In 1693, the book written by Kirkwall minister James Wallace, *A Description of the Isles of Orkney* was published. The following curious description stands out among other notes of a geographical and cultural nature:

“Sometimes about this country are seen these men they call Finnmen. In the year 1682, one was seen in his little Boat, at the South end of the Isle of Eda, most of the people of the Isle flocked to see him, and when they adventur’d to put out a Boat with Men to see if they could apprehend him, he presently fled away most swiftly. And in the year 1684, another was seen from Westra, and for a while after they got few or no Fishes for they have this Remark here, that these Finnmen drive away the fishes from the place to which they come. These Finnmen seem to be some of those people that dwell about the Fretum Davis a full account of whom may be seen in the natural and moral History of the Antilles Chap. 18. One of their boats sent from Orkney to Edinburgh is to be seen in the Physitians hall, with the Oar and Art he makes use of for killing Fish” (Wallace, 1693: 28).

In the second edition the son of the minister James Wallace Jr. added the following comment to the passage:

“I must acknowledge it seems a little unaccountable how these Finn-men should come on this coast, but they must probably be driven by Storms from home, and cannot tell when they are any way at Sea, how to make their way home again; they have this advantage, that be the Seas never so boisterous their Boat being made of Fish Skins are so contrived that it can never sink, but is like a Sea-gull, swimming on top of the Water. His shirt he has so fastened to the Boat, that no Water can come into his Boat to do him damage, except when he pleases to untie it, which he never does but to ease nature or when he comes ashore” (Wallace, 1700: 60–61).

Reverend John Brand, who visited the Shetland and Orkney Islands, and Caithness being a member of a
delegation (from April, 18 to June, 24, 1700), published his impressions in the book, *A Brief Description of Orkney, Zetland, Pightland-Firth and Caithness* (1701) in which he also mentions a strange phenomenon:

“There are frequently Finnmen seen here upon the Coasts, as one about a year ago on Stronsa and another within these few months on Westra, a Gentleman with many others in the Isle looking on him nigh to the shore, but when any endeavour to apprehend them they flee away most swiftly; which is very strange, that one Man sitting in his little Boat, should come some hundred of leagues, from their own Coasts, as they reckon Finland to be from Orkney; it may be thought wonderful how they live all that time, and are able to keep to sea so long. His boat is made of Seal skins, or some kind of leather, he also hath a coat of Leather upon him, and he sitteth in the middle of his Boat, with a little Oar in his hand and Fishing with his lines: And when in a storm he seeth the high surge of a wave approaching, he hath a way of sinking his Boat, till the wave pass over, lest thereby he should be overturned. The Fishers here observe that these Finland or Finland-men, by their coming drive away the Fishes from the Coasts. One of these Boats is kept as a Rarity in the Physicians Hall at Edinburgh” (Brand, 1701: 50–51).

The inserted phrase claiming that it is impossible to capture a Finn is a direct quote from the episode in *A Description of the Isles of Orkney* by James Wallace already discussed. There is no doubt that John Brand read this book, since he mentions it in the preface (Ibid.: 8). He could not have personally observed the events he wrote about since he visited Orkney only a year later. However, a reference to “a certain Gentleman from the island” and the local fishermen suggests that J. Brand talked with eyewitnesses of these events.

We can summarize the information provided by the two authors in the following manner: James Wallace reported two appearances of the Finnmen in 1682 near Eday Island and in 1684 near Westray Island (Fig. 1), and indicated that one of their boats was sent to the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh. His son added that one boat belonging to the Finnmen was placed in the church on the Island of Burray. Thus, we have here at least three different cases where the mysterious seafarers appeared near the Orkney Islands, since the first boat, as reported by James Wallace, escaped the pursuit. John Brand, in turn, wrote that the Finnmen were seen twice in 1699 near the islands of Westray and Stronsay (Fig. 1), and repeated the information concerning the boat kept at the Royal College of Medicine in Edinburgh. Thus, we can speak of five recorded appearances of the Finnmen near the Orkney coasts during the period 1682 to 1699. It is probable that there were many more similar visits, since there emerged a local tradition not only to call the visitors Finnmen, but also to associate the absence of catch with their presence.

None of the Finnmen’s kayaks have survived to the present day. John Tudor did not find any mention of the boat on the island of Burray (Tudor, 1883: 341); David MacRitchie mentioned that the church in question had been destroyed at least a century ago, and that the kayak had disappeared without trace (MacRitchie, 1912a: 500). After the death of A. Balfour, the custodian of the collection in 1694, the second Finnmen’s boat was sold along with other rarities to Edinburgh College. In 1695 the boat was included in the catalog, but for some reason was not immediately transferred to the College’s museum collection. The next cataloging, carried out in 1780, did not record the kayak and its fate remains unknown. It is not known whether the boat disappeared before being moved to Edinburgh College or whether it was sold by unscrupulous caretakers after it arrived at the College; no document confirms its transfer (Idiens, 1999: 173). There is speculation that it was one of the two kayaks handed by the University of Edinburgh (the former College) to the Royal Museum of Scotland in 1865. However, this suggestion is not supported by any real evidence (Whitaker, 1977: 42).

Who were the mysterious Finnmen? It should be noted that the inhabitants of Orkney Islands, just like their neighbors from the Shetland Islands, have a rich folklore theme of the Finnmen, which they inherited from their Norwegian ancestors. However, there is no immediate connection with the events described above in the form of the mythological Finnmen. In the Scandinavian tradition, the word Finns was used to designate the Sami (Pálsson, 1999: 30). According to John Brand, the Finnmen arrived

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**Fig. 1.** Time and place the Finnmen appeared near the Orkney Islands, according to J. Wallace and J. Brand.
from Finland (although the distance he indicated suggests that he actually had Finnmark in mind). The suggestion that the Sami kayaked to the Orkney Islands was made by David MacRitchie (1912a: 505) and ethnologist Ian Whitaker (1954: 102). However, due to an absence of proof both scholars had to limit themselves to simply proposing such a possibility. The problem is that the Finnmen are mostly identified by descriptions of their boats, according to which the boats were small, closed, leather keeled vessels – kayaks. However, the question is whether the Sami had such boats at all? According to three experts from the museums of Northern Norway (D. Storm, Tromsø University Museum; R. Persson, Varanger Samiske Museum; and H.Ch. Søborg, Alta Museum), there is no information to support the idea that such leather boats existed among the Sami in the historical period, and the assumption that such boats might have existed is based on rock art dated to the Stone Age, found in Eastern Finnmark. By the Middle Ages, the Sami had completely switched to boats made of wood, sewn with deer tendons.

James Wallace believed that the Finnmen were a people living on the shores of Davis Strait, referring to Chapter 18 of Natural and Moral History of the American Antilles (1658, Eng. trans. 1666) by Charles de Rochefort. The book describes the nature and inhabitants of the West Indies, but following information about sea unicorn (narwhal), Chapter 18 contains a story about the journey of Captain Nicholas Tunes to Davis Straits in 1656 and his meeting with the local inhabitants – the Eskimos. The chapter describes their boats, outfits, and equipment in detail; in the description of an Eskimo kayak Rochefort surpasses all his predecessors in terms of richness of detail (Rochefort, 1666: 110–111).

The hypothesis on the Eskimo origin of the Finnmen is the most popular in modern scholarship. The clothing of the Finnmen, described by James Wallace Jr. resembles tuvilik – an Eskimo waterproof jacket with a hood, whose flaps were attached to the edges of the manhole in the kayak where the rower sat, ensuring complete waterproof resistance. Moreover, the story of John Brand about the ability of the Finnmen “to sink” their boats may be associated with various methods of rowing, customary among the Eskimos: chest sculling, back sculling as well as “Greenland roll” for recovering an overturned kayak to even keel during the overturning of the boat while hunting marine animals or after deliberate sinking in a storm (Heath, 2004: 21–30).

The most important documentary evidence for the Eskimo hypothesis is a 17th century kayak from the Marischal Museum (University of Aberdeen), which has a long history. In 1760, Reverend Gastrell mentioned a canoe from the Royal College (Aberdeen) in his diary: “... about seven yards long by two feet wide, which about thirty-two years since was driven into the Don with a man in it who was all over hairy, and spoke a language which no person there could interpret. He lived but three days, although all possible care was taken to recover him” (quoted after (Souter, 1934: 14)). Francis Douglas in his book, A General Description of the East Coast of Scotland (1782), also shared his impressions concerning the canoe which he saw in Marischal College, covered “with fish skins, curiously stretched upon slight timbers, very securely joined together. The upper part is about twenty inches broad at the centre, and runs off gradually to a point at both ends. Where broadest, there is a circular hole, just large enough for a man to fit in, round which there is a kind of girth, about a foot high, to which he fixed himself, probably, when he did not use his oar, or paddle; which when he chose it, he stuck into some lists of skin, tied around the canoe, but slack enough, to let in the paddle, and some other awkward utensils which were found stuck there. The canoe is about eighteen feet long” (Douglas, 1782: 114–115). Douglas also cited the opinion of the time that the deceased owner of the canoe had sailed from Labrador and gone missing. No more information about the kayak can be traced until the record from 1824 in the catalogue of Marischal Museum, repeating the dating of Douglas and indicating Belhelvie (the town north of Aberdeen) as the place where the kayak was found. The kayak has the registration number ABDUA:6013; its length is 547.7 cm; width, 45.1 cm; distance from the gunwhale to the keel, 17.8 cm; forebody depth, 20.3 cm (Fig. 2).

Kaj Birket-Smith thought the kayak belonged to the Western Greenland type (1924: 266). However, in 1976, Ulrik Lennert, head of the Inuit community of Qanaaq (the municipality in Northwest Greenland), visited the Marischal Museum and examined the kayak. Contrary to all expectations, he was not able to identify it as a West Greenlandian vessel. He suggested that the kayak might have come from East Greenland (Cunningham, 2001: 60). Common characteristics of both types are small cockpits, sharp bilges, and a relatively small interior space, while for the East Greenland type it is customary to have an upturned tip of the stern, lower and flatter bottom, and rounded shape at the sides. The answer to the problem of this controversial classification lies in the fact that today it is difficult to identify specific local features of the West Greenlandian kayak type, since, according to S. Jensen, due to the constant migration of the population many kinds of boats coexisted in West Greenland, and their shape resulted not so much from a local tradition but from particular personal needs (Jensen, 1975: 9–12). Nevertheless, the Greenlandian origin of the kayak is beyond doubt.

At present two groups of theories exist concerning how the Eskimos could have appeared off the coast of Northern Scotland. The classical hypothesis is that the Eskimos escaped from European ships, whose crews
captured them in Northern Canada and Greenland for the purpose of demonstrating them as overseas curiosities at fairs. Information regarding the first captive Eskimos delivered to Europe goes back to 1567. These were a woman and a child brought to Zealand from Labrador by French sailors (Sturtevant, Quinn, 1999: 61). Martin Frobisher brought home four captives from his expeditions to Baffin Island; John Davis captured an Eskimo on the western coast of Greenland; and in the period 1605 to 1660, Danish-Norwegian and Dutch sailors captured over thirty Eskimos (Gad, 1970: 238). We currently have no information on locals being captured by the crew of vessels engaged in illegal whaling off the coasts of Greenland, but may only assume that the total number of captives was much larger. Trade of captured Eskimos was so active that in 1720 the States General of the Netherlands adopted a resolution prohibiting the abduction and transportation of Eskimos to Europe. In 1732 the Danish government followed this example and issued a Royal Declaration with a ban to bring the natives of Greenland to Denmark, regardless of whether they traveled of their own will (Fossett, 2001: 51).

The idea that Eskimos escaped from a European ship first appeared in the studies of David MacRitchie. MacRitchie estimated the distance from Labrador to Scotland to be approximately 2000 miles and believed that the journey could not have been accidental, since it required a supply of fresh water lasting for at least a month. Moreover, a kayaker could eat, drink, and relieve himself only in a calm sea, thus his dependence on windless weather would have been crucial. Such a trip also raises the question of sleeping in the open sea. Even in calm seas the danger of one’s boat overturning while asleep is very great, and so the Eskimos usually went out on open seas in pairs if they planned to spend a night or two at sea, and would tie their kayaks together to keep them balanced (MacRitchie, 1912b: 222–223). MacRitchie sourced the idea of the possible abduction and subsequent escape of Eskimos from the book by Isaac de La Peyrère, Relation du Groenland (1647). The passage cited describes nine Eskimos who were captured in Greenland and brought to Denmark. Two tried to escape and were forcibly returned when one of them had reached 30–40 miles offshore. The second time they managed to escape their captors and travel out to open sea. MacRitchie suggested that this was no isolated case, and that some Eskimos might have reached the Orkney and the Shetland islands on their way to Greenland. Unfortunately, he did not have any other sources containing information about the escape of captive Eskimos (Ibid.: 232–233).

The address of William Clark Souter, the President of the Aberdeen Medico-Chirurgical Society, “The Story of Our Kayak and Some Others” was published in 1934. The address included a list of thirty three Eskimo kayaks which could be found at that time in Great Britain (including eighteen Scottish kayaks). The author thus noted regarding the Marishal kayak, already known to us, “(...) but my own impression is that he was being brought to this country, or to Europe, as a willing or unwilling passenger on board a homeward-bound whaler, and that he escaped when he saw the land, and pulled, or rather paddled, for the shore” (Souter, 1934: 17). The same view was expressed by Ejnar Mikkelsen, who suggested that the captive had to try to escape as soon as he saw land, and the Orkney Islands were the closest shore, visible to the seafarers travelling from Greenland (from the Cape Farewell) to Scotland (Mikkelsen, 1954: 58).

In 1971, a study by the Dutch anthropologist Gert Nooter, Old Kayaks in the Netherlands was published. The author visited Greenland in 1968, where the Ammassalik Eskimos told him that the kayak could remain in water for over two days, if it was stitched from fresh hides and was well-oiled; however journeys on these boats usually did not last for more than 12 hours, although in the old days they used to be much longer. G. Nooter was under the impression that the Eskimos believed that long distance, stormy waves, and the lack of suitable food constituted insurmountable difficulties for a long journey. Moreover, according to G. Nooter, the design of their kayaks was not adapted to travelling on the open sea (Nooter, 1971: 8–9). Ultimately, G. Nooter agreed with E. Mikkelsen’s theory adding the suggestion that abductions of Eskimos and their escapes continued even after the resolution of the States General of the Netherlands, “Although plundering
and murder on Greenland did not cease in 1720 (…) I can easily imagine that once in sight of the Dutch coast a returning captain would wish to dispose of the living evidence (a kidnapped Greenlander) that he had not stayed within the regulation of the \textit{Staten Generaal}, and ended by giving his crew orders to set the Greenlander overboard” (Ibid.: 10–11). The second group of theories is united by the idea that the kayakers could get to the coast of Scotland on their own. Ian Whitaker was the first author to seriously consider this possibility seriously. He started his argument with a critique of the hypothesis concerning the escapes of the Eskimos from European ships. Referring to the data of MacRitchie on Eskimos escaping from Copenhagen, Whitaker admitted that one or two could have reached the shores of Scotland, but these were unlikely to have numbered six or more (Whitaker, 1954: 102). Having rejected this hypothesis, Whitaker described the conditions under which the Eskimos could have reached the shores of Scotland on their own. According to Whitaker, the frequency of visits implied well-planned journeys. The author cited evidence that the kayak started to leak after continuous exposure to water for over 48 hours (Ibid.: 99), and therefore the kayakers had to make stops to dry their boats and secure additional supplies of drinking water. Whitaker proposed the following route: from Greenland to the northwestern coast of Iceland (180 miles), from the southeastern coast of Iceland to the Faroe Islands (275 miles), and from the Faroe Islands to the Shetland Islands (185) or to the Orkney Islands (200 miles) (Ibid.: 103). Regrettably, we did not have an opportunity to read the article on the subject by John Heath (1987), but Heath reiterated the main findings in his chapter in the collective study, \textit{Eastern Arctic Kayaks: History, Design, Technique} (2004). Heath indicated that the along-shore current near West Greenland is directed to the north, thus if the kayak had been swept into the sea, the rower would have known how to get back home: first he had to row to the east until he would reach the coast, and then keep rowing to the south. However, a Greenlander might not know that the current in Davis Strait near Baffin Island is directed to the south. If the storm lasted for several days or an Eskimo became lost in the fog, he could be caught by the current, and the kayak would be driven far to the south. When the Eskimo would try to row east, as his rowing experience suggested, the leading wind and the North Atlantic Current would carry him to the Orkney Islands (Fig. 3). Heath believes that such an unplanned trip is quite possible: the Eskimo would occasionally land on ice floes to dry the kayak and to hunt with the help of tools which he kept in his boat. Furthermore, the upper layer of ice would have provided sufficient drinking water (Heath, 2004: 13–14).

A curious theory connects the visits of the Eskimos to Scotland with the onset of the Maunder Minimum – a long period of low solar activity (1645–1710), which coincided with the coldest phase of the Little Ice Age (14th–19th centuries). Renée Fossett suggested that the Eskimos had reason, opportunity, and the information needed to travel to the southeast. The main reason was the extreme cooling which increased the amount of coastal ice and the advancement of glaciers on land. As far as the unfeasibility of kayaking over a distance of 2000 km is concerned, Fossett believed that this figure was exaggerated, and in fact the length of the journey was only 1200 km. In her opinion, the proposed route would have been the following: Cape Brewster in Ammassalik territory to the northwestern coast of Iceland (260 km), from the southeastern coast of Iceland to the Faroe Islands.
impact on the North Atlantic Ocean. Firstly this had a negative water running in a southern direction from the polar cap, probable. In the period 1675 to 1700, the currents of cold in British waters (Fossett, 2001: 67–82).

and the Netherlands, the kayaking people were only seen that the majority of captives were brought to Denmark captivity, Fossett points to its weakness: despite the fact that the Eskimos of the 17th century had information at their disposal related to the populated lands in the east and the desire to explore them. Eskimo legends, recorded in the 19th century, preserve the memory of the Norman presence in Greenland, the visits of M. Frobisher to Baffin Island, as well as their clashes with Irish, Icelander, Basque, and Portuguese sailors in the 15th–16th centuries. Commenting on the hypothesis that the Eskimos escaped captivity, Fossett points to its weakness: despite the fact that the majority of captives were brought to Denmark and the Netherlands, the kayaking people were only seen in British waters (Fossett, 2001: 67–82).

The theory on climatic change seems to be most probable. In the period 1675 to 1700, the currents of cold water running in a southern direction from the polar cap, caused a drop of 4–5 °C in the temperature of waters in the North Atlantic Ocean. Firstly this had a negative impact on fishing in Norway and Iceland as well as on the Faroe, the Orkney and the Shetland Islands, since cod migrated to the south (fish that feels comfortable at 4–7 °C, could not survive at temperatures below 2 °C) (Lamb, 1995: 199–200). Perhaps this could well explain a strong tradition among the Orkney fishermen of the late 17th century to associate the absence of catch with the coming of the Finnmenn. Changed climatic conditions in general had a negative impact on the fauna of the North Atlantic region, including the populations of seals and reindeer, the lack of which might have served as a key factor in the eastward migration of the Eskimos.

However, did the Eslimos travel on kayaks? We know that the carriers of the Thule Culture migrated from Alaska to Greenland on dog sleds and umiaks, overcoming a distance of several hundred kilometers per season (McGhee, 2001: 209). The Eskimos were using dog sleds as the main means of transportation ten months a year; from October to July the Eskimos would also use them for riding across sea ice (Gilberg, 1984: 577–580). We do not have exact data on the climate in Greenland at the end of the 17th century, but scholars note a rapid spread of ice in the Norwegian Sea at that time, to the point that in 1695 for several months Iceland became totally icebound for miles (Soon, Yaskell, 2008: 60). It is possible that the unprecedented drop in temperature led to a significant increase in the thickness of sea ice and its almost year-round presence in the coastal waters of Greenland. The Eskimo route, for which advocates of the independent journey theory determine extreme points of land on the way, is, in fact, unknown. We may assume that the Eskimos went far north of Iceland, and that their route therefore ran on ice. In this case, the Eskimos would not have needed to cross the Atlantic in kayaks: they would have traveled most of the way on sleds and used boats at the last stage of the trip for hunting, when they were noticed by the Orkney dwellers.

Considering other options for the origin of the Finnmenn, it should be noted that the nearest neighbors of the Scots, the Welsh and the Irish, also used traditional leather boats. However coracles and currachs, which were used until the 20th century, differ significantly from the kayaks, described in the sources, particularly by the fact that they did not involve being covered with leather on top and attached to clothing. In addition, the Scottish authors must have surely been aware of these types of boats.

D. MacRitchie pointed out that travelers of the 16th–17th centuries mentioned leather boats which were used by the population of the north of Western Siberia (1912b: 213–214). First mention of this was made by Stephen Borough who saw “boats of reindeer skins” in 1556 among the Samoyeds living near Vaigach Island (Angliiskiye puteshhestvenniki, 1937: 108–109). P.M. de La Martinière, who visited Novaya Zemlya in 1653 as a member of the Danish trade expedition, wrote that the boats of the locals were “canoes designed in the form of a gondola from 15 to 16 feet long, 2 and a half feet wide, very cleverly made of fish bones and leather; on the inside the skin was sewn in such a way that it would make as if a bag from one end of the boat to the other; inside such a boat they were covered to the waist, so not a single drop of water could get inside of the boat and they could thus safely withstand any bad weather” (1911: 95). F.O. Belyavsky wrote about the use of such boats by the Nenets and the Khanty, “the boat of the Ostyaks and Samoyeds is made like regular Russian boats with the difference that (a) they do not have a difference between the bow and the stern, (b) on the top the boat is wrapped with leather made from whale intestines which... is gathered in the middle of the boat like ladies’ reticules with a drawstring” (1833: 258–259).

A certain similarity in the description of the Finnmenn’s kayaks and Samoyed boats can be observed. In both cases we are talking about a specific type of boat covered with leather in such a way that the hole for letting the sailor inside was located only in the center of the upper part, and water could not get inside the boat. Yet, in the description of the Samoyed boats we do not find that they were in any way fastened to the outer clothing of the rowers.
Such boats could be a part of the culture of the pre-Nenets Sikhirtya people who lived in the northern coastal tundra, and were engaged in arctic fishing and hunting (Golovnev, 1995: 47). The distance they would have had to cover is much larger than the assumed route of the Eskimos from Greenland, but their route would pass along the coast, which would greatly facilitate the journey. However, the question concerning the kayaks of the Sikhirtya is very complex. N.V. Fedorova expressed her doubts on the possibility of coastal navigation on wooden or leather boats along the shores of the Kara Sea and the Gulf of the Ob; she also noted that, despite the excellent preservation of wood in the cultural layer of the excavated monuments in Yamal, no remains indicating the use of boats by the inhabitants of those settlements were found (2002: 106). Until the leather boats of the Sikhirtya are found, we will have to rely on narrative sources only. This makes the hypothesis on the Western Siberian origin of the Finnmen problematic.

In conclusion we should make the following observation. The closed leather keeled boats, described in the sources, drastically narrow down the range of possible contenders for the role of the Orkney Finnmen. The kayak from the early 18th century, discovered near Aberdeen, which is believed to have originated in Greenland, supports the main argument in favor of the Finnmen. However, the question concerning the kayaks of the Sikhirtya are found, until such time as Sikhirtya leather boats are discovered, with similar features to those described by travelers, we cannot challenge that view. Scholars continue to disagree on the Western origin of the Finnmen, drastically narrow down the range of hypotheses.

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