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Place-Names of Mingulay

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Arne served as one of the supervisors to my PhD thesis. In many ways, he and I are exact opposites. He was punctual, organised, and very serious, and in this way, I always thought he was much more German than me.

This chapter aims to provide an overview of the mapping and recording of place-names on Mingulay, located in the Outer Hebrides of Scotland. It will do so by employing evidence collected from maps, charts, gazetteers, letters, and from interviews with descendants of former inhabitants, local fishermen, and crofters.

Once considered to be more difficult to reach than North America, Mingulay (NL560830) is one of the remotest islands of the Hebrides. It lies 19 km south of Barra and 90 km west of Ardnamurchan Lighthouse, the nearest point on the Scottish mainland. Of the group of islands south of Barra, known as the Bishop's Isles,[1] Mingulay is the second largest in terms of area, measuring 4 km in length, just over 3 km in width, and covering 6.4 km². However, it is larger than its closest neighbours, Berneray (Ceann Bharraigh, Barra Head) to the

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1. As such they appear in the rental of the bishopric of 1561. *Collectanea de Rebus Albanicis* 1839: 4. For further discussion of this term, see Buxton 1995: 50.

south and Pabbay to the north, and features the highest hills in the island group. Its size is likely to have inspired its descriptive name which is derived from Old Norse (ON) *mikil* ('big') and ON *ey* ('island').[2] In Gaelic, the island is known as Miùghlaigh [mjuːəLaj].

Earlier versions of the name include:

1546 *Megaly*	George Lily
1654 *Megala*	Robert Gordon: Joan Blaeu's *Atlas novus* ('Vistus insula')
1703 *Micklay*	Martin Martin
1714 *Megala I.*	Herman Moll
1776 *Mingaly I.*	Murdoch Mackenzie
1794 *Mingalla I.*	Captain J. Huddart
1804 *Mingalay I.*	William Heather
1807 *I. Mingalay*	Aaron Arrowsmith
1827 *Minguly*	John Lothian, 'Western Isles'
1832 *Mingulay*	John Thomson
c. 1850 *Mingalay*	A. and C. Black
1880 *Mingulay*	OS six-inch map, first edition

The vertical cliffs of Mingulay, the tallest in Britain after St Kilda, run along the rugged northern and western shores and incorporate deep chasms, high sea stacks, and natural arches. They are home to colonies of guillemots, razorbills, puffins, and kittiwakes. From its highest cliff Biulacraig (NL549831) at 213 m, in the west, the land drops off gradually to the east where the ruins of the village (NL565834) sit by a sandy beach. Four hills, running in a semi-circle from north-east to south-west, break up the slope, with Carnan (NL553828) at 273 m serving as a triangulation point. The island is treeless

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2. Borgström 1936: 287.

and appears barren with only a thin layer of acidic soil. The bedrock is mainly Lewisian gneiss with veins of basalt, which, being subject to erosion, contribute to the serrated look of the coast.

Figure 1: Biulacraig. Photo: Anke-Beate Stahl.

Settlement history

It is estimated that Mingulay has been permanently settled for at least 2,000 years. Although there are no obvious Iron Age buildings, such as brochs and duns, the more than 400 recorded archaeological sites on the island have left archaeologists confident that further fieldwork would most likely produce evidence of pre-Iron Age settlements.[3] Dùn Mingulay (NL545822, OS 1880) is a large peninsula with sheer cliffs and a narrow isthmus as access. It may have been a livestock enclosure rather than a defensive structure.[4] The OS also lists a *dùn* ('fort') on Geirum Mòr (NL548813, 1931), an islet with 15 m steep cliffs just 180 m south-west of Mingulay. Here appear to be the ruins of a chapel,[5] but no obvious signs of a fort.

The Viking raids on Iona and Skye in the period between AD 795 and 825, as described by the *Annals of Ulster* and *Annals of Innisfallen*, are most likely the cornerstones of the initial Norse settlement in the Hebrides.[6] Norse influence dominated for five centuries until 1266, when the Hebrides were sold to the Scottish Crown as a result of the Treaty of Perth.

Despite its remote location, Mingulay had around 150 inhabitants in 1881. Locals made a living from fowling, collecting eggs, selling feathers to mainland markets, crofting, and fishing. Peat provided a source of energy, but life was hard. The village, located in the east of the island, was relatively sheltered,

3. Branigan and Foster 2000: 128.
4. 'Mingulay, Dun Mingulay', *Canmore: National Record of the Historic Environment*, https://canmore.org.uk/site/272187/mingulay-dun-mingulay. Accessed 19 May 2022.
5. 'Geirum Mór, Mingulay', *Canmore: National Record of the Historic Environment*, https://canmore.org.uk/site/21381/geirum-mr-mingulay. Accessed 19 May 2022.
6. Jennings 1996: 61.

but houses were basic and some were overcrowded. Landing on the sandy beach was difficult, and taking cargo ashore or loading boats was dangerous.

Even the derrick, finally completed in 1901, proved not as practical as hoped for. Visitors could be marooned on the island for many weeks, unable to leave due to bad weather. Likewise, islanders who had travelled to Barra or beyond were prevented from returning. There was a limited amount of fertile land suitable for growing food and grazing cattle, the quality of the soil was poor, and seaweed was scarce so there was not much to be used as fertilizer. Unrest started, followed by emigration, encouraged by the prospect of some land on Vatersay, and by 1912, Mingulay was deserted.[7] Today, we can refer to audio recordings of former inhabitants, written accounts by locals and visitors, and maps and charts to get a glimpse of what life on the island was like.

Mingulay on maps and charts

The mapping of Mingulay evolved alongside the mapping of the Outer Hebrides as a whole. In early maps, the Hebrides appeared much further north than their actual location, but as surveying techniques progressed, the shapes of individual islands became more defined, and their positioning within the Minch – the strait to the west of the Scottish mainland – became more accurate. Abraham Ortelius' map 'Scotiae Tabula' of 1573 is significant, as it is the first to show the Inner and Outer Hebrides as clearly separated sets of islands. On it, the smaller islands south of Barra may be identified by location, although not yet by shape.
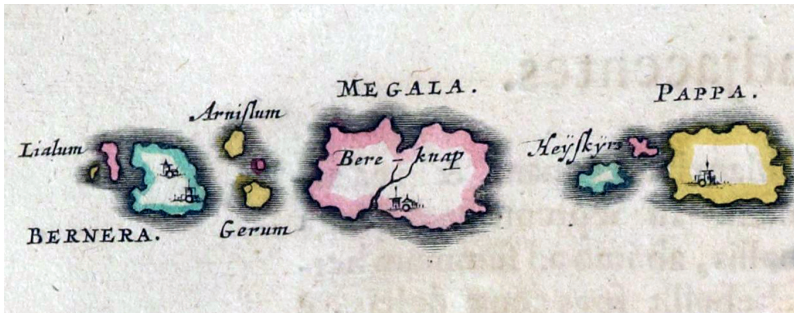
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7. Buxton 1995: 123.

Figure 2: Joan Blaeu's *Atlas novus.* 1654. Reproduced with
permission of the National Library of Scotland.

Joan Blaeu's 'Vistus Insula' was published as part of his *Atlas
novus* in 1654. It was based on Robert Gordon's survey, which
in turn had been informed by the work of Timothy Pont.
On 'Vistus Insula', Mingulay appears as *Megala* and can be
clearly distinguished from its neighbouring islands. This map
shows one name in the interior of Mingulay, *Bere-knap*. Both
elements of this name are likely to be of ON origin, from *bere*
('naked', 'bare') and *knappr* ('top of a hill', 'knob'). *Bere-knap*
appears to be an older name for what is now known as Carnan
(NL553828), the most distinguishable hill on Mingulay. In
Atlas Novus, the sea stack *Arnislum* and the islet *Gerum* are
located to the south of Mingulay. These names – in contrast
to *Bere-knap* – are still in current use and appear as Arnamul
(NL545825), Geirum Mòr (NL547813), and Geirum Beag
(NL551814) on contemporary maps.

At 150 m, Arnamul is impressively high. The first element
of this name may be derived from ON *arnar*, genitive case of
örn, (m., 'eagle')[8] or from a personal name of the same form.[9]
The generic derives from ON *múli* ('sea rock'). Geirum may be
based on ON *geirr* ('spear') or possibly the ON personal name

8. There are sea eagles in this area.
9. A. Kruse, pers. comm. The personal name Ǫrn is popular in ON anthro-
toponyms. See Evemalm 2018: 197.

Geirr. The generic of this name, *-um*, is derived from ON *holmr* ('islet') and it is followed by Gaelic *mòr* ('large') and Gaelic *beag* ('small'), which were added at a later stage. Alternative spellings are *Gierum* (1892), *Gìrum* (1903) and *Gìrum Mhòr* (1931), with a number of variations also seen for the smaller of the two islands.

Figure 3: Caolas Àirneamuil (Caolas Arnamul). Photo: Anke-Beate Stahl.

In the aftermath of Culloden in 1746, the lack of detailed maps led to the Hanoverian army failing to capture Charles Edward Stuart. As a result, William Roy was commissioned to produce the *Military Survey of Scotland* between 1747 and 1755. Maps from this survey were considered so strategically important that public access was denied, leaving many eighteenth-century cartographers to draw information from earlier publications. However, Roy did not cover the Outer Hebrides at all, and only a small part of the Inner Hebrides.

John Thomson's *Atlas of Scotland* of 1832 proved to be a significant milestone in mapping the Hebrides as it showed the 'Southern Part of the Western Isles' in great detail. In addition to a more accurately depicted coastline, headlands and hills are shown with contour lines. For the first time, streams are shown – although not named – on Mingulay. The atlas contains more hill names than any previous map and also includes names for coastal features such as sea stacks, islets, promontories, and landing places. Considering the size of Mingulay, the number of names shown on the map is unusually large and suggests that the surveyor, MacLean, may have had a particular interest in recording this much detail. In contrast to previous publications, Thomson's map is rotated by ninety degrees, with the chain of the Outer Hebrides running from west to east, rather than the familiar south to north. In some places, names are difficult to read, as Thomson's ornamental horizontal lines separating the land mass from coastal waters interfere with the typescript.

Figure 4: John Thomson, 'Southern Part of the Western Isles', Map of Barra, 1832.
Reproduced with permission of the National Library of Scotland.

Captain Otter's survey of Scotland's West Coast, 'Hebrides or Western Isles from Barra Head to Scarpa' (Sheet V, Chart 2474), published in 1865, added another dimension to mapping the Hebrides. His charts show the depths of the seabed in great detail and also record the heights of hills on Mingulay. For the first time, names appear in English translations, examples being *Ram Head* (Tom a' Reithean, NL568848), and *Green Island* (Greanamul). Some names receive English generics such as *Gnuarsay* [sic] *Point* (Guarsay Mòr, NL548844) or *Bay of Sonodal* (Bay Hunadu, NL572845), while others are given entirely new names in English such as in *Horse Island* (Geirum Mòr, see above), *Dun Bluff*[10] (Dùn Mingulay, see above), *Twin Rocks* (Bogha Dubh an Dùin, NL542819), and *Night Bay* (Bàgh na h-Aonaig, NL552833).

The six-inch OS maps published in 1880 show considerably more place-names on Mingulay than any previous map. They were preceded by the Ordnance Survey object name books, which listed all features considered for entry in the OS six-inch maps.

The object name books for Barra and its southern islands were compiled between 1876 and 1878, possibly by Captain J.C. MacPherson, whose name is noted on the last page.[11] The printed layout of these books provided space for each place-name, alternative spellings, authorities (i.e. contributors), and historical maps and charts from which information was obtained. Depending on the collector, detailed information about antiquities, natural history, and sometimes even social conditions were given. The

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10. This name appears on only one historical record and is unknown amongst locals. In this case, the element *bluff* may be a topographic term for 'headland', mostly used in North America for prominent (inland) cliff-faces. The Admiralty use probably stemmed from the use of *bluff* during Canadian coastal surveys. Ian A. Fraser, pers. comm.
11. Ordnance Survey Name Books 1878. Inverness-shire, Outer Hebrides, II: 139.

OS provided clear guidelines that informants be recruited first from key professions in the local community, examples being landowners, tacksmen, clergymen, schoolmasters, and inn-keepers. In many areas, however, crofters and fishermen, who had an in-depth knowledge of the land and sea, were also consulted.

Figure 5: OS six-inch map, Mingulay, 1880. Reproduced with permission of the National Library of Scotland.

In Mingulay, all entries from the OS object name books appeared on the OS six-inch maps (1880). The contributors for Mingulay were listed as Mr John Sinclair (Iain Dhunnchaidh) from Mingulay, Mr Allan McNeil, assistant lighthouse keeper who would have lived on Berneray, and Mr Sinclair from

Barra Head.[12] A few names were verified by Mr McAulay from Castlebay, who was a boatman for the mail boat for the southern islands, and one by Rev. A. McDonald. All entries were confirmed by A.A. Carmichael, who acted as an authority on the correct spelling of the place-names. This Alexander Archibald Carmichael, a native of Lismore who had lived in South Uist for many years, was an exciseman, collector of folklore, antiquarian, and author of the *Carmina Gadelica*.[13] In a private letter, Carmichael expressed his concerns regarding the inclusion and exclusion of place-names on the final maps.

> I think Gaelic place-names are very descriptive and self-evident and intelligible to most intelligent Highlanders. There are not a few however which for various and obvious reasons are open to doubt. And let me here give my opinion of the O.S.D. [Ordnance Survey Department] which I am not sure is wholly blameless in this matter. When the work of the Barra SU B & U and Harris [i.e. Barra, South Uist, Benbecula, North Uist, and Harris – the Hebridean islands whose names Carmichael was asked to authorise] came out, I found that many of [the] place-names which I was at so much pains and expense in collecting were entire [sic] left out that some names on the old maps were left unaltered and that some were altered in form thus lending the meaning different. I took the liberty of drawing the attention of the Dir G of the OS to these alterations and the reply was that names were omitted to save expense that old names were left out as they were obviously incorrect & [so] as to avoid confusion and that the final mode of spelling rested with the Inspector General. Sir C. Wilson repeats that the final mode of spelling rests with the In.G.[14]

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12. He is likely to be the brother of John Sinclair (Iain Dhunnchaidh).
13. Carmichael 1900.
14. Withers 2000: 547.

Individual place-names collectors

Interest in the island, its flora and fauna, and its inhabitants and their traditions increased in the second half of the nineteenth century, and Mingulay received visits from ornithologists, folklorists, and people who tried, unsuccessfully, to convert the local Catholic population to Protestantism. John Finlayson (1830–1904) was born in Lochcarron, Ross-shire, and came to Mingulay in 1859 to work as schoolmaster. He married Jane Campbell, a local woman, and remained on the island for the rest of his life. His letter to the botanist and naturalist John Alexander Harvie-Brown, who had visited Mingulay in 1870 and 1887,[15] was written on 9 March 1892 and contains a list of fifty place-names of the island. An invaluable source, each of Finlayson's place-names follows a brief description of each feature, which in some cases helps to distinguish the type of feature, particularly in cases where the origin of the name is opaque. He starts with *Soalum* (Solon Mòr, NL574849), an islet in the north-east, and works his way clockwise round the island, in some cases enabling at least an approximate location of now-lost place-names.

Eleven years after John Finlayson's compilation of Mingulay place-names, Fr Allan McDonald (1859–1905) conducted his own collection of place-names of the island. Also known as Maighstir Ailean or Fr Allan, he worked as a Roman Catholic priest on South Uist and Eriskay. He was also a poet, collected Hebridean folklore, was interested in philology, and worked as a political activist, fighting for crofters' rights. Both John Finlayson and Fr Allan were Gaelic speakers, and confident in writing in Gaelic too. In 1903, Fr Allan's 'List of non-Gaelic

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15. See Buxton 1995: 21.

place-names in the island of Mingulay, near Barra-Head' was published.[16]

In his list of non-Gaelic place-names, Fr Allan attempts a phonetic spelling, placing accents on vowels and hyphenating names to facilitate pronunciation. For *Háwshŭm*, Fr Allan provides the alternatives *Sáwshŭm* and *Táwshŭm*, acknowledging that a name used by native Gaelic speakers may, under certain grammatical circumstances, have been lenited.

The first entry on Fr Allan's list is *Hiarigeo,* most likely located at the northern end of the sandy beach on Mingulay Bay (approx. NL568834). The list is ordered to follow the shoreline anti-clockwise around the island. The final entry is *Gūnarsay* (approx. NL567831), a rocky area south of the village just by the old school. The locations of the following names on the list are now unknown:

- *Căhăsdal*
- *Rōw-rye,* or *Trow-rye, Srow-rye*
- *Clet Annsa*
- *Alāvi*
- *Sheōw-a-dal*
- *Sūinsibost*
- *Orācri*
- *Háwshŭm,* or *Sáwshŭm, Táwshŭm*
- *Ugráiny*
- *Lianacui*

The coastline of Mingulay, as shown on a hand-drawn map titled 'Mingulay Place-Names as located by Donald MacPhee,

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16. It appeared as an appendix to the article 'The Norsemen in Uist Folklore', which Fr Allan wrote for the *Saga-Book of the Viking Club* (McDonald 1901–1903: 413-433), and as such is not connected to the main text of his essay.

1931',[17] appears to have been traced from a six-inch OS map. Donald MacPhee (Dòmhnall Bàn) grew up on Mingulay and was considered to be exceptionally scholarly.[18] In general, this map has a flat appearance, as the contour lines of elevations were not recorded. It contains around eighty handwritten place-names. Each entry is numbered,[19] starting with *Na Gilleachan Ruadh* ('the red boys', NL566852)[20] in the north and continues clockwise round the island, concluding with a few interior features. Aside from well-documented names of major hills, main gullies, and prominent sea stacks, this map lists names of a number of smaller features, some of which initially appeared on John Finlayson's and Fr Allan's lists of place-names. Dòmhnall Bàn's map includes the names of most small streams on the island, none of which appeared on previous maps or previous place-name gazetteers.

- *Abhainn Lianagaidh* (NL557832) starts around the top of Biulacraig and cuts through the central valley towards Mingulay Bay (NL569831). An alternative name for this stream, *Abhainn a' Ghlinne*, is not listed on this map.

- *Abhainn a' Chàrnain* (NL559825) starts on the eastern slope of Carnan and flows into the sea at the village around *Soilis Bheag* (NL567828).

- *Abhainn Sumhsabaist* (NL555818) starts east of Sloc Heisegeo (NL549818) and flows in a south-easterly direction through Skipisdale (NL556817) into the sea.

17. I am indebted to Ben Buxton for sharing information about this map.
18. See Buxton 1995: 38.
19. Mairi Ceit MacKinnon, a Castlebay resident, numbered each entry at a later date.
20. This feature appears in its singular version, The Red Boy, on OS maps.

- *Abhainn Léite* (NL555837) runs in a north-westerly direction from the north-eastern slope of Tom a' Mhaide (NL554834) into Bay Sletta (NL555844).

- *Abhainn na h-Àirde* (NL569845) runs in an easterly direction along *Gàradh na h-Àirde* (NL568846) into Bàgh Hunadu (see above).

Figure 6: Abhainn a' Ghlinne (Abhainn Lianagaidh). Photo: Anke-Beate Stahl.

Both the date on the map and the confident use of Gaelic suggest that John Lorne Campbell may have advised on the spelling and possibly noted down the names supplied by Dòmhnall Bàn. John Lorne Campbell (1906–96), a Celtic scholar who extensively collected Hebridean folklore, lived on Barra in the 1930s.

Another map, a photocopied part of a six-inch second-edition OS map,[21] shows a number of handwritten place-names along the west coast of Mingulay, from Sloc Heisegeo (NL548819) in the south-west to Sloc na Muice ('gully of the pig', NL556843) in the north. This map mirrors all the names on Dòmhnall Bàn's map, except for one difference: the spelling of the river running through Skipisdale, which appears as *Abhainn Sûsabast*[22] rather than *Abhainn Sumhsabaist*, as on Dòmhnall Bàn's map.

During the author's research of place-names of Barra and its surrounding islands,[23] carried out between 1994 and 2000, a total of seven residents from Barra and Vatersay contributed place-names for Mingulay: Donald MacNeil (Dogain), Joseph Sinclair (Jaw), Roderick MacLeod (Roddy Dhòmhnall Uilleim), John MacLeod (Iagan an Dot), Domhnall Dhunnchaidh Campbell (DD), Peigi Anna Campbell, and Malcolm MacNeil (Calum a Chal) were all native Gaelic speakers. For years, the men of this group had fished and set creels around Mingulay and knew the area extremely well. Two of them had regularly taken visitors and research teams to the island. One of them had even belonged to a local syndicate of crofters, the Barra Head Isles Sheepstock Company, which owned the island until it was sold to the

21. Hugh Cheape sent a copy of this map to Ben Buxton in 1999. An annotation on the map states that it was from 'Canna House Library. J.L. Campbell's additions from Barra informants. This is the only section of the map'.
22. The quality of the reproduction of this document casts doubt over the last vowel of the specific, which could alternatively read as 'e', as in *Sûsabest*, or 'o', as in *Sûsabost*.
23. Stahl 2000.

National Trust of Scotland in 2000. Some of the above crofters had ancestors who originated from Mingulay, and all of them had a special interest in the local history of the island.

Unsurprisingly, eighty-five years since the last permanent inhabitants left Mingulay, the majority of place-names remembered lay in coastal locations. Most place-names collected during this survey were of Gaelic origin. Some place-names describing small features contained Norse place-name elements as specifics, helping to pinpoint the original Norse name on the map. In addition, the above contributors were instrumental in tracing the locations and supplying the pronunciation for a number of place-names previously listed by John Finlayson in 1892 and by Fr Allan in 1903.

The interaction of languages in the place-names of Mingulay

Norse place-names form the earliest linguistic evidence of settlement on Mingulay. Whereas a number of place-names are purely Gaelic, most place-names on the island contain elements from two languages, such as a Gaelic or English generic combined with an opaque Norse name. In such cases, the meaning of the ON element may no longer be transparent but it still works as a place-name as long as it is combined with a functioning generic.[24] Admiralty charts introduced English names – some of them translations of existing names, others entirely new creations such as Twin Rocks (NL542819) for *Bogha Dubh an Dùin* ('black reef of the fort'). In structure, Norse names are closer to English than Gaelic and would in most cases have been left unaltered by English-speaking topographers.

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24. See Cox 1987: 91.

Figure 7: View from Druim na h-Aoineig (NL550828) with Dùn Mingulay to the left, Arnamul to the right, and *Bogha Dubh an Dùin* (Twin Rocks) in the centre. Photo: Anke-Beate Stahl.

Sea stacks and islets

Apart from the name Mingulay itself, most names of prominent sea stacks and islets are of ON origin. South of Arnamul (see above) is picturesque Gunamul (NL547825), a rock connected to mainland Mingulay by a natural arch. The first element of Gunamul (*Gonamul* 1892, *Gonnamul* 1903; 1931) may derive from the ON personal name *Gunnarr*. Lianamul (NL549837), a substantial sea rock to the north of Arnamul, is possibly a combination of ON *lína* ('rope') and ON *múli* ('sea rock').[25]

The ON element *holmr* can be found in two prominent islets to the north-east of Mingulay, Solon Mòr (NL574850)

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25. In the past, ropes were used to gain access to the stack. See Buxton 1995: 15.

and Solon Beag (NL578849). Finlayson's spelling of this island, *Soalum* (1892), and Fr Allan's *Sòălum* (1903) suggest a derivation of the specific from ON *sauðr* ('sheep'), which is fitting, as sheep would have been kept there until the National Trust of Scotland purchased the island. As with Geirum, the Gaelic adjectives *mòr* ('big') and *beag* ('small') have been added at a later stage to differentiate between the two islands.

Figure 8: Caolas Lianamul (NL550836). Photo: Anke-Beate Stahl.

Another islet in this location is Sgeir nan Uighean (NL577850), which is derived from Gaelic *sgeir* ('skerry', a loanword from ON *sker*) and Gaelic *uighean* ('eggs'), suggesting that this place would have been an important source of food for the islanders. Other islets in this area are *Sgeir nam Bàirneach* (NL574852),

the Gaelic name for the OS entry Barnacle Rock, and *An Adhrac* (NL576849 – *An Adhraic,* 1931) derived from Gaelic *adhrac* (f., 'horn').

The Red Boy (NL566852) is a distinctive red sea rock on the north-western side of Tom a' Reithean. On Johnson's map (1832), the name appears as *Gillachanruagh*. As previously mentioned, Dòmhnall Bàn refers to this place as *Na Gilleachan Ruadh* ('the red boys', 1931). The colour of this rock is reflected in *Creag Ruadh* or *A' Chreag Dhearg* ('red rock'), which is the name for the most north-westerly stretch of coastline on Mingulay itself, just opposite The Red Boy.

Mountains

The hills of Mingulay contain elements of all three languages: Norse, Gaelic, and English. An early version of the name for the highest point of Mingulay, *Beinacharrn* (1832), indicates that the modern name Carnan (NL553827) has been short-ened, that the original Gaelic generic *beinn* ('mountain') was lost, and that the previously specific Carnan was transformed into a generic. The area between Carnan and Biulacraig is called *Aonaig* (NL553830, 1931), with *Aonig* (1892) and *Aoinig* (1903) as variations. This element possibly derives from Gaelic *aoineadh* ('steep coastal cliff', 'very steep hillside').[26]

The name of the second highest hill, Hecla, probably derives from the ON adjective *hár* ('high') and ON *klettr* ('rock, cliff'), and is a place-name frequently used in Iceland, Norway, and other parts of Scotland.[27] In 1931, Dòmhnall Bàn dis-

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26. For further discussion of this term, see Whyte 2017: 252; Fraser 1985.
27. Hecla is likely to be a transferred name. Transfer of name types can take place when a place-name from the homeland is semantically correctly applied to a similar looking feature in the new territory. For further

tinguished between *Hecla Bheag* and *Hecla Mhòr*, adding the Gaelic specifics 'small' and 'large', but is the only contributor to do so.

MacPhee's Hill, or *Beinn 'ic a' Phì* (NL566843), in the north, is the best-known mountain on Mingulay, despite being, at 224 m, only the third-highest on the island. Legend has it that the hill was named after the oldest son of Kenneth MacPhee, who originated from Eigg. The son travelled to Mingulay onboard a boat sent by the MacNeil of Barra to investigate why people from Mingulay had not visited Barra for a while. When the crew noticed that there was no human activity in the village, young MacPhee was sent over to find out what had happened. As soon as he realised that all the people on Mingulay had died, he reported it back to the boat. On hearing this, the crew feared it was the plague and decided it would not be safe to let MacPhee back onboard, so they left without him. Every day, the boy would climb the hill to see if anybody was coming to fetch him. After six weeks, the chief revealed to Kenneth MacPhee the reason for his son's disappearance, allowing Kenneth to crew a boat to travel to Mingulay. The son was alive, and in acknowledgment of the boy's courage, the MacPhees were given permission to settle on Mingulay rent-free.[28]

A smaller hill is Tom a' Reithean ('round knoll of the young ram', NL568847), with the alternative Gaelic version of *An Àird* ('promontory') and anglicised form *The Ard*.

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discussion, cf. Stahl 2000: 38.
28. Bruford 1983.

Figure 9: Mingulay Bay overlooking MacPhee's Hill. Photo: Anke-Beate Stahl.

Promontories

Finlayson, Fr Allan, and Dòmhnall Bàn identify the south-westerly headland of Mingulay as *Ginish* (NL550815, 1892), *Gí–i–nish* (1903), and *Gi'inis* (1931). The ON place-name element *nes* (n., 'headland') also occurs in Bannish (NL547819) and *Meinish* (NL574830, 1892). Smaller headlands on Mingulay are Sròn an Dùin ('point of the fort', NL543819) and *Sròn Guarsay* ('point of Guarsay', NL549844) in the north-west. Ard nan Capuill (NL572851) or *Ard nan Capall* ('headland of the ponies', 1931) on the north-east side of Tom a' Reithean refers to the time when ponies would have transported the peat from this part of the island back to the village. Smaller promontories such as points are almost always Gaelic, as in Rubha Liath ('grey point', NL550814) and Rubh 'an Droma ('point of the ridge', NL571833).

The serrated west coast of the island is home to deep ravines. Many of them carry Norse names, but in most cases only the meaning of the generic, *geo*, from ON *gjá*, can be identified, as in *Heisegeo* (NL549818), with alternative spellings in *Hesigu* (1892), *Háishigeo* (1903), *Sloc Heisigeo* (1931), and the OS version Sloc Heisegeo.

The latter two versions of this name reveal a common feature in Hebridean place-names: the addition of a generic to an existing place-name. This process can result in names containing two elements that mean the same thing. In Sloc Heisegeo, the ON *gjá* and Gaelic *sloc* both mean 'chasm' or 'gully'. The creators of this name would have been unaware of the lexical meaning the original name once had. To them, *Heisegeo* was what Cox calls an *ex-nomine* unit,[29] to which they added a functioning generic, *sloc*, ensuring continuation of the name. On Mingulay, this can also be observed in names such as Sloc Ghremisgeo (approx. NL570821)[30] and *Sloc Lamarigeo* (NL573836, 1832).

The majority of smaller gullies on this island carry purely Gaelic names such as *Na Sluic* ('the gullies', NL551846), *Sloc a' Bhòcain* ('gully of the ghost', NL573846), *Sloc an Uisge* ('water gully', NL571844), or *Sloc na h-Àirde* ('gully of the headland', NL571850).

Streams and wells

There are no freshwater features beyond the streams mentioned above. Nor are there ponds or lakes except for a few peat bogs.

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29. Cox 1987: 91.
30. Finlayson (*Tremisgu*, 1892), McDonald (*Tremmis-geo*, 1903), and MacPhee (*Sloc Hreimisgeo*, 1931) appear to position this place-name at NL568820.

There do not appear to be any sizeable wells.[31] A hollow in a rock near the school was used to obtain water for religious purposes. This place was called *St Columba's Well*. The islanders would have taken their fresh water from the streams running through the village.[32]

Settlement names

None of the maps and charts reveal a specific name for the main village by Mingulay Bay. Buxton suggests that there may have been another three sites which show evidence of human habitation.[33] The area around Skipisdale, a valley in the south-west of Mingulay, contains clusters of ruins, and land close by still shows remnants of lazy-beds, used for growing food. As suggested by the name Skipisdale, from ON *skip* ('ship') and ON *dalr* ('valley'), there is a landing place for boats.

On Dòmhnall Bàn's map of Mingulay, the river running through Skipisdale appears as *Abhainn Sumhsabaist*, and is listed as *Abhainn Sûsabost* or *-bast* in the handwritten additions on John Lorne Campbell's map. A local contributor pronounced this name as [ãũiN 'husabɛʃt] in an interview with the author in 1998. This name contains the Gaelic generic *abhainn* ('stream') and a specific, almost certainly of ON origin, possibly a settlement name.[34] As the Gaelic generic *abhainn* is feminine, it would require lenition of the following word, even if this

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31. Local folklore mentions a water horse, believed to have lived in a well in a hollow near the top of MacPhee's Hill. See Buxton 1995: 46.
32. I am grateful to Mingulay ranger Jonathan Grant for this information.
33. Buxton 1995: 35.
34. Ian A. Fraser observed a similar case in Illeray, where the river name, containing a settlement name, survived, even as the original habitative name had been lost. See Fraser 1973: 155; Branigan and Foster 2000: 307 identify a settlement on either side of this stream.

word is not of Gaelic origin. Lenition, a form of softening of consonants, can occur with twelve consonants in the Gaelic alphabet. Phonologically, lenition can affect the consonants b, c, d, f, g, l, m, n, p, r, s, and t. However, in orthography, only nine require the insertion of the letter 'h' after the lenited consonant, with l, n, and r remaining unaltered. In many cases, the lenition of ON names makes it difficult to trace their meaning because the initial sound of the original name can be obscured.

Figure 10: Lazy-beds near Skipisdale on the slopes of Hecla.
Photo: Anke-Beate Stahl.

With *Abhainn Sumhsabaist* or *Abhainn Sûsabost*, it is at this point not possible to establish if *sumhsa* or *sûsa* is derived from ON *hús* ('house') or from the ON adj. *sunnr* ('south')[35] or noun *suðr* ('the south'). *Abhainn Sumhsabaist* is indeed located on the southern shore of Mingulay. This part of the specific, *Sumhsa-*, *Sûsa-*, or potentially *Husa-*, requires further investigation. The second part

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35. Mentioned in correspondence with Ben Buxton.

of the specific may be derived from ON *bólstaðr* ('farm', 'settle-ment').[36] In relation to other place-names containing the element *bólstaðr*, this site would potentially be the most southerly one in the Outer Hebrides.[37]. Alternatively, the name may point to *Sūinsibost* (1903), a name recorded on Fr Allan's list. The specific of this name may be derived from the ON personal name *Sveinn*, which was used frequently in ON place-names.[38] This possible use of personal names as specifics is reflected in other places in the vicinity, examples being Arnamul, Gunamul, and Geirum.[39]

Another name from Fr Allan's list is *Sheōw-a-dal*. At this point in time, the location of the name is not known. The name may potentially function as settlement name.

Conclusion

The commissioning of maps and charts was mainly driven by social and political interests. Providing safe navigation for ships to facilitate trade was as important a use of maps as documenting land ownership, establishing if an area was agri-culturally viable, and to help with taxation. Mingulay's earliest place-names date back to Norse times, being actively used in oral tradition for many hundreds of years before being officially recorded. The first meaningful depictions of Mingulay took place in the sixteenth century. Five hundred years later, even the remotest areas of the island can be explored digitally with the help of OS data and modern satellite images.

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36. See Gammeltoft 2001; Jennings 1994: 27 for an in-depth discussion of the element *bólstaðr*.

37. The name *Abhainn Sumhsabaist/Abhainn Sûsabost* is not mentioned in Gammeltoft 2001.

38. See Gammeltoft 2001: 153.

39. For an extensive discussion of ON personal names in place-names within a Hebridean context, see Evemalm 2018.

Coining and using place-names, however, remains a very human endeavour. On its journey from collection to depiction on a map, a name passes through many hands. As such, a place-name is subject to potential error by surveyors, cartographers, local informants, sappers, engravers, and officials who decide on the inclusion or omission of the place-name, its exact location, and its spelling.

The place-names collected on lists by Finlayson (1892) and Fr Allan (1903) add a new dimension to the heritage of the island. Compiled out of interest in local history and linguistics, the names depict places that were of no interest to official cartographers but were meaningful and relevant to the people who contributed them. The short explanations for various features mentioned by Finlayson, and the attempt at phonetic spelling by Fr Allan, are valuable resources for toponymic research and go beyond what is normally found in maps or charts. The work of Finlayson, Fr Allan, Dòmhnall Bàn, and the locals who volunteered their knowledge of the land and shore illustrates the importance of individuals in preserving history. In doing so, they pave the way for onomastic research and for international comparative studies.

Mingulay's last permanent residents left in 1912, and in 2000, the island was sold to the National Trust for Scotland. Access to the island is regulated, but it still sees a steady stream of visitors attracted to adventure tourism activities, such as rock climbing and extreme swimming. Sheep are no longer kept on the island, and gradually, nature is claiming back its territory. Interest in the island has never ceased.

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Map of the West coast of Mingulay. Photocopy. Note in pencil: 'Sent by Hugh Cheape, Dec 99. From Canna House Library. J.L. Campbell's additions from Barra informants. This is the only section of the map'.

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