

## Faroese Bird-Name Origins

(IV)

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*Lomvigi* 'common guillemot'

In *Fróðskaparrit*, xx, 47f., we found that the second element of this name must refer to the bird's call, but since *-vigi* hardly suited the guillemot's guttural voice represented by such onomatopoeic names as Eng. *murre*, etc., we argued that the name must have originally designated some other species.

We now see that we improvidently overlooked important ornithological evidence. While it remains true that the guillemot's voice is typically guttural — *lomvigin karrar* — the call of the immature bird differs from that of the older ones. Some authorities describe it as a thin variety of the adult voice: a keen observer, H. Gätke, *Heligoland as an Ornithological Observatory*, 579, renders the adult call as arr-r-r-r, but that of the young as irr-r-r-idd, uttered in timid and anxious accents. However, bird calls can be variously interpreted by human ears, and such variation may be reflected in echoic names, as already noticed in connection with *spógvi*, *havhestur*, *terna*, see *Fróð.*, xviii, 188ff., xix, 123f., xx, 50—53. In the present case, too, impressions are seen to differ. H. F. Witherby (ed.), *Handbook of British Bird*, v, 155, carries a report which characterises the juvenile voice as a musical, shrill quee-wee, adding that this note presumably gave rise to the dialect name *willock*. A similar observation is quoted in J. Wright, *English Dialect Dictionary*, under this name: 'On the south coast it

(‘the common guillemot’) is called *willock* or *willy* which is supposed to represent the cry of the young bird’, and the same dictionary further gives *weerit* as an obsolete Renfrewshire word for the young guillemot, with the comment: ‘It is supposed that the name has originated from their cry, which it resembles in sound, as they have an incessant, peevish note’.

It is apparent that the Norse name may also be explained in this way, so that we postulate ON *\*víi* m. (Icel. Western Fiords *langvíi*) or *\*vía* f. (Far. Northern Islands *lomvía*, Icel. *langvía*) as the basic forms, the alternation of masculine and feminine in an imitative name being paralleled in ON *þeisti*, Icel. *þeista*, etc. ‘black guillemot’ (*Fróð.*, xviii, 187), with Far. *lomvígi*, *-víga* showing secondary shortening of ON *í*, a development doubtless encouraged when ON *lang-* became Far. *lom-* by assimilation (*Fróð.*, xx, 47). Whereas before the name had been a tolerably transparent compound, as still in Icelandic (see below), it was now quite obscure. Originally applied to the immature bird, the name was eventually extended to embrace the species as a whole. Such widening of an original sense is, of course, not unusual. Suffice it to recall Shetland *liri*, the generic term for shearwater, but the phrase ‘fat as a liri’, to say nothing of the meaning of Far. *líri*, proves that the name properly denotes the corpulent nestling.

It may next be noted that imitative names like *\*víi*, *\*vía* can be equally applicable to other species characterised by a shrill voice, and we remember Orkney *weeo* ‘kittiwake’ (*Fróð.*, xx, 47f.) which can represent either of the postulated Old Norse alternatives, see H. Marwick, *The Orkney Norn*, passim. There are comparable examples outside Scandinavia, too, as Ger. *Weih*, Old High Ger. *wīo* m.

We are now in a position to consider the element *lang-* ‘long’. Taken at face value, *lang-* qualifies the basic name *-víi*, *-vía*. This will do for a folk etymology, but not for a scientific one. Only parts of a bird can be long, like the neck, the legs or the beak, but not the bird itself. As far as we can see, the only part of a guillemot that could be called long is its beak.



This means that *langvíi*, *-vía* is to be interpreted as a reduction of original *\*langnefvíi*, *-vía* 'long-neb-*víi*', *-vía*, a reduction not hard to visualise prosodically or phonetically. Such a designation, however, implies a contrast with some other bird going under the same basic name *\*víi*, *\*vía*. The contrast will naturally have been with the razorbill, a species consorting with the guillemot and, of course, taken with it by fowlers. The razorbill frequently assumes the name of the guillemot (*Fróð.*, xix, 127f., cf. also *svartfótti* below). According to works of ornithology, the guillemot's beak can be half as long again as the razorbill's, and the impression of length is heightened by their differing shapes, the former being slender and pointed, the latter deep and rounded.

There is something of a parallel in Scot. Gael. *falcag bhiorach* 'guillemot' lit. 'pointed razorbill' (A. Carmichael, *Carmina Gadelica*, vi, 70), where *bhiorach* 'pointed' refers, of course, to the beak.

It goes without saying that the creation of the compound *langvíi*, *-vía* resolved any troublesome homonymity with the simplex *\*víi*, *\*vía*, cf. Orkney *weeo* above.

From the foregoing it is evident that Icel. *langnefja* 'common guillemot' lit. 'long-neb' has no relevance for the origin of *langvía*, as we had previously thought possible (*FBN*, 52). The implied contrast here with *stuttnefja* 'Brünnich's guillemot' lit. 'short-neb' was, of course, never in question. But it now becomes clear beyond doubt that these two terms, which are confined to Iceland, also arose there as a direct reflexion of the local scene where the species co-exist as nowhere else in the Scandinavian area.

Finally Icel. *bringvía* and *geirvía*, names denoting the mutant guillemot (*FBN*, 51f.) may now be further considered thanks to information kindly supplied by Jakob Benediktsson. The former name is common, records going back to the 17th century, but the latter has only been noticed in this century and its precise meaning is still uncertain. According to one theory, *geir-* may allude to the line which runs from the ring

round the eye to the ear coverts. As formations, however, both names ultimately owe their origin to the fact that the generic term *langvía* was felt as a compound in which *lang-* 'long', somehow or other, qualified a basic name *-vía*.

### *Svartfötti* 'guillemot; razorbill'

The above term (*FBN*, 70) corresponds idiomatically to Icel. *svartfugl*, see Blöndal. The Icelandic name itself is exactly paralleled in Scot. Gael. *ian dubh* 'guillemot' (*ian* 'bird', *dubh* 'black') occurring in a verse from St Kilda (Carmichael, *op. cit.*, v, 46). Seeing that such an appellation is hardly acceptable for birds whose colouring is black and white, the term must be evasive in origin, proper to the language of fowlers or fishermen. The St Kilda words will be a translation of the Norse, showing that the term goes far back into the Middle Ages, and indeed a collective *svartfygli* is attested in the older language, see Fritzner.

It appears that the Faroese synonym may hold the clue to the motivation here: *svartfötti*, sc. *fuglur*, is an accurate description of the two species in question and belongs to the same milieu. One wonders therefore if Icel. *svartfugl* is not an elliptic formation from *\*svartfótflugl*.

### *Stelkur* 'redshank'

The purely Faroese side poses no problems. The name (*FBN*, 5), also Icelandic, goes back regularly to ON *stelkr*. variant *stjalkr*. The term survives in Norw. *stelk*, also *stilk*, further Swed. (Gotl.) *stålk*; it was once even more widespread, cf. OHG *wazarstelb* 'water-stelb', where the element 'water' naturally refers to the habitat.

Nor is there any problem about origins, according to the standard authorities, who associate the word with Dan. *stalke*, Old Eng. *-stealcian* 'stalk' (see Falk-Torp) and Norw. *stulka* 'gaa stivt svakt og støtende', and unanimously declare that the



bird has been named 'eftir den stive gang' (Torp). We are not going to dispute that the verbs mentioned belong etymologically to the same base as the bird name, but we do say that the proposition that the name alludes to stiffness of gait can only be described as an insult to this lively and nimble bird — *stelkur titar títt um tún!*

The true explanation of the name is, however, soon revealed by further cognates, namely the nouns Old Swed. *stielke*, Norw. *stjelke*, *stjalk*, with a different ablaut grade Norw., Eng. *stalk* 'stalk'. Whether the redshank be running or flying, the long slender legs are always conspicuous. What could then be more natural than to call such a bird after its legs? The name *stelker*, now placed with its closest cognates, is seen to mean literally 'stalk' which here obviously stands for 'leg'. The same motivation is, of course, evident in Eng. *redshank*, like synonymous Dan. *rødben* or Ger. *Rotschenkel*. There is a related species similarly particularised by the colour of the legs: Eng. *greenshank*, Dan. *grønben*, Ger. *Grünschenkel*. But the redshank is by far the commoner bird in our area and the only one occurring in Faroe and Iceland. Hence there has been no need to further qualify Far., Icel. *stelkur*. In Norwegian, however, *rødstilke* appears to have become the standard form.

It may be noticed that there is a close parallel to the above in Ger. *Bachstelze* 'wagtail', where *-stelze* lit. 'stilt' and etymologically related to *stelker*, must be a similar circumlocation for 'leg'.

### *Storkur* 'stork'

The stork is not a Faroese species and ON *storker* probably dropped out of the language until restored in more modern times, *FBN*, 72f.

As with *stelker*, there has been no difficulty in associating the name with etymologically related words, thus Falk-Torp envisage an IE root *\*sterg-* 'steif sein' — cf. ON *storkinn* 'geronnen, erstarrt', etc. — and compare tirol. *stork* 'strunk,

baumstumpf', bair. *stork* 'fischerstange', mhd. *storch* 'penis', adding: Der Name bezieht sich also auf die langen Beine und steifen Gang des Vogels. It is considered that the stem seen in ON *starker*, *sterker* 'strong' is to be connected with the above, and this led Hellquist to wonder if the bird name could mean 'stark (fågel) el. dyl.' This latter suggestion we find unacceptable, since 'strong' is hardly feasible as a distinguishing epithet for a bird and accordingly, to the best of our knowledge, never figures in bird nomenclature. The former explanation, which is followed by others, contains a grain of truth, but is still a long way from the real solution.

We have, in essentials, the same problem as with *stelker*, since *storker*, too, is not primarily a bird name at all, but a word for something else which has been secondarily applied to name the bird. What that something may have been will conceivably be apparent from the other meanings of the word, and glancing back to Falk-Torp one can quickly infer a basic sense of something like 'stick'. And would this be a suitable word with which to designate the stork? The answer is there almost for the asking. No bird is better known in those parts where it breeds, for it makes man's abode its own. Its domestic life is lived on his roof-tops, and what more familiar sight than the stately storks taking their rest there, standing — as they always do — on one leg? This one leg is surely the 'stick' — the nickname which has remained when its more original sense was no longer remembered, except obscurely in German dialect.

We cannot conclude without recalling that history then repeated itself, perhaps two thousand years later, in Far. *pinnur í reyv* 'stick in backside', a Vágar name for the heron, *FBN* 62f.

### *Æða* 'eider'

As is well known, Far. *æða* is comparable to ON *æðr*, cf. *FBN*, 8. In the following we take the matter further and investigate the origin of the Old Norse term itself.



The difficulties are considerable, for the name is isolated, though it has been borrowed into Lappish and forms in the dialects of this language have been regarded as relevant for the phonology of the Norse prototype, see below. A problematic word like the present always attracts its quota of wild guesses; here we discuss only two of the etymologies suggested in the belief that only these have any recognisable substance.

The first is that reported in the Scandinavian etymological dictionaries which compare *æðr* with Skt. *ātī-* f. 'an aquatic bird', postulating IE *\*ēti-* as the ancestral form. The Sanskrit word is certainly a very tangible entity. It occurs in the Rīgveda, thus belonging to the oldest language and therefore very likely genuine Indo-European and not a borrowing from an exotic language as so much of the later vocabulary; it lives on in certain derivative languages, denoting *Turdus ginginianus* see Turner, *Comparative Dictionary of the Indo-Aryan Languages*. Nevertheless we cannot forbear to remark that it is a frightfully long way from India to Scandinavia when there's nothing in between. It goes without saying that the posulated IE *\*ēti-* is a construction based solely on the assumption that the Norse and Indian names are to all intents and purposes etymologically identical. Whatever one may feel about the Norse, the philology of the Indian word is in the nature of the case hopelessly obscure, with Skt. *ā* representing indifferently IE *ā*, *ē*, *ō*, or a syllabic nasal. In view of this last possibility, it is much more likely, however, that the Sanskrit name will be cognate with ON *qnd*, Lith. *antis*, Old Slav. *qty*, Lat. *anas*, gen. *anatis*, etc. 'duck', as is indeed generally supposed by Indo-Europeanists, cf. e. g. Brugmann, *Kurze vergl. Grammatik der indg. Sprachen*, 125, further Pokorny, *Indo-germ. etym. Wb.*, 41, 345.

The second etymology was proposed by B. Collinder in a fundamental article in *Acta Phil. Scand.*, vii, 215—225. Identifying Lapp. *aktâ* (gen.sg. *āvtâ*), (*h*)*awdâ*, etc. 'eider' as reflexes of Prim. Norse *auþ-*, *auð-*, Collinder posited a dental enlargement of the root seen in Lat. *avis* f. 'bird'. This analysis

represents an advance on the previous one to the important extent that it has apparently been possible to determine, more or less, the shape of the Germanic root. On the other hand, we find the proposed connection with Lat. *avis* too highly speculative to possess objective value, cf. Ernout-Meillet, *Dict. etym. de la Langue Latine*. We would however mention, though more out of piety than conviction, that Pedersen, *Vergl. kelt. Grammatik*, i, 55f., 412, similarly referred the British Celtic term for duck (Welsh *hwyad*, etc.) to a dental enlargement of *avis*, but only at the cost of invoking exceptional vowel development and explaining *h-* (normally representing old *s-*) as unetymological.

We believe one may fairly say that the etymology of the name here in question has not yet been found, and it very much looks as though there simply are no cognates among known bird names. We therefore propose to abandon pure philology for the moment and take a closer look at the bird itself.

The unique thing about the eider is its down, for which it has been valued from ancient times — see Svabo, *Indberetninger*, 10 — and its importance in this respect is seen in names bestowed upon it. Thus the Scottish Gaels may call it *colc* (with self-evident variants *colcach*, *colcair*) akin to Mid. Irish *colcaid* 'bed of flocks' (*Scottish Gaelic Studies*, x, 58f.). The Faroese noa term for the eider *rusk* 'rubbish, dirt' is explicable as the opposite of what it says — an allusion to the valuable down (*Fróð*, xvi, 107f.). Such a prized bird might well be placed under high patronage, hence Eng. dial. *St Cuthbert's duck*.

The eider is generally a quiet species, but the duck may call 'gogg, gogg, gogg', as M. á Ryggi, *Fuglabókin*, 55, says. Such a call is clearly the basis of Russ. *gaga* 'eider'. As an essentially inland people, the Russians will have acquired their word from a foreign, possibly Baltic language, cf. Latv. *gaga* 'do.'

It is evident that *æðr* is no representation of the call, but may it not conceivably denote the down? In this connection



one cannot fail to notice synonymous ON *æðarfugl* which at once makes sense if interpreted 'down bird', whereas 'eider bird' gives a tautology unparalleled in Norse ornithological nomenclature. We therefore seem justified in inferring that *æðr* originally denoted the down, and only later came to be transferred to the bird itself, after which feeling for the old meaning was eventually lost. Semantic shifts of this sort are well known. We have already referred to the origin of *stelkur*, *storkur* (above), cf. also Far. *líri* 'nestling shearwater' lit. 'flesh' *skerápur* 'adult shearwater' lit. 'skin' (*FBN*, 37), further *skata* 'magpie' lit. 'tail' (*Fróð.*, xvi, 108), and similarly in principle *rusk* above.

The eider is a member of the duck clan. It may therefore appear surprising that the compound name referred to above was not *\*æðarond* 'down duck' rather than *æðarfugl*. We assume that *fugl* is here to be regarded as an evasive generalisation, and note that the word is still used in Iceland (where eider farming is important) in ways which point in the same direction, as *eggfugl*, *geldfugl*, terms for laying and non-laying eiders respectively, *FBN*, 70.

It is to be supposed that when *æðr* was transformed into a bird name, it designated in the first place the female, as is still commonly the case in Iceland and Faroe. It is she who occupies the nest and fills it with her incomparable down. The gaudy male, who is not involved in the house-keeping, went under the entirely different name *bliki* lit. 'shiner' in allusion to his resplendent white plumage, *Fróð.*, xix, 130f. Later still, *æðr* came to be used generically, hence such compounds as Icel. *æðarbliki*, *æðarkolla*, Far. *æðublikur*, *æðuboga*, for the male and female respectively, etc., etc.

A Germanic and/or extra-Germanic congruent remains to be found. We see nothing obvious and in the nature of the case rather expect a negative result. But if we have identified the primary meaning of the word, that in itself will be a step forward.

*Trani* 'crane'

The crane is not a Faroese bird, but its genuine Old Norse name *trani* occurs in traditional sources, perhaps indebted to Norwegian, *FBN*, 73. The bird is well known in Norway, for it breeds there, as also in Sweden; the forms are Norw. *trane*, Swed. *trana*. This word is, however, peculiarly isolated in that its initial *tr-* contrasts with *kr-* found in the most closely related languages, as Eng. *crane*, Dutch *kraan*, with derivative ending Ger. *Kranich*. The roots are otherwise identical, presupposing Prim. Germanic *\*tran-*, *\*kran-*. The apparent primacy of the latter is confirmed by its various Indo-European cognates, as Greek *géranos*, Lith. *garnys*, Welsh *garan*, further Lat. *grus*, etc.

We next look at what the Scandinavian etymologists have made of things. Jóhannesson surprisingly saw no problem and derives the name, without further ado, directly from an IE root *der-*. But other authorities have considered the question of the initial consonant. Falk-Torp invoke a lost Prim. Norse *\*kranuka-* corresponding to Ger. *Kranich*, and explain *tr-* for *kr-* as a likely case of dissimilation. But Torp then turned agnostic: forholdet til det vestgerm. ord er uklart. Hellquist also found the term obscure, but added: mögl. sammenhängande med ordet onomatopoetiska karaktär. Holthausen declares that the bird name has been influenced by *trami* 'demon'. De Vries has no new contribution, but criticises Holthausen's explanation as unsatisfactory.

Thanks to new evidence the matter can now be settled beyond doubt, and the possibility envisaged by Hellquist provides the answer. In a work dealing with the principles of bird-name formation, just published (1973), M. M. Ginatulin, *K Issledovaniyu Motivatsii Leksicheskikh Yedinit* ('An Examination of the Motivation of Lexical Units'), 24, directly compares Swed. *trana* with synonymous Kazakh *tyrna* as representative of a type of onomatopoeic patterning. This is no chance correspondence, for we discover that the Kazakh name



is widespread in the Turkic languages, e. g. (Osmanli) Turkish *turna*, and recognise that the equation observed by Ginatulin solves the riddle of the Scandinavian form. As already remarked elsewhere in this paper, the call of a bird can be variously interpreted in human speech. The Turkic peoples have heard the crane's trumpeting note as *tyrna*, *turna*. The ancient Scandinavians must have had the same impression. Or perhaps more precisely: they inherited the Germanic *\*kran-*, but later amended the initial consonant to accord with what they believed they were hearing.

#### ÚRTAK

*Lomvigi* verður greitt sum fn. *\*langvíi*, har ið *-víi* endurgevur pisumálið. *Svartfótti* bendir á, at hitt sammerkta ísl. *svartfugl* kann vera komið av *\*svartfótful*. Víst verður á, at *stelkur* og *storkur* eru ikki upprunalig fuglanøvn uttan orð, ið merkja 'stelkur, leggur' og 'stavur' sipandi til hinar longu feturnar á hesum fuglum, og somuleiðis tykist *æða* upprunaliga at hava merkt 'dún'. At enda verður við støði í nýfunnum próvtílfari víst á, at *trani* er ljóðhermandi í uppruna sínum.