

Knowe of Stenso



The knowe of Stenso is one of several probable broch sites that lie along this coastal section. The turf covered remains have not been excavated though the broch attribution is widely agreed. This area is of interest as there are several place-names here that may relate to the Magnus story.

Stooan – this is a shore name to the north of the broch, and means a landing place or boat naust in Old Norse, *stoð*. Here it takes the form, ‘the landing place/naust’.

A short distance to the north of Stooan is ‘Gressy Geo’, meaning a grassy inlet. A somewhat unusual name but when combined with the landing place, might contain a remnant of the tradition of the place where Magnus’s body was landed and the grass grew green.

A third name, now given to a house, is Spithersquoy. This name in its earliest recorded form is ‘Spittalisquy’ (1492) meaning the hospital or hospice enclosure. This is the only example of a spittal name in Orkney and the fact it is located on the Mainland shore close to Eynhallow, where there was most likely a monastery in the middle ages, cannot be coincidence. This hospice, near a good landing place, suggests this was a communication route and it is tempting to think that it may have been connected with the transportation of travellers visiting the monastery on Eynhallow or St Magnus Church on Egilsay.

There is also a Spittal place-name in Caithness, associated with St Magnus chapel and burial ground, hospice and mains farm. This may have been a hospice for Magnus pilgrims travelling over land to Orkney from the south.

References

Knowe of Stenso – canmore entry: <http://canmore.org.uk/site/2161>

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