

## **LOOKING FOR A SAFE HAVEN: NORSE AND MEDIEVAL HARBOURS IN THE NORTHERN ISLES OF SCOTLAND**

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Maritime heritage is central to the cultural identity of the archipelagos of Orkney and Shetland. In the Norse and medieval periods Orkney was the centre of a Norse earldom. The island groups were part of the inter-regional colonisation, economic and communication networks of the North Atlantic and the North Sea. Sagas like the *Orkneyinga Saga* indicate they were a node on routes linking Scandinavia, Scotland, Ireland and the islands of the North Atlantic. However, the identification of the Northern Isles' early harbours, landing places and maritime infrastructure remains problematic.

The ongoing *Prospecting for Orkney's Maritime Infrastructure* Research Project uses a multi-disciplinary methodology based on Westerdahl's holistic approach to the maritime landscape, which is also applied by the 'Harbours of the North Atlantic' (HaNoA) Project and other projects in the SchwerPunktProgramm. The project has successfully identified a number of previously unrecorded harbours, primarily using coastal walkover survey, place names, cartographic evidence, satellite imagery and local tradition. Dating of these harbours is still an issue, but there are strong indications that they date back to the medieval period at least. We will present the results of this work, which has implications for the discovery of small rural harbours and landing places in the rest of the Norse and Medieval North Atlantic.