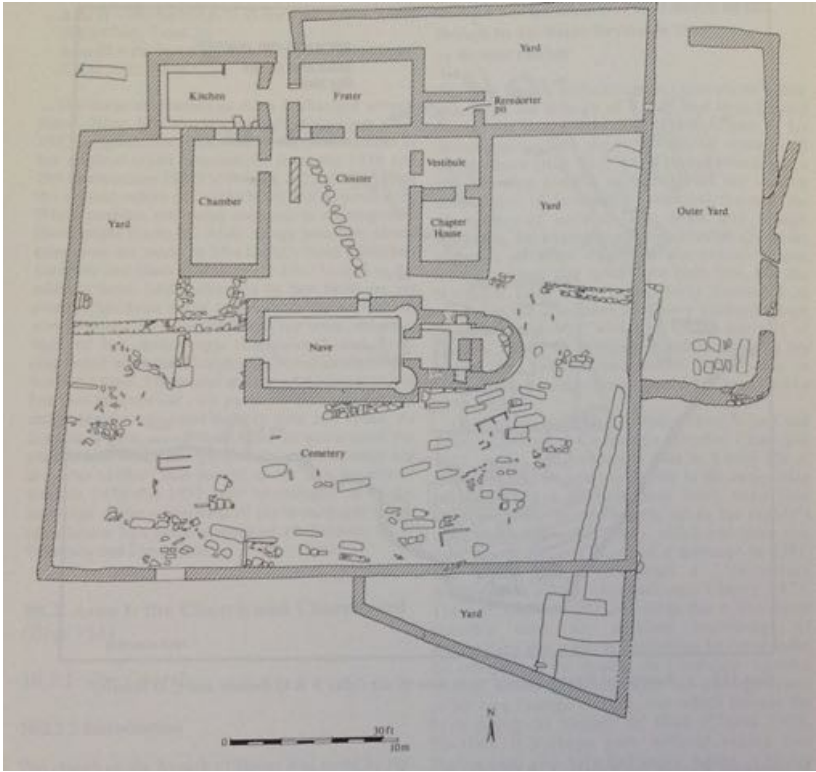


Figure 13: Full monastic complex of the Brough of Birsay (gray) and underlying Pictish, horizon (white). The presumed cloister, chamber, kitchen, frater, vestibule, and chapter house of the monastery are identified. From: Morris, *Birsay Bay Project*, vol. 2, 212.

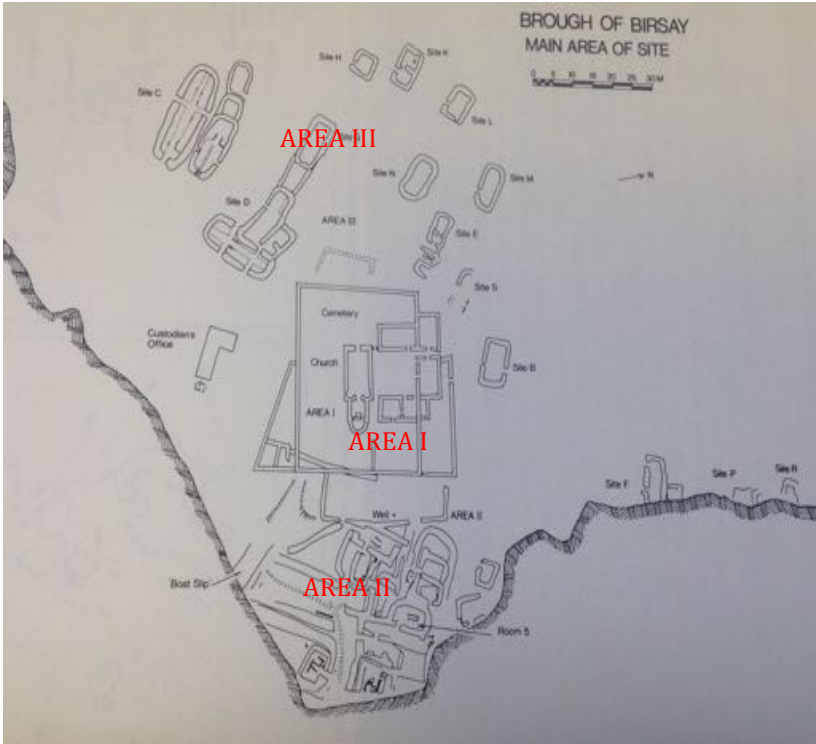


Figure 14: All archaeological remains on the Brough of Birsay, including the twelfth-century monastery and church (Area I), a multi-phase cluster of houses (Area II), and Viking-Age longhouses (Area III). Viking-Age industrial buildings appear in an unnamed area to the right. From: Curle, *Pictish and Norse Finds from the Brough of Birsay*, 12.



Figure 15: Church ruins on the Brough of Birsay from the West. Projecting stones around the doorway suggest a tower was planned, but never completed. Author's photograph.



Figure 16: Grave stone with an engraved cross that was discovered south of the Birsay church. From: "Brough of Birsay," CANMORE, <http://canmore.org.uk/site/1796/brough-of-birsay?display=image>.



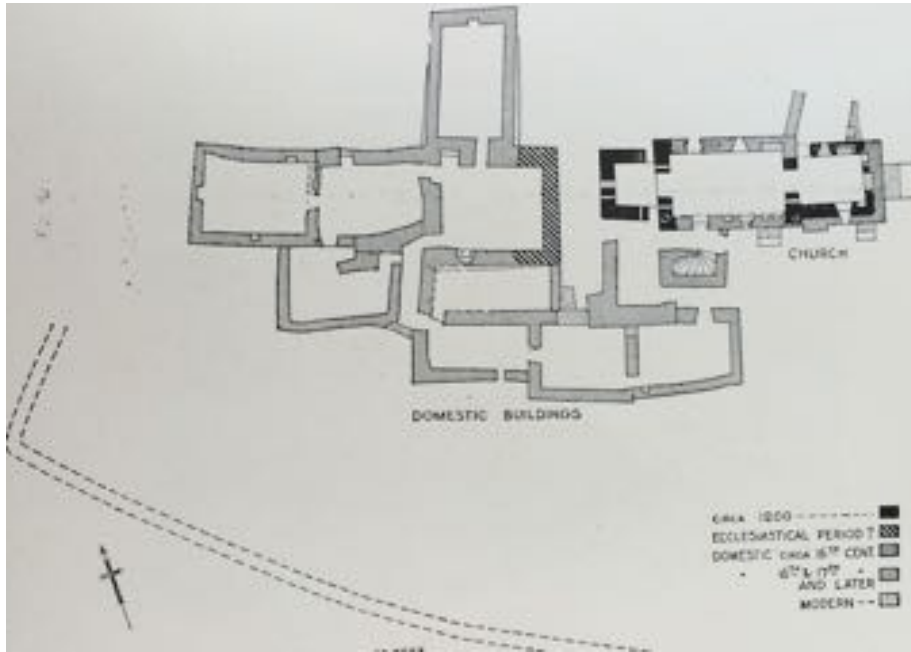


Figure 17: Plan of the Eynhallow ruins with architectural phases. From: Mooney, *Eynhallow*, 149.



Figure 18: Triangular arch of the western porch doorway of the Eynhallow church. The form is found in Anglo-Saxon architecture, including St. Peter's church in Barton-upon-Humber. From: Mooney, *Eynhallow*, 155.



Figure 19: Pointed arch into the chancel of the Eynhallow church. While the pointed shape recalls the architectural trends in Britain and Europe starting in the twelfth century, the construction method is unique. With three triangles acting as the two springers and keystone, the rest of the arch is filled in with undressed freestones that would have necessitated some type of centering or support. The only other arch that uses three triangles in this way is found in Hvalsey, Greenland. From: Mooney, *Eynhallow*, 159.



Figure 20: Entryway and steps to the Eynhallow belfry. The stones of the lower doorway have been dressed to resemble columns. From: Mooney, *Eynhallow*, 153.

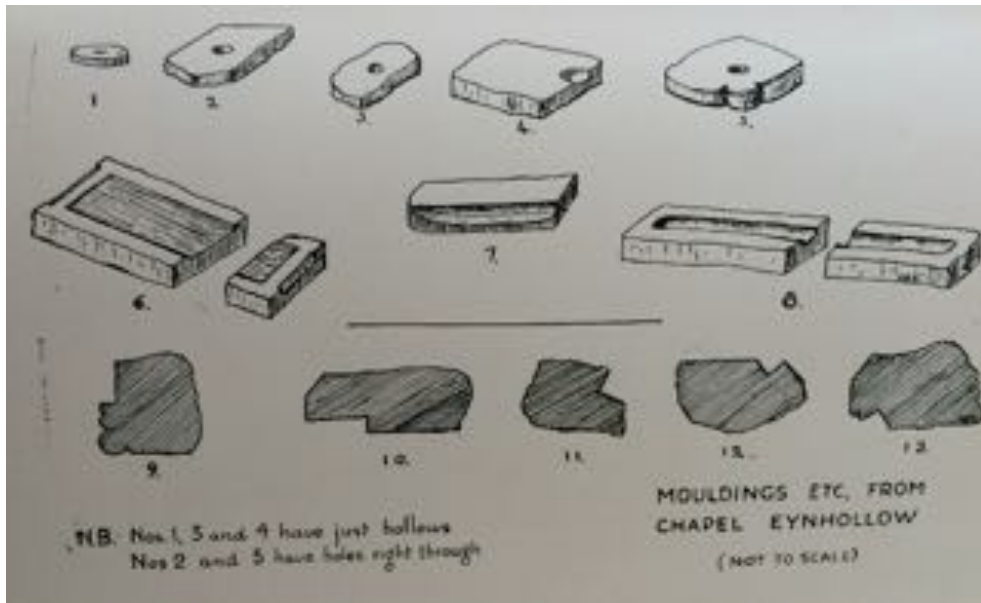


Figure 21:  
Mouldings and  
other dressed  
stones discovered  
in the Eynhallow  
church ruins.  
From: Mooney,  
*Eynhallow*, 161.

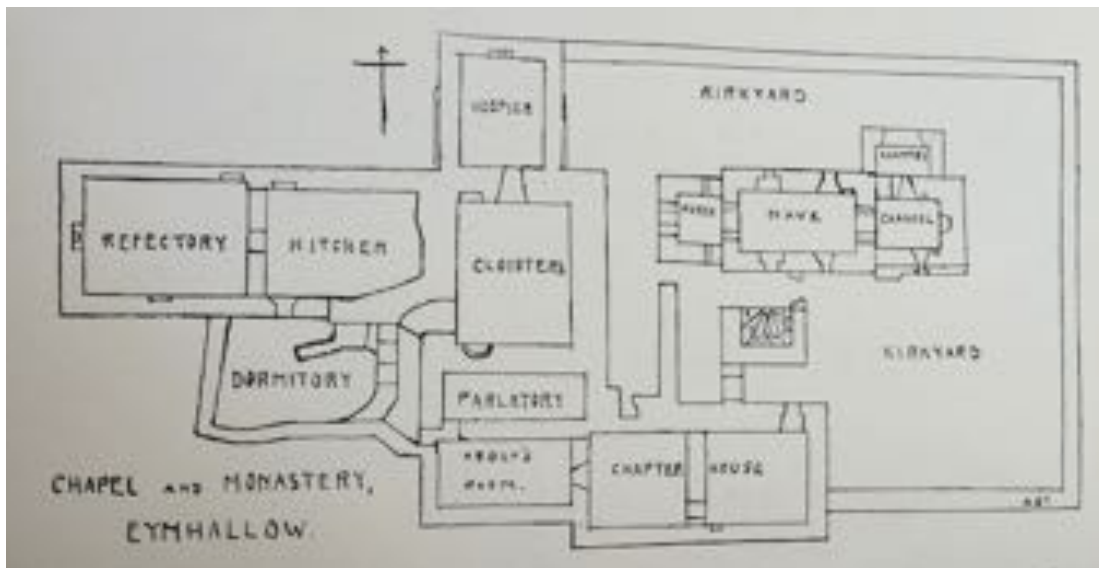


Figure 22: Diagram of the Eynhallow monastery with identified rooms, including a hospice, cloister, kitchen, and chapter house after Dietrichson. Mooney notes that the dormitory and refectory should be switched. From: Mooney, *Eynhallow*, 148.



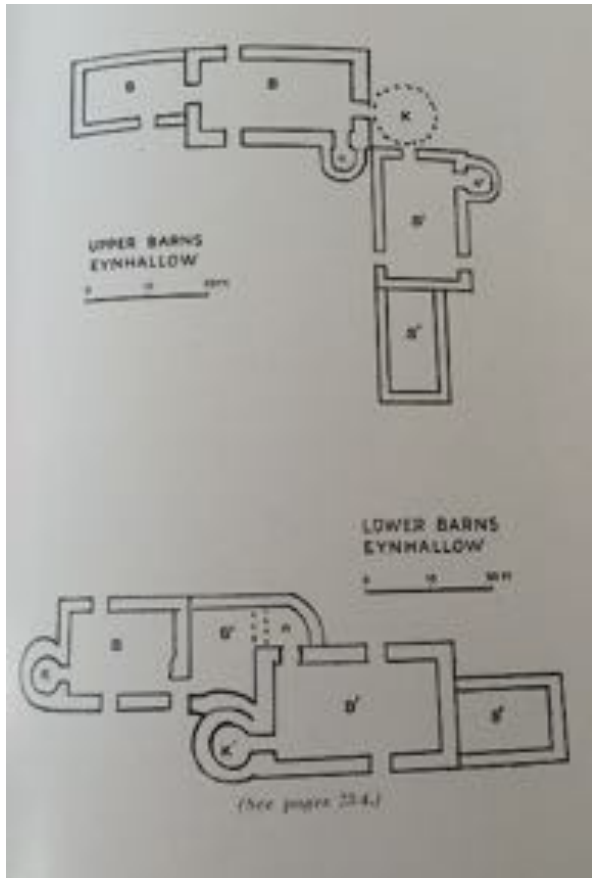


Figure 25: Two barns north of the monastery on Eynhallow. The date of the structures is not clear, but they were used as domestic houses until the nineteenth century and might be contemporary with the monastery. From: Mooney, *Eynhallow*, 165.

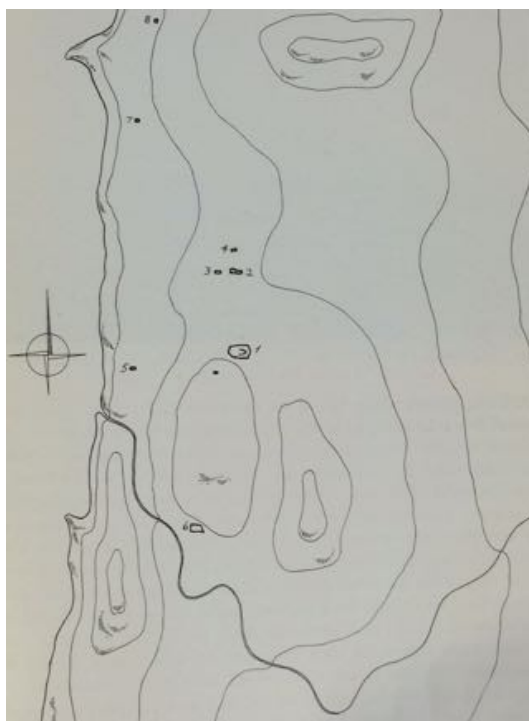


Figure 26: Map of the Ø105 site with buildings identified by Roussel: (1) Church, (2-3) two small houses, (4) byre, (5) a storehouse, and (6-8) three pens. From: Roussel, *Farms and Churches*, 49.



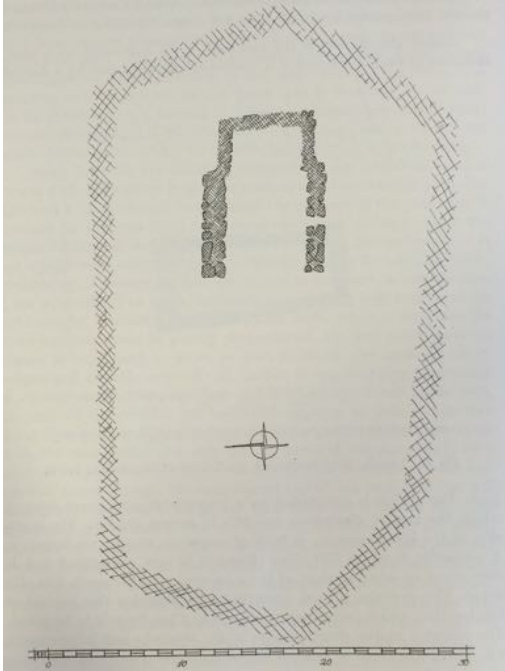


Figure 27: The plan of the church at Ø105 in Ketilsfjord. It is a simple nave and chancel plan and has an open western wall. The southern door faces away from all domestic structures. An irregular hexagonal wall encloses the churchyard around it. From: Roussel, *Farms and Churches*, 106.

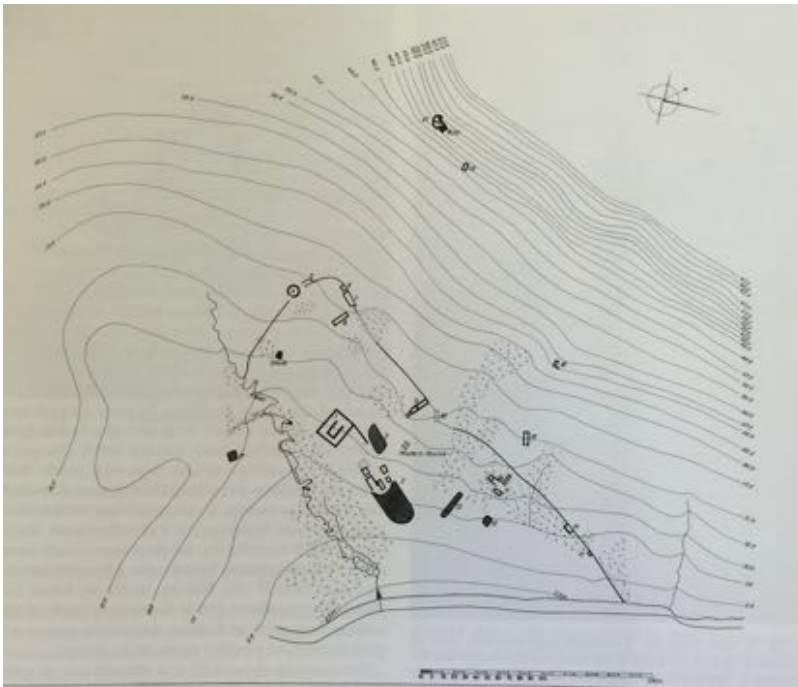


Figure 28: Map of Ø149 ruin group showing enclosed home field with some estimated 21 buildings. The church is enclosed in the middle. From: Vebæk, *Church Topography of the Eastern Settlement*, 23.

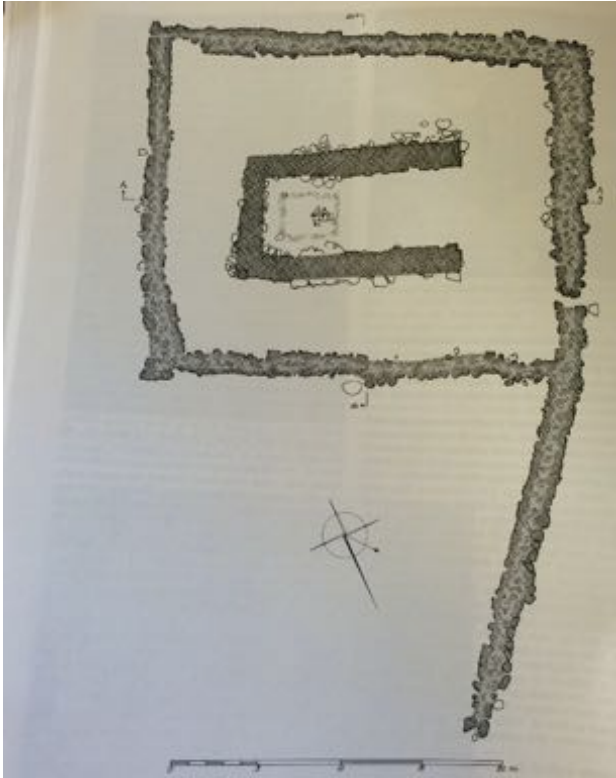


Figure 29: Plan of the Ø149 church with extended churchyard fence wall to the north. The open end in the west was likely completed with wooden planks. From: Vebæk, *Church Topography of the Eastern Settlement*, 26.

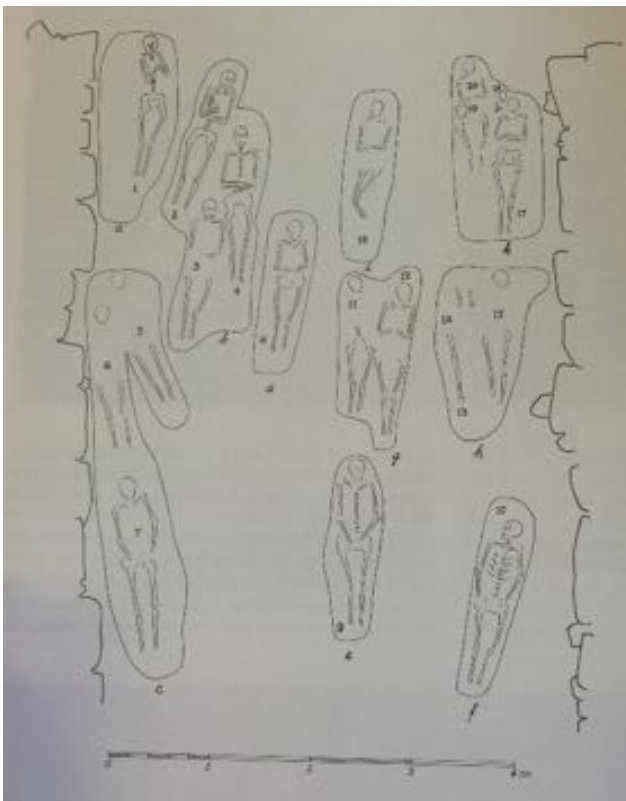


Figure 30: Plan of the burials inside the Ø149 church. From: Vebæk, *Church Topography of the Eastern Settlement*, 30.



Figure 31: Photograph of the burial on the churchyard fence in Ø149. Human bones can be seen in the center right of the image. From: *Vebæk, Church Topography of the Eastern Settlement*, 42.

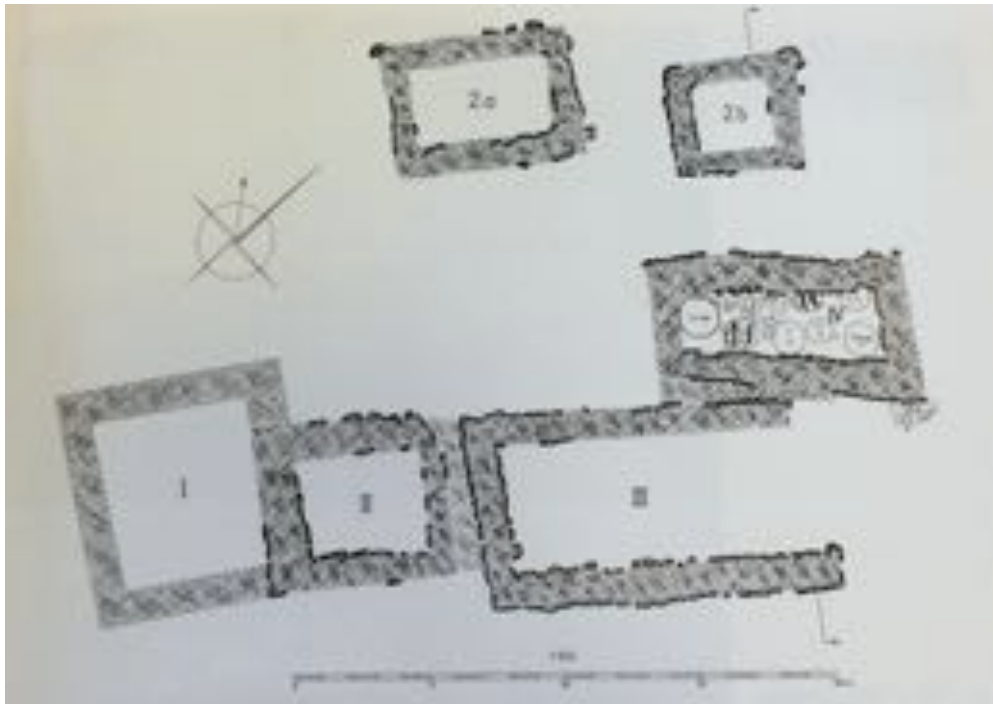


Figure 32: House structures for Ø149. Many artifacts, including the food barrels, were discovered in the earliest layer of room IV. From: *Vebæk, Church Topography of the Eastern Settlement*, 46.



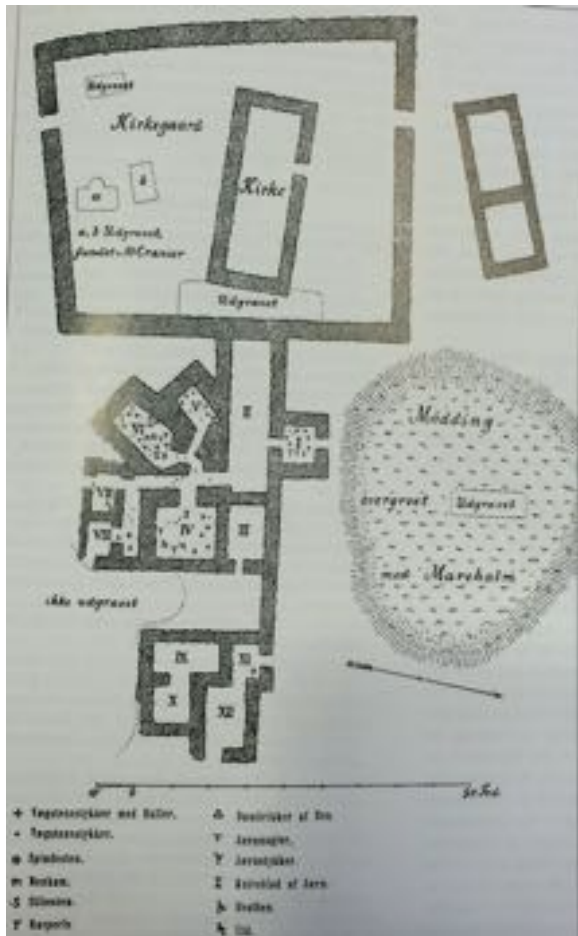


Figure 33: Plan of Undir Höfða, currently believed to be a farm, rather than a monastery. Høegsberg, “Continuity and Change: The Dwellings of the Greenland Norse,” 99.

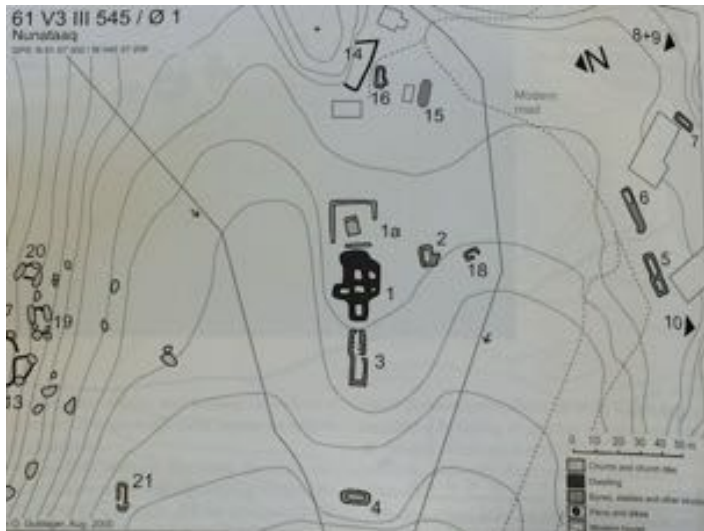


Figure 34: Plan of Ø1, with the church in the center labeled 1a. Houses can be found immediately to the west of the church outside of the churchyard. From: Guldager, *Medieval Farmsteads in Greenland*, 89.

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