

Faroese Bird-Name Origins

(III)

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Imbrimil 'great northern diver'

In the *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik*, xix, 54—6, we have argued that the oldest recorded form of this name ON *himbrin* (þula, hap. leg.) is most likely corrupt and that Mod. Icel. *himbrimi* for **hímbrimi* preserves the name best. The word may be interpreted 'foam roarer', a thoroughly characteristic designation for this species, cf. Norw. *him* 'tyndt skum, hinde av meget tynd sne', Shetl. *do*. 'tyndt dække, især over væske', Far. *hím* 'tyndt lag, (tynd) hinde'.

It has all along been evident that, in Faroese, the second element had been peculiarly influenced by *brimil* 'bull seal' (*Faroese Bird Names*, 64, *Fróðskaparrit*, xvi, 104). Now that the etymology is available, the first element is seen to have been modified, too. Like Icelandic, it shows phonologically regular vowel shortening before consonant cluster. In a compound like the present, such a development suggests that the literal meaning of *hím* was early forgotten — indeed in Icelandic the simplex appears to have vanished altogether. The loss of initial *h* in Faroese remains to be explained: it is presumably an example of that instability occasionally attested in other words, as *akul*, *eita*, *ugga* < ON *høkull*, *heita*, *hugga*, further among bird names *ógvella* 'long-tailed duck', Icel. *bágvella*. There seems no special reason to invoke *ím* 'soot' as a sort of folk-etymology.

Karkareyði, karkarassur 'puffin'

The evidence for these problematic compounds was detailed in *FBN*, 17f., including the tradition, noted in Skálavík, that *karkatáttur* originally meant *lundaband*, the first element being **karki*, a lost word for puffin. We now consider this element further.

It is to be noticed that *karka-* is reminiscent of onomatopoeic forms and suits the puffin's deep, grumbling voice very well. It must be cognate with Icel. *kjarka* 'croak, chatter' used primarily of birds, further the *l*-derivative in Norw. (Telemark) *karkla* 'croak (e. g. of crows, divers, grouse)'. We therefore postulate Far. **karka*, further **kark* n. 'croak' on the analogy of synonymous *krunk*, *gorp* n. and the corresponding verbs *krunka*, *gorpa*. It now seems possible to interpret *karkareyði* as 'croaky red', unquestionably a suitable appellation. The alternative *karkarassur* will be equally acceptable, the second element being *pars pro toto*. It will be remembered that this form occurs essentially in connection with the redoubtable outside claw of the bird, i. e. *aftasta klógv á karkarassi*; the claw can inflict upon the fowler a most painful wound. Hence the use of the disparaging term.

We suppose that *karkareyði* also originated as a fowler's word, for the reason that it contains the element denoting the voice. The puffin's call is, relatively speaking, not a notable feature; the puffin is in fact a rather silent bird. What is remarkable about the species is, of course, its quaint appearance, which has accordingly provided the usual motivation for puffin names in any language. Thus in the present case, the epithet *reyði* alludes to the red legs and beak, as in Irish *éan dearg* lit. 'red bird' or Sc. Gael. *peata ruadh* lit. 'red pet'. But the less obvious refinement *karka-* can only have come from those who knew the subject at close quarters, i. e. the fowlers who sought the bird with net or crook.

We refer back to the tradition that the first element itself meant puffin. If there once was an independent word, we

suggest it was **karkur* rather than **karki*, i. e. a formation parallel to *krunkur*, *gorpur* 'raven'. That such a bird name could have existed hardly requires demonstration. There is a correspondence in medieval Irish *cerc*, Mod. Ir. *cearc* 'hen'. Bearing in mind that Ir. *cerc*, if borrowed, would have appeared in Norse as **kjark*, as e. g. *Cellach* > *Kjallakr*, then the closeness of the forms is striking. This does not mean that some element of borrowing must be assumed, though the possibility is not theoretically excluded. But how spontaneous and independent such echoic creations can be is well illustrated by Ossetic *kark* 'hen' (quoted from H. Wagner, *Transactions of the Philological Society*, 1969, 227) — Ossetic as an Iranian language belongs to the *satem* type. And for a verbal form, cf. Lithuanian *kerkiù*, *kirkiù* 'cluck (of broody hens)'. It goes without saying that our forms are ultimately of the same stuff as Norse *kráka* 'crow', Eng. *corn-crake*, and the like.¹

Lomvigi 'guillemot'

In the *FBN*, 51—2, we duly compared Far. *lomvigi* m. and the variants *lomviga*, *lomvía* f. with Icel. *lómvía*, Norw. (Lof.) *lomvie*, and further with ON (þula) *langvé* (ms. *langvę*). Norw. (Ndl.) *langve*, (Lof.) *langvie*, Icel. *langvía*, (Vf.) *langvi(g)i*, Shet. *longvi*, also a loan in Sc. Gael. *langaidh*, *langaid*, *langach*, *lamhaidh*, at the same time accepting the standard explanation that the type found in Faroese arose under the influence of ON *lómr* 'great northern diver', seen clearest in Icel. *lómvía*.

It subsequently occurred to us that the Faroese form ill accorded with this explanation which demands an Early Far. **lómvigi* not justified by the modern form. Having noticed

¹ Since this section was written Håkon Hamre, *Fróð.* xix, 120—1, has drawn attention to the likely onomatopoeic origin of *karka*-. As our own remarks do not otherwise overlap, it seemed best to leave the present contribution unchanged.

in Faroese certain bird names which seem best explained as loans from Norwegian, as *mási*, *bárufjarta*, etc., maybe also *havhestur* (cf. *Fróð.* xiii, 50—1, xviii, 186—7, xix 123—4) we wondered if it might be possible to see in Far. *lomvigi* a borrowing from Norwegian also. However, as Chr. Matras kindly pointed out, the Faroese must have been on the most intimate terms with this species as one of their chief food suppliers ever since the settlement of the islands in the 9th century. It is therefore most unlikely that a foreign form should be adopted to name such a well-known bird. We clearly had to look further, and turned first to Icelandic.

The relevant Icel. *lómvía* is given on the authority of Blöndal, but Jakob Benediktsson obligingly informs us that this variant of usual Icel. *langvía* is extremely rare. Blöndal's original slip gives no source, and the form is in fact known to the files of *Orðabók Háskólans* only from two writers: B. Gröndal, *Dýrafræði*, 1878, 69, and the (amateurish) P. Porkelsson, *Íslenzk Fuglaheita-Orðabók*, 1916, 44. There is no evidence that such a form is traditional or that it ever had any mentionable currency, so that the remark by the latter that 'Le nom de *lómvía* est bien connu dans la langue usuelle islandaise, mais on le trouve très rarement dans les livres' is not trustworthy. It is therefore as good as certain that Icel. *lómvía* is a recent adaptation of a foreign form, either from Scandinavian books (Norw., Dan. *lomvie*, Swed. *lomvi*) or perhaps from Faroese fishermen who were often ashore in Iceland in the last decades of the 19th century. It follows that the (apparent) assimilation to *lómur* 'great northern diver' is, after all, a recent, purely Icelandic matter and, as like as not, quite artificial.

Turning now to Norwegian, forms here also show variation comparable to Icelandic: on the one side (Lof.) *lomvie*, on the other (Lof.) *langvie*, (Ndl.) *langve*. We have no further information on these divergent forms, but it appears conceivable, that *lomvie* is a genuine folk-etymological perversion of *langvie*, etc., since *lom* is the local development of ON

lómr. On the other hand, the analysis we shall now give for Faroese may be equally applicable to Norwegian.

Far. *lomvigi* cannot be regularly explained as a secondary substitution of the name of the great northern diver, since ON *lómr* is regularly Far. *lómur*. It can, however, without hesitation be regarded as the local product of the Old Norse form resulting from ordinary processes of assimilation, thus ON *lang-v-* > Far. **long-v-* > *lom-v-*.

What now of the ultimate origin of this difficult name? It has not so far been possible to find an etymology, though proposals have been made, see De Vries, *An. etym. Wb.* As these are all admittedly very tentative, there is no call to review them here and we proceed to seek something more tangible.

It is not to be doubted that a name of this shape has to be analysed as a compound *lang-vé*, in which the first element means 'long' and qualifies the second. The latter, however, is problematic. As it stands, *ms. vé* is morphologically incomprehensible; when 'normalised' to *-vé* it remains equally obscure. since such a word would surely be neuter and therefore exceptional in a bird name. It is plainly corrupt, as is further indicated by the divergent latter-day correspondences, e. g. Far. *-vigi*, *-viga*, *-vía*, Shet. *-vi*. Nör are the Gaelic forms of real help. It is not impossible that the variants *langaidh* and *lamhaidh* point to Viking-Age Norse **langví*, thus *langaidh* [langi:] < **lang(v)í*, and *lamhaidh* [lavi:] < **la(ng)ví*. On the other hand, Gael. *-aidh* is equally a native suffix which could have replaced the Norse element, as has been the case with the other variants *langaid*, *langach*.

But whatever its ultimate form, this second element must refer either to some part of the bird's anatomy, as *svarthaker* lit. 'black back', or else characterise the bird itself, as *grágás* 'grey goose'. The first alternative seems excluded, for *-vé* is not comparable to any known word denoting an anatomical feature. However it does — and particularly its 'descendants' do — recall a name found in Orkney *weeo* 'kittiwake', with-

out a doubt onomatopoeic in origin and a fair reproduction of that gull's insistent scream. But the guillemot's guttural call sounds nothing like this and is represented in imitative names quite differently, as Eng. dial. *murre*, *marrott*, Welsh *aron* (*Fróð.* xix, 127). It follows that *-vé*, or whatever, is not proper to the guillemot, but may well have denoted the kittiwake. If so, then *langvé* is lit. 'long kittiwake'. Now confusion between guillemot and kittiwake — or any screaming species — can hardly have been accidental, not only because of intrinsic dissimilarity, but chiefly because the guillemot has been familiar as a main source of food since time immemorial. This consideration, together with the linguistic evidence, supports the view that *langvé* as a name for the guillemot will be secondary and evidently arose as a fowler's evasive term for a much sought-after species. The presence of the term as a loan in Gaelic confirms the age of the compound, and since the guillemot is an abundant Norwegian species, the term possibly antedates the Viking Age.

Súla 'gannet'

The affinity of ON *súla* 'gannet' with *do*. 'Søile, Støtte, Stolpe. . . . Kløft af Træ til at hænge om Halsen paa Svin for at hindre dem fra at bryde sig igjennem Gjerde' (Fritzner) has been surmised by all dictionary makers. This affinity has been variously explained.

As it is the prime duty of the etymologists to provide such an explanation, we turn first to them. With one accord, however, they assert that the bird is named »efter den kløftede hale« (Torp), »väl efter stjärtens form« (Hellquist), »nach dem gespaltenen/gegabelten Schwanz« (Holthausen, Jóhannesson, De Vries) — surely an unfortunate statement seeing that the gannet's tail is not all forked, but very pointed. Other authorities have taken the trouble to look at the bird. It will suffice to quote *Nudansk Ordbog*, 1953: »Navnet skyldes den kløft, fuglens vingespids i hvilestilling danner«. This time

the ornithological observation is correct, but whether it can have motivated the name is another matter, for many other birds fold their wings in the same fashion, among them common seabirds as the fulmar, petrel and shearwater. In this respect there is nothing distinctive about the gannet's wings which could have called forth such a name. It is apparent that the bird name *súla* has not been explained; indeed, as our enquiry will show, the nature of the serious difficulties have not even been realised.

Although the ultimate identity of *súla* 'Soile, etc.' and *súla* 'gannet' is not evident, we may incline to the view that the words are etymologically identical, for the following reason. In our latitudes, the gannet breeds at stations in Iceland, Faroe and the British Isles. Outside the breeding season the bird is at sea, chiefly in the off-shore waters of Western Europe and West Africa. No one doubts that this distribution also obtained in the Viking Age, so that the Norsemen could hardly have known the species properly until they colonised the islands to the west. To name a new species, they would have two possibilities. They could adopt a name already in use by the native population, or they could take a word already present in their own language and apply it to the bird, so *FBN*, 6. However, the weight of the evidence from a closer study of the Scottish Gaelic and English cognates now makes it virtually certain that Gael. *sùlair* from older **sùla* is a loan from Norse and not vice versa, while Eng. *solan(d)* is in turn a further borrowing via Gaelic, see forthcoming *ZAA*. We therefore assume that our bird name is indeed a special application of *súla* 'Soile, etc.' We may add that ON *hafsúla* 'gannet', now clearly seen as an explanatory compound, could be regarded as strengthening this assumption.

There remains the crucial question of motivation. But the enquirer is at once beset with a problem, for which of the earlier senses of *súla* is to be the starting point? The Old Norse significations are set out above. To these must be added certain others, such as Far. *súla* 'kløftet, gaffelformet træred-

skab, ramme, hvorpå fiskesnøren ophaspes' (Jacobsen-Matras), see further Norw. *sul* (*Torp*), Shetland Norn *sul(a)*, *sulek*. As at least some of these meanings may also be ancient, they must be taken into account when considering the motivation of the bird name. The problem is indeed assuming some complexity.

Since the gannet is also a British species, one may seek enlightenment from the gannet names found in the languages of the British Isles. The great majority of these are collected in C. Swainson, *Provincial Names of British Birds*, 1885, A. R. Forbes, *Gaelic Names of Beasts, Birds, etc.* 1905, S. Ó. Súilleabháin, *Handbook of Irish Folklore*, 1942, p. 291, M. Parry, *Enwan Adar*, 1963. But neither here, nor in other minor sources, have we noticed any clue to the motivation of the Scandinavian name.

One thing about the name *súla* is, however, remarkable: its derivation from the name of an artifact. This is a very rare feature of ornithological nomenclature. In the Scandinavian world we recall two examples, both Faroese: *hakaspjæð* 'heron' lit. 'old worn-out spade' and *sóttræ* 'shearwater' lit. 'sodstang' (see Svabo *Dict. Fær.*), and both fishermen's noa terms with a humorous connotation (*FBN*, 62, 64). Although the inherent difficulties at this distance may make us despair of ever discovering the motivation of the gannet's name in Norse, we have perhaps identified the milieu in which it arose.

Terna 'tern'

The derivation of Far. *terna* from ON *perna* presents no obstacles, but the philology of the Old Norse prototype is more problematic. Below we indicate where previous treatment of this word has been inadequate and suggest a solution.

The etymologists have referred ON *perna* to an onomatopoeic root. Some have associated it with OE *stearn*, seeing in the pair doublets comparable to, say, ON *þjórr*, OE *stēor* 'bull', apparently from IE **tewros*, **stewros*, i. e. with *s*

mobile as ON *melta*, OE *smeltan*. Although Hellquist, *Svensk etym. ordbok*, regards *stearn* as distinct, his statement of the onomatopoeic principle is the fullest, as follows: »*tärna* . . . = isl. *perna*, da. *terne* (eng. *tern* från nord. spr.), av urnord. **þirnōn* > (med a-omlyd) **þernōn*, innehållende en *n*-avledn. av en beteckning för tärnornas skrik, som av ornitologerna brukar återges med *tirr* ek. *kirr*! Likartade bildningar äro de likbetyd. da. *kirre* fin. *kirra* o. fin. *tirra* o. sv. dial. *tiärp* . . . Av annat ursprung är ags. *stearn* (eng. *starn*)«

It seems to us that ON *perna* is phonologically intractable, cf. A. Jóhannesson, *Íslenzk tunga í fornöld*, 54 and *passim*. Moreover, if the word is imitative, there is no hope of satisfactorily restoring its prehistoric form, for the following reason. An imitative *perna* must reach back into pre-Germanic times, *p* is scarcely plausible as an imitative sound for the screeching tern, whereas the ancestral pre-Germanic *t* is. One may compare ON *þiðurr* 'capercaillie' whose onomatopoeic origins, obscured by the Germanic sound shift, are clearly revealed in the forms of such names as Russ. *téterev*, Latv. *teteris* 'black grouse' and several others, see M. Vasmer, *Russ. etym. Wb.* But the suggested cognate of *perna* is philologically problematic, indeed according to the view represented by Hellquist there is no cognate at all. Now it is methodologically impermissible to postulate the shape of an isolated imitative word at such a remote distance in time. Since there are no means of checking the theoretical form proposed, it amounts to no more than a guess, valueless for scientific enquiry. Hellquist's insistence on the types *tirr* and *kirr* is not justified, the examples given in support being too selective. A glance over the score of echoic names found in English dialects proves that the tern's harsh screams can be quite differently represented. Beside *kirr*-, *skirr*, also *pirre*, English has such divergent forms as *purl*, *spurre*, *sparling*, *scraye*, then from Scotland *tarrock*, *tarret*, from Norfolk *darr*. Consider also such independent imitative creations as Sc.Gael. *steàrnal*, *steàrtan* or Welsh *ysgraell*, *ysgrechan*. At this point, too, must be menti-

oned OE *stearn* (above), also *stern*, with its complement *tern*, today the standard English name but originally a very local northern one, see *OED*. These two, together with dial. *starn*, *tarn-* (in *picktarnie*) are yet other instances of spontaneous echoic creation. It follows that there is no basis for the commonly accepted view that Eng. *tern* is a loan from Scandinavian, as Hellquist above. How the etymologists have wished us to envisage that borrowing we cannot say, since ON *perna* would of course have given ModE **tharn*.

Whereas some of the words we have been discussing are doubtless old, more will be relatively recent, but a feature of them all as a type is their spontaneity. With word material of this sort, speculation on prehistoric connections is next to worthless. Certainly the evidence of the British *tern* names brusquely rules out any serious consideration of ON *perna* and OE *stearn* as examples of Indo-European *s* mobile.

What remains to be usefully said about ON *perna*? There is the evidence that *tern* names are commonly based upon onomatopoeia, so that the same may apply to our word. But onomatopoeia is not the only possibility. ON *perna* was apparently a Common Scandinavian name. If it were purely onomatopoeic in origin, it is perhaps surprising that no variants exist, as in other languages. Now the Norse bird name is identical with *perna* 'serving girl'. It doesn't seem to have occurred to anyone that the former could be an application of the latter, or at least influenced by it. The concept of a bird as a servant is well known in folklore, as in the Faroese examples *kleðseksdrongur* 'puffin' lit. 'baggage boy' and *láar-trælur* 'dunlin' lit. 'plover's thrall'. There is no reason why *perna* shouldn't be in the same category. Indeed, speakers of Old Norse will perforce have so interpreted the name whatever its ultimate origin.

Assessing probabilities here is admittedly hazardous, and aggravated by the uncertainty surrounding the origin of *perna* 'serving girl', interpreted now as native Norse (Falk-Torp, Kluge, Feist), now as a Low German loan (Hellquist, Holt-

hausen, De Vries). In this connection I am beholden to Jóhan Hendrik W. Poulsen for the observation that the occurrences of this term in literature, as represented by the citations in Fritzner, speak in favour of the latter view, also Hellquist »ej i Eddan el. skaldespr.« It could then be held that the case for the ultimate identity of a secondary element in the lexicon with the bird name becomes tangibly weaker.

ÚRTAK

Navnið *imbrimil* verður týtt sum »skúm-ýlari«. Nøvnini *karkareyði* og *karkarassur* verða mett at vera úr máli fuglamanna. Sýnt verður, at navnið *lomvigi*, sum higartil hevur verið ætlað at hava samband við navnið *lómur*, er reglulig føroysk framkoma úr fornnorr. *langvé*. Millum fuglanøvn er súla undantak, tí tað er ætlandi komið av navni á manngerðum luti, sama orð og vaðsúla. *Terna* kann ikki verða nýtt til endurgerðar av fornum orðasniðum.