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The Inuit discovery of Europe? The Orkney Finnmen, preternatural objects and the re-enchantment of early-modern science

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ABSTRACT

The late-seventeenth century saw a peak in accounts of supposed encounters with “Finnmen” in Orkney. These accounts have shaped the folklore of the Northern Isles. Scholars linked to the Royal Society suggested the accounts represented encounters with Inuit. Subsequent explanations included autonomous travel by Inuit groups and abduction and abandonment. These accounts should be understood as part of a European scientific tradition of preternatural philosophy, occupied with the deviations and errors of nature. Far from indicating the presence of Inuit individuals in Orkney waters, they provide evidence of the narrative instability of early-modern science and its habit of “thinking with things.” Captivated by Inuit artefacts, the natural philosophers and *virtuosi* of the Royal Society imagined Orkney as a site of reverse contact with the “primitive.” Nineteenth-century antiquarians and folklorists reliant on these texts failed to understand the extent to which objectivity was not an epistemic virtue in early-modern science.

KEYWORDS

Early-modern science; Scottish history; Arctic history; Orkney; Inuit; folklore; Atlantic worlds

Between 1693 and 1701 three books were published in Edinburgh and London that have been cited as evidence of sightings of Inuit people fishing in boats off the coasts of Orkney. These three texts have by-and-large been taken at face value, with scholars, antiquarians and folklorists seeking to determine how the Inuit could have got to Orkney, not whether the texts in question bear the weight of this interpretation. The texts seem to indicate an *unheimlich* form of reverse colonization, a mysterious encounter with the primitive which has proved to be both compelling and distracting for subsequent commentators. These texts also contain the first printed mention of the term “Finnmen” to describe the subject of these encounters and as such became urtexts for Scottish antiquarians in the nineteenth century seeking to assert racially-inflected regional and national histories.¹ Explanations of who or what “Finnmen” were became entangled in narratives of modern selfhood and arguments for the particularity of place. Adam Grydehøj has demonstrated the ways in which early-modern non-supernatural accounts of Finnmen from Orkney were used by folklorists like Samuel Hibbert and Jessie Saxby to construct supernatural

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mythologies for Orkney and Shetland and how, by 1881, the anthropologist and linguist Karl Blind had conflated early-modern accounts of mer-folk, seal people, sea trows and Finns to create a very modern mythology.² The Finnmen legends thus constitute a distinctive mythos in the Northern Isles down to the present day, with explanations of who or what Finnmen were hovering between the mystical and the mundane.

One distinctive line of speculation pursued in the pages of archaeological and anthropological journals in the late-nineteenth century and early-twentieth century, was to explain the Finnmen's identity as Inuit. The main proponent of this theory was the folklorist David MacRitchie.³ Building on MacRitchie's speculations, two main theories of origin emerged, one involving autonomous travel, the second based on theories of autochthonous abduction.⁴ Both theories have been uncritically propagated amongst antiquarians, folklorists, and amateur and professional historians. Contemporary scholars have become entangled in the speculative iterations of these theories, all of which fail to address the veracity of the first documentary accounts. This paper briefly outlines these two theories, highlighting their weaknesses, before moving on to examine the source texts. I argue that these highly unusual accounts purporting to demonstrate encounters with Inuit in Scottish waters should be understood as part of a European scientific tradition of preternatural philosophy and that, far from indicating the presence of Inuit in Orkney waters, they provide evidence of the narrative instability of early-modern science and its habit of thinking with things. Orkney's site as an entrepôt for returning vessels from the Arctic initiated a process of cargo-driven curiosity as circumpolar objects became available to scholars and collectors. Captivated by Inuit artefacts, the natural philosophers of the Royal Society imagined Orkney as a site of reverse contact with the primitive. Nineteenth-century antiquarians and folklorists reliant on these texts failed to understand the extent to which nineteenth-century scientific notions of objectivity were not necessarily the epistemic virtues practiced by early-modern science. As we shall see, despite developing a form of empiricism, early-modern science was not free from the temptation to argue from authority. Above all it was the misuse of textual authority, perpetuating narrative errors, that has shaped the Finnmen mythos to the present day.

Significantly, this account of the Orkney Finnmen texts provides an additional and more nuanced understanding of what some scholars have termed "the Red Atlantic," the circulation of indigenous bodies, artefacts and ideas around the Atlantic World.⁵ There are several problems within this historiographical tradition. In seeking to recover Indigenous agency, some scholars have uncritically replicated and compounded many of the errors promulgated by nineteenth century antiquarians and folklorists. For example, Jack D. Forbes in a chapter entitled "The Inuit Route to Europe" in his book, *The American Discovery of Europe* (2007), relies on inductive leaps and counterfactual intuition to suggest the possibility of autonomous Inuit presence in European waters. In one case, he argues, that because Inuit "were crossing the Davis Strait in native skin boats [...] then they could cross the Denmark Strait also."⁶ Reprising nineteenth-century debates about the sea worthiness of Inuit skin-on-frame kayaks and drawing on the writings of David MacRitchie, Forbes arrives at the seemingly inevitable conclusion of an independent Inuit presence in European waters:

The question of whether any of the kayaks seen in European waters actually were rowed from Greenland is not resolved. As we shall see, some of the kayaks seen in the Orkney may have

been coming from Norway and perhaps were rowed by Inuits [sic] who had adapted to living in European waters.⁷

This article therefore addresses the important issue of how a contemporary scholar came to believe in the presence of autonomous groups of Inuit in northern European waters, despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary and, more importantly, why he wanted to believe that this was true.

Equally problematic is the lack of scholarly attention focussing on the Inuit presence in the wider North Atlantic world prior to the Eighteenth Century. Essays by Sturtevant, Whitehead and Idiens in the edited volume *Indians in Europe* (1989) represent the most sustained examination of the early evidence of the Inuit presence in Europe. Major new works of “Red Atlantic” scholarship have tended to focus on the romanticization and idealization of Native Americans from British colonial North America in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁸ Some works, like Alden T. Vaughan’s *Transatlantic Encounters: American Indians in Britain, 1500–1766*, acknowledge the fragmentary nature of the source material prior to 1600, establishing the fact that the first North American indigenes to reach Britain were almost certainly Inuit from Newfoundland and Baffin Island. Vaughan’s focus on “American Indians” highlights another problem in the historiography: the tendency to write trans-Atlantic histories from national perspectives, utilizing familiar geographical categories. The circumpolar experience of the Inuit becomes fragmented when the history of what is now Arctic Canada is separated from the history of Greenland. Nicole Waller has recently called for a re-theorization of the Arctic as a connective space, taking into account a specifically Inuit archipelagic imagination where notions of sovereignty, homeland and habitus extends across land, ice and water.⁹ Waller’s argument on the importance of the “Inuit sea” offers new theoretical scope for scholars of the “Red Atlantic.”

Integrating Greenland into colonial narratives of the wider Atlantic World is also problematic. Despite attempts by King Christian IV of Denmark to locate the lost Norse Eastern Settlement in the early seventeenth century¹⁰, the recolonization of Greenland only began again in 1721 when the Lutheran pastor Hans Egede received a royal charter from Frederick IV of Denmark. Slowly incorporated into the maritime networks of the Age of Exploration, for over two hundred years Greenland lacked the type of colonial settlement and administration that provides contemporary historians with a corpus of coherent archival sources. Scholars are forced to rely on widely dispersed and linguistically diverse maritime sources for evidence of contact with Greenland in the early-modern period. No systematic study has yet been undertaken to establish just how many Inuit were abducted and taken to Europe in the period 1500–1700. The scarcity of evidence of the Inuit experience in Europe in this period makes a proper understanding of the Orkney Finnmen texts even more important as they register the presence, both real and imagined, of Inuit people within European society and the circulation of Inuit culture and artefacts throughout the wider North Atlantic World.

Theories of indigenous agency and colonial abduction

If early-modern accounts of encounters with Inuit in Orkney were true, some mechanism was required to explain their presence. MacRitchie and other folklorists suggested the

possibility of autonomous travel by Inuit, made possible by the southward extension of the Arctic ice pack in the Little Ice Age. The Orcadian accounts of Finnmen do broadly coincide with temperature minimums in the late seventeenth century and were followed by a period in Scottish history known as the Seven Ill Years, a period of crop failure and famine that started in 1695.¹¹ Climate data gathered from Icelandic annals confirms that the “last decade of the seventeenth century was extremely cold. It was also the decade with the most sea ice during the years 1601–1700.”¹² The natural historians of Europe had long known about the possibility of ice bridges forming between Greenland and Iceland and the intermittent presence of polar bears in Iceland was known to sixteenth-century natural philosophers.¹³ Proponents of the autonomous travel theory speculated that Inuit hunter-gatherer bands could have reached the Faeroes and the coasts of Norway by following the pack ice. This idea was reinforced by the widespread geographical notion that all the continents and islands of the Northern Hemisphere were connected by land at higher latitudes. David Krantz in his *History of Greenland* (1820), recorded that “the same consideration led the old Icelanders to believe that Greenland was contiguous to Lapland.”¹⁴ This theory was reinforced by an even more startling fact that began to assert itself in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. When Egede established his mission to Greenland in 1721, he also set out to discover what became of the lost Norse colony of Greenland. As well as discovering the archaeological evidence of the former colony and evidence of climactic change, Lutheran and Moravian missionaries also recorded Inuit oral testimony of conflict with strangers that had become incorporated into Greenlandic Inuit creation narratives. Krantz records an Inuit account of conflict between a foreigner and a Greenlander:

A war immediately took place, in which the Greenlanders proved victorious, and exterminated all the strangers. This last tradition has an evident allusion to the massacre of the old Norwegians, for whom the natives harbour such a deep rooted hatred, that they ascribe their origin to the transformation of dogs into men.¹⁵

Krantz also understood that the Inuit displacement of the Old Norse settlers was the result of migration from the west: “It appears therefore most probable, that the present race of savages first came to Greenland in the fourteenth century, not from Europe, but from North America.”¹⁶ The evidence began to seem overwhelming and counter to the dominant narrative of European colonization. Indigenous resistance had completely annihilated the European settler presence in Greenland and that had been the result of a west–east migration of indigenous peoples. The question that the Orkney Finnmen texts seemed to raise for nineteenth century folklorists and antiquarians was just how far to the east that migration of Inuit groups had penetrated.

The problems with this theory of autonomous Inuit travel to Europe are many. Firstly, we have very little historical data on where the edge of the Arctic ice pack was to the east of Iceland in the late-seventeenth century. Conversely, we have extensive records from Iceland that have enabled climate scientists to reconstruct sea ice variation around Iceland. The Icelandic clergy who wrote the annals from which climate data has been collated also corresponded with members of the Royal Society in Great Britain.¹⁷ If Inuit groups were travelling eastwards during a period of climactic change we would expect their first contact with settled European communities to have been in Iceland; no evidence of such migratory encounters exists.¹⁸ Much of the “autonomous travel” debate

has hinged on the ability of skin-on-frame kayaks to remain watertight over long sea voyages. However, evidence from modern ultra-long-distance sea kayak voyages adds a volume of evidence which increasingly makes this theory look highly implausible.¹⁹

Another line of argument that attempts to explain how Inuit individuals might have ended up in Orkney focusses on autochthonous abduction. There is ample evidence of the kidnapping of Inuit individuals by Dutch and Danish whalers and merchants for commercial and scientific purposes. The first well documented case of Inuit abducted and brought to Europe occurred in Zeeland in 1567 although there may have been abductions from Newfoundland by Bristol merchants as early as 1498.²⁰ On his 1576 voyage to Baffin Island, Sir Martin Frobisher kidnapped an Inuk who was taken to London where he subsequently died. On his second Baffin voyage in 1577 Frobisher abducted three Inuit, all of whom died soon after their arrival in England.²¹ It is difficult to estimate the total numbers of Inuit people abducted but the practice became so problematic that the Dutch States General had to pass a law against the murder and kidnapping of Inuit in 1720.²² Similarly, Christian VI of Denmark issued a formal proclamation against transporting Greenlanders to Denmark in 1732.²³ There is no evidence of Inuit travelling to Europe of their own free will until 1724, when Egede's Lutheran mission in Greenland persuaded two Inuit to travel to Denmark.²⁴ The abducted Inuit body was therefore already a well-documented object of scientific curiosity in the seventeenth century, cognate with the circumpolar artefacts that filled the *Wunderkammern* of Europe. The German diplomat Adam Olearius met three named Inuit in Gottsdorp, Schleswig in 1655. Abducted in 1654, they were taken to Bergen, where their portrait was painted.²⁵ Olearius published his *About the Greenlanders* in 1656, which contains images of these abducted Inuit. It also records other accounts of abducted Inuit in Europe. He noted that a group of Inuit taken to Denmark in 1636 tried to escape in their kayaks but were recaptured ten miles out to sea and returned to Copenhagen. Isaac de la Peyrère recounts a similar story in his *Relation du Groenland* of 1647.²⁶ These and other documented accounts of Inuit abduction, escape and recapture in Europe suggested to subsequent investigators the possibility that the Orcadian texts referred to instances of abandonment or escape when ships made landfall in Orkney.²⁷

This article questions these theories of independent travel and of abduction and escape by closely and critically examining the three texts which supposedly indicate the presence of Inuit in Orkney waters. The first mention of Finnmen appeared in *A Description of the Isles of Orkney* (Edinburgh, 1693) by the Rev. James Wallace of Kirkwall. His son, Dr. James Wallace F.R.S., followed this with *An Account of the Islands of Orkney* (London, 1700). Finally, the Rev. John Brand of Bo'ness published *A Brief Description of Orkney, Zetland, Pightland-Firth & Caithness* (Edinburgh, 1701), the work deriving from a visitation he undertook to Orkney and Shetland on behalf of the Church of Scotland. The context of these texts, I will argue, is one in which scientific *virtuosi* linked to the Royal Society engaged correspondents throughout Scotland in compiling a Scottish national geography, during a period in which the kingdom of Scotland brought itself to the brink of ruin via dreams of an empire to rival England's, pursuing a financially ruinous colonial venture in the Gulf of Darién in Central America in the late 1690s. Scientific ways of knowing, with their focus on the heteroclitic and the exceptional, reinforced religio-political dispositions that were providentialist, looking for signs of God's special providences in nature. In imagining an empire for Scotland, Orkney's geographical location as a site of departure and arrival for trans-Atlantic voyages enabled the

savants linked to the Royal Society to imagine Orkney as a site of colonial encounter with alterity, a process that was driven by the arrival of Inuit artefacts from the Arctic. In mobilizing the authority of objects from the Arctic and texts about the Inuit, early-modern scientists employed a form of epistemic virtue radically at odds with our current notions of objectivity, one in which scientific authority was derived both from exotic objects and the author's own narrative ingenuity and ability to demonstrate his command of texts. Far from being decisive evidence supporting the presence of Inuit in Orkney waters, these texts ultimately demonstrate the habitual metonymy of early-modern scientists and their practice of "thinking with things."

Encountering the Finnmen in early-modern texts

In 1693 the Rev. James Wallace's of Kirkwall's book, *A Description of the Isles of Orkney*, was published posthumously although the manuscript was extant in 1684.²⁸ The *Description* contained a dedication to Sir Robert Sibbald, Geographer Royal for Scotland, as well as another piece by Sibbald entitled *An Essay concerning the Thule of the Ancients*. Wallace had died in September 1688, the book's title page indicating that it was "Published after his Death by his Son." The *Description* notes that "Sometime about this Country are seen these men which are called *Finnmen*." The text mentions an eyewitness seeing one sailing and rowing a little boat at the south end of Eday in 1682, who fled when the inhabitants sought to pursue him in boats. Soon afterwards, another was seen from Westray and "for a while after they got few or no fishes," alluding to local tradition that Finnmen chase away fishes. The author then speculates that "these Finnmen seem to be some of these people that dwell about the *Fratum Davis*" before going on to cite a textual authority: "the natural & moral History of the *Antilles*, Chap.18." The book referred to is Charles de Rochefort's 1658 *Histoire naturelle et morale des iles Antilles de l'Amerique*, a text with a complex and obscure publishing history which has little or nothing to say about the Inuit but does feature a few incongruous illustrations of Inuit artefacts and peoples.²⁹ The author of the *Description* concludes: "One of their boats sent from *Orkney* to *Edinburgh* is to be seen in the *Physistians* hall with the Oar and the Dart he makes use of for killing Fish."

There is much in this short account that gives us pause for thought. Wallace's unnamed informants from Eday indicate a boat both rowed and sailed: the Inuit kayak and umiak are only ever paddled. Also, in the summer, Orkney abounded in strange boats as the vast herring fleets from the Low Countries and England assembled off the east coast. Why should the author seek to establish the link with Greenlanders via the authority of a scientific text? Or raise the issue of artefactual evidence in the form of the kayak on display in the Physicians' Hall, Edinburgh? The answer must be sought in the scientific patronage of the dedicatee of the *Description*, Sir Robert Sibbald. Sibbald was a founding member and subsequent president of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh (f. 1681) and was made physician-in-ordinary to King Charles II in 1682. In the same year he received a patent as geographer royal for Scotland and immediately began requesting geographical information for a proposed two volume geography of Scotland, sending out questionnaires to a vast network of sixty-five known correspondents, many of them ministers, one of whom was Rev. James Wallace of Kirkwall. Sibbald's "Advertisement and General Queries" that he sent out to gather information for his projected national

geography asked his correspondents to record “what Substances cast up by the Sea” and what curiosities and customs are to be found there?³⁰ Sibbald, along with his cousin Sir Andrew Balfour, had founded the Edinburgh botanical garden in 1667 and both men conformed to the pattern of natural historians and scientific *virtuosi*. Both Balfour and Sibbald had collected large cabinets of natural history specimens. Balfour’s collection was sold upon his death in 1694 to “the Town Council of Edinburgh for exhibition in the College of Edinburgh,” the catalogue of the *Museum Balfoureanum*, written by Sibbald, containing the entry “A Fin-Man’s Boat from Orkney. Vid. Nat.et. Mor. Hist:des Antilles.”³¹ Sibbald’s cabinet of natural history specimens was sold in the same way in 1697 as the *Museum Sibbaldiano*.³²

It is unclear exactly what role Wallace’s two surviving sons played in the 1693 publication of the *Description*. The *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticanæ* describes Wallace’s oldest son as “James M. D., F.R.S., in East India Company’s service [...] born about 1673.”³³ As we will see, Dr. James Wallace was to bring out a heavily edited version of his father’s account of Orkney in 1700 but it is so different in terms of its patronage, acknowledgements and content that it almost represents a repudiation of the 1693 *Description*. What does seem clear is that Sir Robert Sibbald was significantly invested in the publication of the *Description*, as evidenced by the dedication, by the inclusion of his Thule essay and by the fact that “on several occasions in 1693 he wrote to [Sir Hans] Sloane to say that if the Fellows [of the Royal Society] would welcome a copy of Wallace’s work on Orkney he would provide it.”³⁴ Furthermore, the linking of the “Fin-Man’s boat from Orkney” with Rochefort’s *Moral and Natural History of the Antilles* in both the Balfour catalogue and Wallace’s *Description* are strongly suggestive of Sibbald’s editorial involvement in the latter.

An examination of Wallace’s original manuscript of 1684 indicates the extent to which Sibbald embellished Wallace’s manuscript account when bringing out the published *Description* of 1693.³⁵ In the manuscript, under a chapter heading “Chapter 4th, The Ancient Monuments & Curiosities of this Countrey,” Wallace provided descriptions of local archaeology and folklore. His descriptions are a model of judicious factual reporting based on empirical methods. When discussing local accounts of unusual phenomena, he is always at pains to advance natural explanations whilst carefully noting associated local superstitions. He also employed experimental methods to test the veracity of local customs and beliefs.³⁶ Wallace was, in many ways, a model scientific correspondent, responding to the demands of metropolitan science for observable facts and applying “best-practice” in terms of his method. Wallace’s manuscript account of the reported Finnmen sightings is therefore instructive. It states:

Sometyme about this Countrey are seen these men which they call Finmen. Tuo years agoe one was seen sometym sailing sometym rowing up & dooun in his litle Boat, att the south end of the Ile of Eda. Most of the people of the Ile flocked to see him, & when they adventured to putt out a Boat with men to see iff they could apprehend him, he presentlie fled away most swiftlie. This same year another was seen from westra, since which tyme they have gott few or no fishes: for they have this Remarque heer that these finnmen drive away the fishes from the place to which they come.³⁷

Wallace’s 1684 manuscript therefore makes absolutely no mention of “the people that dwell about the Fratum Davis,” the Physicians Hall kayak or Rochefort’s *Moral and*

Natural History, which were added to the text in the published 1693 *Description*. His 1684 manuscript covers church history, antiquities and natural history but it firmly focussed on Orkney. In 1693, however, Sibbald was under considerable pressure due to his failure to publish his two-volume atlas of Scotland while Wallace's work was (conveniently) unpublished on his death.

What purpose then was served by the author and editor of the 1693 *Description* imagining Orkney's connections with the wider circumpolar north? And what role does the collecting of artefacts and textual authority play in that process? Scotland's colonial ambitions are relevant here. Wallace's manuscript was linked, via Sibbald, to an ambitious project to establish a national geographical survey of Scotland at a time when Scotland was increasingly envious of England's commercial and colonial success overseas. Shut out of colonial trade by the mercantilist system, Scotland's colonial aspirations would lead, in 1695, to the founding of the Company of Scotland Trading to Africa and the Indies and the subsequent disastrous Darien expeditions of 1698 and 1699. Paying close attention to the text certain things are clear. In terms of artefacts, the author of the *Description* says only that the kayak in the Physicians' Hall came from Orkney, not that the Physicians' Hall kayak was obtained from Inuit encountered in Orkney, or from the specific encounters recorded by Wallace. Kirkwall and Stromness, as the first European entrepôts for returning Dutch and Danish-Norwegian whalers were probably two of the better locations in Europe for obtaining Inuit artefacts in the seventeenth century. As Daniel Carey has pointed out, "the cargo of newly arrived ships contained unexpected artefacts appearing in miscellaneous array from diverse locations. These materials, accumulated randomly, exerted a considerable influence" on natural historians and scholars, informing what Carey has termed "cargo-driven curiosity." Carey concludes that often "it was not the Royal Society that directed travel, but rather travel directed the Royal Society," the course of knowledge being "radically open to suggestion."³⁸ Despite considerable scholarly endeavour, the subsequent whereabouts of Physicians' Hall kayak and knowledge of its provenance were lost. Dale Ildiens notes that apart from two eighteenth-century kayaks in Scottish museums "there is no evidence that the majority of kayaks in Scottish collections are not 19th century examples."³⁹

In terms of texts, we must bear in mind the ways in which textual authority was deployed in early-modern science and the vastly different epistemological framework that operated in this period. Objectivity, in the sense of "knowledge that bears no trace of the knower,"⁴⁰ was not a well-developed epistemic virtue in early-modern science. The Baconian injunction to study the irregular, heteroclitic and monstrous "in which nature deviates and turns from her ordinary course" had seen the creation across Europe of cabinets of curiosities. Bacon had called for such collections "as a corrective to the ingrained tendency of scholastic natural philosophers to generalize rashly from a handful of commonplace examples."⁴¹ However, the emphasis on oddities tended to subvert empiricism and led to anomalies, singularities and monstrosities becoming not only objects of scientific attention but also a form of scientific currency.⁴² According to Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, "By the early eighteenth century [...] leading naturalists had begun to worry that the search for natural regularities was being overwhelmed by excessive scientific attention to nature's excesses."⁴³ These excesses tended to "cluster at the margins rather than at the centre of the known world, and they constituted a distinct ontological category, the preternatural, suspended between the mundane and the miraculous."⁴⁴

Preternatural objects were thus the stock-in-trade of scientific correspondence, although in the period in question, their utility was increasingly under scrutiny. “These phenomena were, in the language of the day, *praetor naturam*, ‘beyond nature,’ being remarkable divergences from ‘that which is always or for the most part.’”⁴⁵ They were distinguished from the miraculous and the supernatural and “among practitioners of preternatural philosophy, it was an inflexible premise that all such anomalies might be ultimately explained by recourse to natural causes.”⁴⁶

The way that oddities informed scientific speculation can be demonstrated by a paper jointly published by Sir Hans Sloane and Sir Robert Sibbald in the *Philosophical Transactions* 1 January 1695 entitled “An Account of Four Sorts of Strange Beans, Frequently Cast on Shoar on the Orkney Isles, with Some Conjectures about the Way of Their Being Brought Thither from Jamaica.” James Delbourgo has noted how Sloane characterized the “Atlantic as a providential medium connecting the Old World and the New,”⁴⁷ its oceanic currents and winds bringing natural items from the Caribbean to the furthest shores of the British Isles. Orkney was understood to be the site of trans-oceanic convergence and circulation, a place where you could encounter preternatural instances of fauna and flora from both the tropics and the Arctic. Sloane’s and Sibbald’s short communication of 1695 also includes accounts of South American canoes and bodies washed up in the Azores, indicating an active interest in the possibility of trans-oceanic voyages being undertaken by colonized Indigenes from the New World.⁴⁸ The Royal Society also had a longstanding relationship with the Hudson’s Bay Company, a key source of information on the Indigenous population of North America.⁴⁹ We also know that Sloane had seen a purported “‘wild man’ from the Davis Strait off Greenland,” a handbill in his collection reporting the individual being “shewn twice before the Royal Family and Sir Hans Sloane.”⁵⁰ Sloane’s and Sibbald’s “Account of Four Strange Beans” in many ways demonstrates a similar conjunction of disparate natural artefacts and textual authorities to the 1693 *Description*. Indeed, there is a clear “resemblance between objects of preternatural philosophy and the contents of *Wunderkammer*” maintained by the likes of Sibbald and Sloane, which, according to Daston, are both marked by “the very type of a miscellany, a hodgepodge of strange objects still more strangely juxtaposed.”⁵¹

I would argue that Sibbald’s guiding role in the publication of the 1693 *Description* transformed Wallace’s manuscript account of Finnmen from a third-hand and rather opaque account of unexplained events tinged with local superstitions, to something far more enigmatic. Through the scholarly process of citation and inference, Sibbald linked Wallace’s Orkney account to the wider circumpolar Arctic and the objects of scientific curiosity held in collections in Edinburgh. In so doing, Sibbald’s narrative performance lied by authority, an authority partly based on the deployment of unreliable texts. Critiquing the practices of the Royal Society, contemporaries had already remarked on the tendency of some scholars to substitute the authority of texts for the authority of observable facts, in one case noting that a rival collector had fallen victim “to his own fancies and theories, though without any ‘real foundation in fact or things.’ It was a special vice of too much learning and reading.”⁵² Driven by the savant’s desire for scientific recognition, the text of the *Description* introduced an inductive leap, leading to “an economy of error in which knowledge was both advanced and retarded.”⁵³

Despite the Royal Society’s motto, *Nullis in verba*, to “take nobody’s word for it,” in discussing the possible origins of Finnmen, Sibbald reproduced a third-party account that

named no credible witnesses. Stephen Shapin has identified the “role of trust in building and maintaining cognitive order” in early-modern science, a trust derived from gentlemanly codes of conduct applied to the day-to-day scientific practice of ensuring scientific credibility.⁵⁴ Further, Harriet Lyon has indicated that trust was founded on identifiable witness testimony.⁵⁵ Wallace’s original manuscript names none of the purported witnesses on Eday or Westray. By 1693, with Wallace dead and lacking any named witnesses, Sibbald was presented with both a problem and an opportunity. Lacking the authority conveyed by authenticated eyewitness testimony, Sibbald substituted the authority of other texts and his own diegetic powers. The authority of Sibbald’s narrative assisted in the process of fixing belief, propagating a textual economy of error that was replicated in all subsequent contemporary accounts.

Where things no less remarkable do Occur

In 1700 another text was published in London by Dr. James Wallace, son of the Rev. James Wallace, entitled *An Account of the Islands of Orkney*.⁵⁶ This text repurposed and rewrote the 1693 text of the *Description* but made no mention of the Rev. James Wallace. Dr. Wallace added lists of plants and shells and an extract from a Latin manuscript giving an account of the ancient Earls of Orkney, omitted other passages and left out the translation of the Latin passages in the Thule essay. It removed the dedication to Sibbald and replaced it with a dedication to Charles 6th Earl of Dorset & 1st Earl of Middlesex, the Lord Chief Justice. As a fellow of the Royal Society, Dr. Wallace’s 1700 text registers a shift in patronage networks, the Earl of Dorset having become a fellow of the Royal Society in 1699. Thus Dr. Wallace’s *Account* sought to establish his credentials at the apex of the Protestant Settlement. He published an advertisement for the book in the *Philosophical Transactions* 1 January 1700 which “discribes the Finn-man, and their Boats observed on the Coasts.”⁵⁷ Appearing immediately before the advertisement for the *Account*, Dr. Wallace also published “Part of a Journal Kept from Scotland to New Caledonia in Darien, with a Short Account of That Country. Communicated by Dr. Wallace, F. R. S.”⁵⁸ It is widely believed that Dr. Wallace travelled to Darien.⁵⁹ The juxtaposition of Darien and Orkney in the *Philosophical Transactions* is instructive. The mania for Scottish plantations had not yet succumbed to disillusionment at the abandonment of the colony to Catholic Spain. Many accounts dispatched home from Darien were markedly optimistic and full of tales of the exotic. If, as the anthropologist Michael Taussig argues, it is the “colonial trade with wildness that ensures civilization its savagery,”⁶⁰ we can perhaps begin to outline how Orkney functioned as a liminal space in a Scotland fascinated by ideas of colonization, functioning as an archipelagic *imaginarium* for the members of the Royal Society. Situated at the confluence of trans-oceanic currents and trade routes, Orkney suggested that national geographies were interpenetrated by global circulations. Each time a ship made landfall in Stromness and Kirkwall, new cargoes became available to the collectors and polymaths of the Royal Society. This “cargo-driven curiosity” enabled sensuous contact with artefacts from the Arctic, contact that animated “the fetish quality, the animism and spiritual glow of commodities,” triggering a sense of the marvellous.⁶¹ It is this sensual contact with Inuit objects that rendered Orkney a plenum with the wider circumpolar north, offering the possibility to scholars linked to the Royal Society of it being a site of reverse contact with the Inuit.

Dr. Wallace's *Account of 1700* subtly alters the report on the Finnmen contained in the 1693 *Description*. Seen in the same locations, there is now no mention of "sailing or rowing." Dr. Wallace speculates that "they must probably be driven by Storms from home" but is not explicit about where that home is. He then provides an account of an Inuit kayak, noting

their Boat being made of Fish Skins, are so contrived that he can never sink, but is like a Sea-gull swimming on the top of the Water. His shirt he has is so fastned to the Boat, that no Water can come into his Boat to do him damage.

He concludes by noting that a full account of the Finnmen can be found in the "L'histoire naturelle & morale des Antilles Chap.18." Dr. Wallace's acceptance of the presence of Inuit in Orkney waters and his further ethnographic embellishment, as well as the repeated citing of Rochefort's text, is strongly suggestive of one thing: that he was working from the published 1693 version of the *Description*, not his father's original manuscript. He further expanded on the account contained in the *Description* by concluding that "One of their Boats which was caught in Orkney, was sent from thence to Edinburgh, and is to be seen in the Physicians Hall, with the Oar and Dart he makes use of for killing Fish," seemingly implying the boat was "caught" in Orkney waters in pursuit of the Finnmen. Finally, Dr. Wallace concludes, "There is another of their Boats in the Church of Burra in Orkney."⁶² This boat is no longer extant but this mention of a kayak on display in an Orkney church may hint at the survival of the wider late-medieval and early-modern tradition of displaying travellers' "wonders" in churches.⁶³

The third mention of Finnmen occurred in 1701 when the Rev. John Brand of Bo'ness⁶⁴ published *A Brief Description of Orkney, Zetland, Pightland-Firth & Caithness*, based on a visitation he made for the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland between 18 April and 24 June 1700.⁶⁵ Brand's *Brief Description* is a mixture of natural history, chorography, travelogue and hortatory exclamations targeting Popish survivals and the deceits of the Devil, a spiritual survey attuned to special providences. Brand gives several indications of recent environmental stresses associated with the Seven Ill Years, providing an important environmental context for the Finnmen accounts.⁶⁶ He noted that ocean currents brought tropical shells, nuts and turtles to the Northern Isles.⁶⁷ His main focus, however, was on the incompleteness of the Reformation, which he ascribed to the "woful effects of pure Devilry, and not the products of Natures Operation," clearly differentiating supernatural agency from either the natural or the preternatural.⁶⁸ Brand provided the General Assembly with a spiritual audit of contemporary supernatural belief. Fairies were common in Orkney he reported, but Brownies had retreated before the Gospel in Shetland.⁶⁹ He recounts tales of witches and wizards but reassures his fellow minister: "As for Witches I do not hear much of them." The locals, keen to distance themselves from the capital offence of witchcraft, assured him that witches were more likely to be found further north in "Island, Lapland and other places to the North of Zetland."⁷⁰ Brand hedged his bets concerning fairies and witches. He maintained that fairies were demonic but does not indicate they played a familiar role in relation to witches and cunning folk.⁷¹ Brand's providentialism clearly differed from that of Sibbald and Sloane. For Brand, an orthodox Calvinist minister, supernatural demonic agency animated evil spirits, known to the parishioners of Orkney and Shetland as fairies and brownies. For orthodox divines in the trans-Atlantic world, the supernatural was part of an important

rhetorical strategy for maintaining the belief in God, many arguing that a failure to believe in the devil and all his works would ultimately end in the denial of the existence of God.⁷²

In Brand's narrative, it is the land that is haunted but the sea that is the main source of the preternatural, bringing forth monsters. He records encounters with mermen, mermaids and sea trows, some of which he seeks to fit within a supernatural schema.⁷³ Brand's account of Finnmen appears in a chapter on ancient monuments and strange providences.⁷⁴ He makes no attempt to provide a supernatural explanation. Brand's text is a reformulation of Dr. Wallace's narrative from the 1700 *Account*, which had introduced information about Inuit skin-on-frame kayaks and a description of the Eskimo roll. He shifts the timing of the encounters off Eday and Westray to "about a year ago" and indicates the presence of a gentleman on Eday as one of the witnesses. He also commented on how strange it was that Finnmen travel from Finland, "sitting in his little Boat." He describes them as "Finland-men" as well as "Finmen," encouraging subsequent commentators to speculate that Finnmen could be linked via Norse folklore with the Lapps (Saami) of Finland.⁷⁵

Brand's *Brief Description* was dedicated to James Douglas, Duke of Hamilton, one of Scotland's largest territorial magnates and a forthright supporter of Scotland's right to overseas plantations. It mentions the Hamilton family link to Orkney via his brother Lord George Hamilton, created 1st Earl of Orkney by King William in 1696, and recounts the Douglas family intermarriage with the former Scottish Earls of Orkney under the Norwegian crown. History, Brand tells his patron, is useful:

And it cannot but stain the Reputation of any, tho able to give Account of what is Rare in other Countrys, If they be Ignorant of their own, and Places which depend thereupon, where things no less Remarkable do Occur.⁷⁶

This cautionary exhortation to look to the remarkable in your own country may well register the disappointments of Darien; many of Brand's Bo'ness parishioners sailed there, never to return. *Caledonia* the colony may have failed but Christian lordship needed to be reminded that *Scotia* was still a nation to be built. Brand's *Brief Description*, combining accounts of the supernatural and the preternatural, forms part of a trans-Atlantic body of work produced by Protestant divines in the late-seventeenth century, recording the special providences of God as evidence of the existence of God. Just as curiosities were subjected to Sibbald's naïve Baconianism, irregularities mattered to Calvinists like Brand as they suggested both the reality of the supernatural world and the vestigial possibility of divine intervention in a world increasingly regularized by new understandings of the laws of nature and arguments from design.

These three Orkney texts reveal how a complex set of interrelationships between empiricism and textual practices in early-modern science and between national scientific programmes and colonial endeavour shaped national identity and place-making in early-modern Scotland. Sibbald's geographical project attempted to lay the foundations for national self-knowledge but early-modern science remained fascinated by non-rational ways of knowing and irregularities, irregularities brought to Orkney shores by ocean currents and in the holds of ships. Orkney became a potent site of sensuous contact with polar artefacts, the source of a cargo-driven curiosity amongst natural philosophers whose ways of doing science involved thinking with objects. All mythologies have their totem objects and for the scientific *virtuosi* of Europe, the Inuit kayak, like the Narwhal

tusk before it, offered sensuous contact with the Polar sublime. The kayak as artefact is, however, only half of something far more compelling and susceptible to mythologizing. The perfect fusion of Indigenous skill and technology, the paddled kayak appeared to the astounded Europeans who first encountered it a theriomorph, half-man, half-fish, a blurring of human/animal boundaries, a preternatural object. These texts, far from providing us with convincing evidence of Inuit penetration into Orkney waters, instead demonstrate an early-modern “mode of thinking with things,” things which “helpfully epitomize and concentrate complex relationships that cohere without being logical in the strict sense.”⁷⁷ It is hard not to draw the conclusion that these texts represent both wishful thinking, misrepresentation, scholarly legerdemain and ultimately a bad case of “Inuit envy,” forming part of a long Western tradition of white lies told about the Inuit.⁷⁸

The location of complex nostalgias

The Finnmen mythos, derived from these early-modern scientific texts, continues to shape regional identities down to the present day. The Viking and Celtic revivals of the late-nineteenth century fused these Inuit encounter stories with Orkney and Shetland folklore. Ideas about racial distinctiveness and regional particularism informed the founding of the Viking Society for Northern Research in 1892, originally called the Orkney, Shetland and Northern Society. Early issues of the club journal contain articles by Jessie Saxby, Karl Blind and Walter Trail Dennison, all devotees of the Finnmen legends.⁷⁹ The idea of north, as Peter Davidson has pointed out, is “the location of complex nostalgias” and the Finnmen legends became implicated in even more “complex nostalgias” as antiquarians in the late-nineteenth century tried to make sense of the archaeological record in the Northern Isles.⁸⁰ The pervasive and lasting influence of the racial theories of David MacRitchie are instructive here.

Influenced by the ethnological speculation of Karl Blind, MacRitchie developed what became known as Ethnological or Pygmy Theory, subsequently known as Fairy Euhemerism. Fairy Euhemerism was a “then-prevalent anthropological theory that belief in fairies arose from memories of a dark, diminutive Bronze Age people – ‘pygmies’ – who had been displaced by Iron Age invaders.”⁸¹ The Finnmen accounts were part of the evidence that MacRitchie marshalled for the existence of a dwarf-like autochthonous race in northern Britain. A double page illustration from the *Illustrated London News* for 1922 demonstrates the pervasiveness of MacRitchie’s theories. It shows a conclave of hairy brownies labouring by moonlight to erect an Iron-Age broch, citing as its authority that “most interesting book, ‘The Testimony of Tradition’, by David MacRitchie” that “gives an exhaustive account of the Finns, Feine, Picts, brownies and fairies – all the same people, whose strange doings are the basis of folklore in Northern Britain.”⁸²

MacRitchie’s key works disseminating these theories were *The Testimony of Tradition* (1890) and *Fians, Fairies and Picts* (1893). The first chapter of *Testimony* deals with the Wallace and Brand accounts of the Finnmen and a large part of the book is devoted to establishing that the Wallace and Brand accounts referred to encounters (and memories of encounters) with autochthonous “Finns” coming from the coast of Norway around Bergen.⁸³ Much of this argument relied on attempting to establish the evidence for skin-boat technology in Northern Europe, arguments MacRitchie pursued in two journal articles in 1890 and in 1912.⁸⁴ In *The Testimony of Tradition*, MacRitchie suggests that the Finns of legend “were somewhat connected to the Lapps or Eskimos, but were a

distinct race because of their very long beards,” concluding that they were even more like the Ainu of Hokkaido.⁸⁵ In MacRitchie’s view the indigenous population of Britain were a quasi-European Ainu-like race responsible for much of the Neolithic and Iron Age archaeology of Britain and Ireland.

In the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century, MacRitchie’s Pre-Celtic nostalgia fused with Norse diasporic identity in the Northern Isles, supporting arguments for the particularity of place based on racial distinctiveness. Writing on the Celtic Revival in Scotland in the late-nineteenth century, Mark Williams has noted how folklorists developed new genres that generously mixed fact and fiction with a “fondness for the dim, the shadowy, and the evanescent,” a literature that “preferred to stitch eclectic scraps together, hinting at connections and allowing allusions to hover.”⁸⁶ MacRitchie’s work falls firmly within this tradition. It mattered little to MacRitchie that there was not a shred of evidence for the survival of proto-European indigenes living around Bergen in the early-modern period, or that there was not an identifiable tradition of sewn-hide boats in Scandinavia. MacRitchie’s efforts were directed at corroborating the text of Wallace’s 1693 *Description* which he assumed contained evidence of “Inuit-like” peoples being encountered in Orkney. As Alexandra Walsham has pointed out, it is ironic that folklorists and antiquarians in the nineteenth century were so reliant on texts when they privileged the oral tradition. They were unwilling to acknowledge that verbal transmission was no guarantee of authenticity but had “been permanently tainted by contact with letters and books.”⁸⁷ The way in which the Finnmen texts were appropriated clearly demonstrates the “impact of literary forms and ideas on the popular imagination” and that “oral and literate cultures were closely interwoven and constantly interacting.”⁸⁸

Subsequent commentators’ failure to understand the textual practices and epistemic virtues of early-modern science compounded Sibbald’s narrative “economy of errors,” to the extent that these Finnmen stories are now firmly embedded in the current wave of cultural politics in the Northern Isles. The Orcadian journalist and folklorist Ernest Walker Marwick did much to perpetuate MacRitchie’s theories in the twentieth century, describing the Finns as a race of witches, found throughout Norway, speculating that “early Norse settlers in Orkney and Shetland, we may reasonably imagine, brought with them their Finnish thralls.”⁸⁹ A number of recent books perpetuate the Finnmen mythos. John MacAulay, a local historian from Harris, produced *Seal Folk and Ocean Paddlers* in 1998, a narrative history that speculates that the Norwegian Lords of the Isles resettled Inuit on remote islands in the Hebrides.⁹⁰ Norman Rogers *Searching for the Finnmen* (2012) demonstrated the power of this myth in modern leisure cultures. Rogers, a sea kayaker, concluded that “the Finnmen in the Orkneys were a residual band of Inuit hunters” forced south by pack ice who based “themselves on the remote uninhabited island of Suleskerry.”⁹¹ The Finnmen legends have even inspired a couple of modern-day adventurers, Olly Hicks and George Bullard, to paddle a large double sea kayak 1,200 miles from Greenland to Scotland in 2016. Sponsored by Red Bull and Virgin, the Olly Hicks’s Website cites as its inspiration the first published account of the Finnmen by the Rev. James Wallace of Kirkwall.⁹²

Texts and irreversibility

Beyond the three texts discussed in this article, there is no other independent archival or artefactual evidence for the presence of Inuit in Orkney waters in the late-seventeenth

century. Furthermore, the holograph source for these printed texts makes no mention of Inuit being encountered in Orkney waters or their kayaks being recovered. Instead, the Wallace manuscript presents us with an enigma of both signifier and signified. In or around 1682 it maintains that the inhabitants of Eday saw someone rowing and sailing off the southern coast of the island, that they tried to apprehend that person, but the boat sped away. In the same year another of these encounters was reported from Westray. Subsequent fish catches were poor. Orcadians associated these instances of poor catches and strange boats with a phenomenon they termed “Finnmen,” but the Wallace manuscript offers no further insight into what Orcadians in the late-seventeenth century meant by the term “Finnmen.” The folkways of the Northern Isles are that of the Norse diaspora, a cultural crossroads that may have drawn on the Irish *fianaigeacht* of the Finn Cycle as well as the tales of shape shifting Finns of northern Scandinavia.⁹³ Ultimately, determining the origins and etymology of the term “Finnmen” is beyond the scope of this study.

The term “Finnmen” first appeared in print in 1693 when a version of the Rev James Wallace’s manuscript appeared as *A Description of the Isles of Orkney*. Wallace’s manuscript was almost certainly compiled at the behest of Sibbald as part of his nation-building geographical project. On publication it became further enmeshed in the socio-technical networks of early-modern science and transformed by its methods. The context was one of feverish colonial speculation in Scotland, with Orkney situated at the nexus of trans-oceanic circulations and currents. Powered by a “cargo driven curiosity,” the *virtuosi* of the Royal Society experienced their own “material turn,” driven by the enchanting power of objects from the circumpolar Arctic, objects that were good to think with. I argue that it was the Inuit kayak that became for some the totemic object of early-modern science, establishing the possibility of an imagined connection with the Inuit. The anthropologist Michael Taussig has argued the colonial encounter is constituted by a constant interplay of mimesis and alterity, the mimetic faculty being the ability to “imitate, make models, explore difference, yield into and become Other.”⁹⁴ This insight has been taken up by historians of science who are not only “unanimous about the circulatory property of knowledge”⁹⁵ but also increasingly emphasise the reciprocal nature of global knowledge circulations, noting that “in circulating, things, men and notions often transform themselves.”⁹⁶ This process operates both ways, the colonial periphery exerting transformative power over the colonizing centre.⁹⁷ Moving beyond postcolonial debates about the relative strengths of the hegemonic core versus colonized periphery, historians of science have begun to argue that circulation itself is “a ‘site’ of knowledge formation” and to pay attention to the “mutable nature of the knowledge makers themselves,” focussing not only on knowledge in transit but also increasingly on the “contingencies of place.”⁹⁸

Significantly, the three texts this article considers enable us to examine in detail the situatedness of knowledge and the power of objects caught in global circulations. They help us to explore the networked power of places and things in early-modern science. They also enable us to chart the rapid process by which enlightenment, through its own techniques and practices, collapses into mythology. The 1693 text of the *Description* began a series of inductive leaps that rested on the authority of the knower and his knowledge of texts and objects. Within the space of eight years, the textual practices of early-modern science had rendered the Inuit presence in Orkney waters a “fact,” or more

precisely, an artefact, the product of scientific investigative practices. As Michel Callon has argued, “certain frameworks of translation acquire durability and robustness during complex processes of social and technical change.” This is achieved “by attachment to and circulation within prestigious networks, thereby contributing to the ‘hardening’ of facts.” Facts are normalized by repetition, ensuring “the irreversibility of widely disseminated accounts.”⁹⁹ By 1701, all the elements that nineteenth-century folklorists later sought to substantiate were fixed in these texts. That early-modern scientific texts should become the basis of legends underscores the narrative instability of these texts, subject to scholarly glossing, re-editing, misinterpretation and myth-making. Legends are defined as traditional stories “sometimes popularly regarded as historical but not authenticated.” Etymologically, “legend” derives from the medieval Latin “*legenda* ‘things to be read’ and from the Latin *legere*, ‘read’.”¹⁰⁰ The failure to understand the textual practices and epistemic limitations of early-modern scientific texts like the *Description* and its subsequent mis-reading, constitutes a process by which texts become transformed into the stuff of legends.¹⁰¹

Nineteenth-century folklorists and antiquarians, in privileging oral culture, failed to register the way in which literary texts had already penetrated popular culture, shaping the way informants responded to the enquiries of folklorists.¹⁰² Ironically, for folklorists like MacRitchie, the testimony of tradition ultimately rested on the veracity of texts. Historical debates concerning superstition and folklore are frequently framed in binary terms, arguing the relative strengths of high culture versus low culture, literary cultures versus oral cultures. The significance of the texts examined in this article is not so much that they further reinforce the case for the diffusion and transformation of high culture into popular culture. What they suggest is that the distance between the two is less than we often imagine.

The subsequent development of the Finnmen mythos is less surprising if we take as our starting point the proposition that one of the outcomes of the early-modern scientific project was the re-enchantment of the world. In *The Myth of Disenchantment: Magic, Modernity, and the Birth of the Human Sciences*, Jason Josephson-Storm traces the survival of science’s fascination with the occult, demonstrating how “from Robert Boyle to Robert Oppenheimer – scientific and magical worlds were often intertwined.”¹⁰³ He goes on to question the teleological conception of modernity as the progress of enlightenment and rationality.¹⁰⁴ He argues that the myth of disenchantment was itself a myth, a product of philosophical debates rooted in a certain time and place.¹⁰⁵ To follow Bruno Latour, not only have we never been modern but that the rupture implied by narratives of modernity is itself a myth.¹⁰⁶ Josephson-Storm goes on to elaborate how the myth of disenchantment works as a master paradigm, exhibiting contradictory functions: it “serves as a regime of truth,” but is also “self-refuting, producing the very thing it describes as endangered, animating occult revivals, paranormal investigations, and new attempts to spiritualize the sciences.”¹⁰⁷ I have argued that the textual practices of early-modern science rendered that science liminal, able to constitute the very opposite of its apparent intentions. The text of the *Description* demonstrates the techniques of early-modern science applied to the problem of curiosities: proceeding rationally, advancing naturalistic arguments and citing the authority of texts and objects. In so doing, far from demystifying the Finnmen narrative, it rendered the text a source of enchantment and mythology down to the present day.

That these Finnmen legends remain a presence in contemporary culture is extraordinary. In part this is because they are symbolic of the very idea of north itself, “an idea about a place that is shifting and recessive. As you advance towards it, the true north recedes away northwards.”¹⁰⁸ The fugitive nature of these accounts is constitutive of a cultural project of re-enchantment that has always attributed to Orkney a distinctive *genius loci*, linking early-modern scientists with folklorists and antiquarians in the nineteenth century. What links them is the importance of place in both the making of science and the making of meaning. Orkney, interpenetrated by oceanic currents and global trade routes, has always been open to the possibility of something washing up on its shores, a place where it is possible to imagine that anything could happen. It is hard not to conclude that Orkney, as well as being a real place has long since become an imaginary archipelago, lost in a sea of texts.¹⁰⁹

Notes

1. Grydehøj, “Ethnicity and the Origins of Local Identity in Shetland, UK-Part I,” 44, 46. Grydehøj, “Ethnicity and the Origins of Local Identity in Shetland, UK-Part II,” 107–114.
2. Grydehøj, “Ethnicity and the Origins of Local Identity in Shetland, UK-Part I,” 46.
3. MacRitchie, “The Finn-Men of Britain,” 1–26; MacRitchie, “Notes on a Finnish Boat Preserved in Edinburgh,” 353–369; MacRitchie, “The Aberdeen Kayak and its Congeners,” 213–241; MacRitchie, “The Kayak in North-Western Europe,” 493–510; MacRitchie, “Kayaks of the North Sea,” 126–133.
4. Trynkina, “Kayakers Near Scotland’s Northern Shores,” 115–122.
5. Weaver, *The Red Atlantic*.
6. Forbes, *The American Discovery of Europe*, 151.
7. *Ibid.*, 154–155.
8. Fulford, *Romantic Indians*; Flint, *The Transatlantic Indian*.
9. Waller, “Connecting Atlantic and Pacific”.
10. White, *A Cold Welcome*, 1–2.
11. Snider, “Hard Frost, 1684,” 8–32; Cullen, *Famine in Scotland*.
12. Ogilvie, “Documentary Evidence for Changes in the Climate of Iceland,” 109; Fagan, *The Little Ice Age*, 10.
13. Fagan, *The Little Ice Age*, 9; Engelhard, “How Polar Bears Became the Dragons of the North”.
14. Krantz, *The History of Greenland*, Vol. 1., 240.
15. *Ibid.*, 188–189.
16. *Ibid.*, 238.
17. Browne, “An Account of Island, alias Ice-land,” 427; Ogilvie, “Documentary Evidence for Changes in the Climate of Iceland,” 99.
18. Gunnell, “On the Border,” 10–31; Gunnell, “An Invasion of Foreign Bodies,” 70–79; Crantz, *The History of Greenland*, Vol. 1, 237, 244.
19. Williams, “Back to the Wall,” 34–46. Author’s interview with Olly Hicks, 24 October 2016. Olly Hicks and George Bullard were the first to sea kayak from Greenland to Scotland in 2016: <http://www.ollyhicks.com/greenland-to-scotland-challenge/>.
20. Sturtevant and Quinn, “This New Prey: Eskimos in Europe,” 61–62. Vaughan, *Transatlantic Encounters*, 11.
21. McGhee, *The Arctic Voyages of Martin Frobisher*, 81–88.
22. Idiens, “Eskimos in Scotland,” 163.
23. Harbsmeier, “Persian Letters from Real People,” 172–184; Anonymous, *Greenland Missions*; Trynkina, “Kayakers Near Scotland’s Northern Shores,” 118.
24. Harbsmeier, “Persian Letters from Real People,” 172–184; Traeger, “Poq og Quiperoq,” 117–144.

25. Whitehead, "Earliest Extant Painting of Greenlanders," 141–159.
26. Scheffel, "Adam Olearius's 'About the Greenlanders,'" 705. Golden, "Kayaks in European Museums," 61.
27. Trynkina, "Kayakers Near Scotland's Northern Shores," 118 notes that David MacRitchie was the first to suggest that escaped Inuit were the source of the Orkney Finnmen accounts in MacRitchie, "The Kayak in North-Western Europe," 493–510.
28. Wallace, *A Description of the Isles of Orkney*, (1693), 33–34.
29. Roux, *Le pasteur Charles de Rochefort*, 175–216.
30. Withers, "Geography, Science and National Identity," 67.
31. Idiens, "Eskimos in Scotland," 172.
32. Sibbald, *Auctarium Musaei Balfouriani, e Musaeo Sibbaldiano*.
33. Scott, ed., *Fasti ecclesiae Scoticae*, Vol. 7, 222.
34. Withers, "Geography, Science and National Identity," 62.
35. Wallace, *A Description of the Isles of Orkney*, (1684), 267.
36. *Ibid.*, 20, 27.
37. *Ibid.*, 27–28.
38. Carey, "Compiling Nature's History," 271, 275–276.
39. Idiens, "Eskimos in Scotland," 173.
40. Daston and Galison, *Objectivity*, 17.
41. *Ibid.*, 67.
42. Carey, "Compiling Nature's History," 277.
43. Daston and Galison, *Objectivity*, 67.
44. Daston and Park, "Wonders and the Order of Nature," 14.
45. Daston, "Preternatural Philosophy," 16.
46. Daston, "Preternatural Philosophy," 17.
47. Delbourgo, *Collecting the World*, 70.
48. Sloane, "An Account of Four Sorts of Strange Beans," 298–300.
49. Binnema, *Enlightened Zeal*, 57; Gascoigne, "The Royal Society, Natural History and the Peoples of the 'New World(s)'," 549; Newman, *Empire of the Bay*, 115.
50. Delbourgo, *Collecting the World*, 201.
51. Daston, "Preternatural Philosophy," 19.
52. Levine, *Dr. Woodward's Shield*, 79.
53. Carey, "Compiling Nature's History," 292; Daston, *Wonders and the Order of Nature*, 67.
54. Shapin, *A Social History of the Truth*, xxv.
55. Lyon, "The Fisherton Monster," 343.
56. Wallace, *An account of the Islands of Orkney / By James Wallace, M.D.* (1700); Wallace, *A Description of the Isles of Orkney*, (1693), viii.
57. Wallace, "An Abstract of a Book," 544.
58. Wallace, "Part of a Journal Kept from Scotland to New Caledonia in Darien," 536–543.
59. Scott, *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticae*. Vol. 7, 222; *Part of Captain Pennycook's Journal to New Caledonia in Darien* (1699).
60. Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, xviii.
61. *Ibid.*, 23.
62. Wallace, *An Account of the Islands of Orkney* (1700), 60–61.
63. Daston, *Wonders and the Order of Nature*, 67–108.
64. Cadell, "Brand, John (1669–1738)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.
65. Brand, *A Brief Description*, (1701); Trynkina, "Kayakers near Scotland," 116.
66. Brand, *A Brief Description* (1701), 20, 110.
67. *Ibid.*, 54, 116.
68. *Ibid.*, 55.
69. *Ibid.*, 62, 112–113.
70. *Ibid.*, 111.
71. Hutton, "The Making of the Early Modern British Fairy Tradition," 1150. Oldridge, "Fairies and the Devil in early modern England," 1–15.

72. Westaway and Harrison, "The Surey Démoniack," 263–228; Walsham, "Recording Superstition in Early Modern Britain," 199, 206; Hunter, "The Decline of Magic," 399–425.
73. Brand, *A Brief Description* (1701), 113–115.
74. Brand, *A Brief Description* (1701), 50–51.
75. Jennings, "The Finnfolk," 2010.
76. Brand, *A Brief Description* (1701), unnumbered dedicatory pages.
77. Daston, "Introduction: Speechless," 20.
78. Steckley, *White Lies About the Inuit*.
79. Dennison, "Orkney Folklore," 167–171; Dennison, "The Play o' De Lathie Odivere," 53–58.
80. Davidson, *The Idea of North*, 11.
81. Williams, *Ireland's Immortals*, 410.
82. Anonymous, "The Original Brownies," 1078–1079.
83. MacRitchie, *The Testimony of Tradition*.
84. MacRitchie, "Notes on a Finnish Boat Preserved in Edinburgh," 353–369. MacRitchie, "The Kayak in North-Western Europe," 493–510.
85. MacRitchie, *The Testimony of Tradition*, 173.
86. Williams, *Ireland's Immortals*, 379.
87. Walsham, "Recording Superstition in Early Modern Britain," 204. Williams, *Ireland's Immortals*, 414.
88. Hutton, "Historiographical Reviews," 1153–1154.
89. Marwick, "Northern Witches, with Some Account of the Orkney Witchcraft Trials," 335.
90. MacAulay, *Seafolk and Ocean Paddlers*.
91. Rogers, *Searching for the Finnmén*, 168.
92. <http://www.ollyhicks.com/greenland-to-scotland-challenge/> [accessed 30 July 2018]. Hicks and Bullard finally provide us with experiential data that can be brought to bear on the theory of autonomous travel from Greenland to Scotland utilizing Inuit skin-on-frame technology. In interviews with the author, Hicks is on record as saying he believes it is extremely unlikely Inuit groups could make this voyage independently and reports that Bullard believes that it was not possible.
93. Williams, *Ireland's Immortals*, 194–247.
94. Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, xiii.
95. Raj, "Beyond Postcolonialism," 337.
96. Raj, "Introduction: Circulation and Locality in Early Modern Science," 515, citing Markovits et al., "Introduction: Circulation and Society Under Colonial Rule," 2–3.
97. Raj, "Beyond Postcolonialism", 344.
98. *Ibid.*, 345, 341.
99. Cruickshank, *Do Glaciers Listen?*, 151 citing Callon, "Techno-Economic Networks and Irreversibility", 150–151.
100. <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/legend> [accessed 31 August 2018].
101. Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 19.
102. Williams, *Ireland's Immortals*, 414.
103. Josephson-Storm, *The Myth of Disenchantment*, 43.
104. *Ibid.*, 5.
105. *Ibid.*, 63–93.
106. *Ibid.*, 308; Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*.
107. Josephson-Storm, *The Myth of Disenchantment*, 309–310.
108. Davidson, *The Idea of North*, 19.
109. Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, 61. Hall, *The History of Orkney Literature*, 7.

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