

Faroese Bird-Name Origins

(V)

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Bakur 'greater black-backed gull'

The present name, aphetic for synonymous *svartbakur* (ON *svartbaker*) lit. 'black back' poses no formal problems, while the cognate Norn (Shetland *baki*, Orkney *baakie*) shows that the term is ancient, enabling us to postulate local ON **baker*, as in *The Faroese Bird Names*, 45.

Perhaps this short form was, however, more widespread than the surviving Scandinavian records tell us, being in fact Common West Norse. We suggest that it lies behind Irish *droimneach* 'black-backed gull', cf. *droim* 'back', semantically difficult as it stands, but very plausible as a rendering of ON **baker* see *Zeitschrift f. celt Philologie*, xxxiv, 10.

It will be appropriate, too, to consider the motivation. ON *svartbaker* as a designation for the greater black-backed gull is seen from its vagueness to have originally been a noa word, for such a term would be equally applicable to the lesser black-backed, and indeed to various other seabirds with contrasting plumage. We shall not be far wrong if we see in ON **baker* a further step in the direction of anonymity in the service of name taboo.

Eskir 'eider drake'

This term is known from Svabo, thus *Indb.*, 13: »Eskjir, saaledes kaldes de Eder-hanner, der ere hvide paa Brystet.«

Accordingly, in *FBN*, 11, we described the apparently mysterious *eskir* as a plural. It will, however, be after all a singular, in fact none other than the proper name *Eskir*, now so easily accessible in Svabo, *Dict.*, I, 163: »Eskjir [nomen viri]« and said to reflect Dan. *Eskild*, though this is questioned by Chr. Matras (*Dict.*, II, 18).

Personal appellatives are not common constituents of Faroese bird names. Among primary terms there is solely (the very ancient) *óðinshani* 'redwing', unless one wished to count also *erla* (*kongsdóttir*) 'white wagtail'. In other cases, we know of two, the terms are definitely noa words: *nornagestur* or *gestur* 'oyster-catcher' and *sigga* 'crow'. To these could perhaps be added the appellatives *prestur* 'puffin' lit. 'priest' and *prinsur* 'shag in its second year' lit. 'prince', the former certainly a noa term (*Fróðskaparrit*, XIII, 52), the latter possibly so (*FBN*, 64). The same possibility clearly holds good for *eskir*. The eider duck and drake have quite distinct names in Faroese. We have already been given a noa word for the duck *æða*, namely *rusk* lit. 'rubbish' (*Fróðskaparrit*, XVI, 107 f.); it rather looks as though *eskir* was a corresponding term for her mate *blikur*.

Gestur 'shearwater'

Gestur is a well-known noa name for the oyster-catcher, as duly reported in *FBN*, 62. Unfortunately, we overlooked another meaning recorded by Chr. Matras, *Stednavne paa de Færoske Norduroyar*, 117, as follows: »*gestur* m. 'Gæst'. Optegnet i Navnet paa en Skraapes Hule (*lírhola*) Kunoy: *Gesthola*.« The tone of this epithet will doubtless have been thoroughly positive, referring presumably to the corpulent nestling (*líri*) rather than the gastronomically inferior adult (*skerapur*). One is disposed to regard this semantic shift as having been only very local.

Gestur, *Nornagestur* 'oyster-catcher'

One would like to know what has motivated these high-

sounding noa terms. If we still cannot give a detailed explanation, we do at least know that the bird has for long enjoyed an excellent reputation in the Faroes, *FBN*, 62. The reputation appears to have been widespread and the purpose of this note is to draw attention to one of the bird's Gaelic names: Irish *giolla Brighde*, Sc. Gael. *gille Brighde* (often spelt *Bride*) lit. 'Bride's (Bridget's) servant', further Sc. Gael. *brideun* 'Bride's bird', Bridget being, as they say, the Mary of the Gael. Here in principle is the same link with mythology and religion as implied in the Norse names which ultimately go back to Odin. A large number of Norse bird names survive as loans in Gaelic, especially Scots Gaelic, but surprisingly there is no trace of such an important name as *tjaldr*. As like as not it fell victim to the tabooing process.

Groddi 'puffin'

This puffin name was referred to in *FBN*, 17, as follows: »J. Jakobsen noted down from an unknown source... *groddi* m., so spelt on the assumption that it is identical with *groddi* 'stump'.« That this assumption is without doubt correct may be illustrated from a remarkable parallel recently noticed. An isolated Cornish puffin name *nath* finds its etymological explanation in cognate Welsh *nadd* 'something hewn or chipped' from *naddu* 'hew, chip'. The basic concepts 'stump' and 'chip' are, of course, to all intents and purposes identical, see *Transactions of the Philological Society*, 1974, 29.

Krypils-, *Kryplingsont* 'garganey' — a misnomer

These uniquely Faroese duck names were considered in *FBN*, 9 f. As explained there, the former variant goes back to Svabo, *Indb.* (1781—2), the latter to Landt (1800). Reference was made to difficulties of identification; at the same time, it was noticed that these now (so it appears) purely bookish words are today understood as denoting the garganey.

It is obvious that the names are meaningful, i. e. 'cripple duck', but to which species do they properly apply? Although

nowadays used of the garganey, this is certainly a recent development, due to literature, for the garganey is not a Faroese bird in any real sense of the word. K. Williamson, *The Atlantic Islands*, 319, reports the bird as a vagrant, only twice recorded. Such a bird could never possess a genuinely native name. Our present names, therefore, must belong to some species prominent enough in the Faroes to have acquired a Faroese name. We compile a list of these, following *FBN*, 9—12: *ógvella* 'long-tailed duck', *æða* 'eider duck', then those compounded with *ont* 'duck', firstly the distinctive *toppont* 'merganser', then *stokkont* 'mallard', *stikkont* 'pintail', *krik-ont* 'teal'. It does not take long to make an identification. From this list, the term 'cripple duck' is applicable only to the teal, or more exactly to the male of the species which, in protecting its young, draws attention from them to itself by feigning injury. Svabo wrote (*Indb.*, 16): »Kripils-ont forekom mig ikke. Maaske kaldes Kriikonten saaledes af nogle.« We are thus able to verify his supposition — two centuries later!

One may imagine how the misnomer arose. The teal and garganey are the dwarfs among the ducks and so much alike, especially the females, as to be often confused; in fact, the two species may share the same name and are, of course, classed together scientifically (*Querquedula*).

Roðbüksuskarvur 'eider duck'

It may be of some interest to notice that this disrespectful poacher's term (*FBN*, 82) has a parallel in principle in Icel. *pokaönd* lit. 'duck in a sack', a similarly evasive name arising under identical conditions, see Blöndal.

Stálkoka 'crow'

This noa term from Fugloy is noted in *FBN*, 61, but no final analysis was offered. We now think that *stálkoka* and not a theoretically possible **stoltkoka* will be the correct form. We may take 'indvendig hulning bagest i ryggen på et kreatur, bækken' (Jacobsen—Matras) at its face value, here used humor-

ously or disparagingly, as befits a crow, a rough translation being 'back'. The first element *stál*- 'steel' will refer to the colour, i. e. *stálbláur*, so that we have in *stálkoka* 'steel back' a concept substantially equivalent to *bláboka* 'dark back', a Suðuroy noa name for the same bird.

Súla 'gannet'

Unresolved problems of interpretation in the case of this name were discussed in *Fróð.*, XX, 48 ff., and we concluded that as *súla* properly denoted an artifact, it possibly arose as a noa name. At the same time, we dismissed the etymology given in *Nudansk Ordbog* (1953) 'Navnet skyldes den kløft, fuglens vingespids i hvilestilling danner' as unsatisfactory since various other seabirds fold their wings in the same fashion.

Taking a lead from J. MacInnes, 'Gannet Catching in the Hebrides', *Fróð.*, XVIII, 156, who referred to the possible use of Gaelic *eun* lit. 'bird' as a noa name for the gannet, we have meanwhile been able to confirm that this is indeed the case, while another term *guga*, today the ordinary name for the immature bird, has every appearance of having been evasive in the first place; its literal meaning is simply 'cackler' (*Zfcelt. Phil.*, loc. cit., 1). We have further established that Eng. *gannet* itself originally meant no more than 'goose', the present specialisation of meaning being again due to the working of taboo (*Zeitschrift f. Anglistik u. Amerikanistik*, XXI, 416 ff.). These various terms are thus examples of the purposely vague noa name, of the same ilk as e. g. Far. *dýr* lit. 'animal', a fisherman's term for *kópur* 'seal'.

We may reconsider *súla* in the light of these observations. As noticed in the previous contribution, *súla* as the name of an artifact has a number of different meanings; however, the concept of the cleft is common to all. We next visualise the situation as the fowler reaches the gannetry. All around him he sees adult birds, and whether standing or sitting their crossed wing-tips, black in contrast to the white of the rest of the plumage, are indeed a feature calculated to draw the attention

and lead to the bestowal of a name. But the nature of the name given, literally denoting a cleft object, hopelessly imprecise and only comprehensible to the initiated in the first place, betrays its origin as a noa name.

The usage is clearly ancient, as proved by the occurrence of the Norse word as a loan in Scots Gaelic: St Kilda *sùl* and in place names as *Sùlasgeir* < **Sùlusker* 'Gannet Skerry', otherwise with secondary terminations (Northern) *sùlair*, (Southern) **sùlan* attested in Eng. *solan*-goose. On the other hand, as the gannet is not known to have bred in Norway, the present term would only come into use after the Norsemen had reached the nesting sites on the islands to the west. Such a name is not likely to have been coined by men who only knew the bird at sea. For them other aspects would be more impressive, such as the angular silhouette against the sky or the hurtling dive into the sea. A good example of a name induced by such considerations is Cornish (Lhuyd) *zethar* lit. 'archer'.

We apologise to *Nudansk Ordbog* whose interpretation becomes acceptable once the peculiar background has been understood.

Tjaldur 'oyster-catcher'

We have twice previously discussed this problematic name in 'Sprachgeschichtliches zu einigen Vogelnamen nordischer Herkunft', *Zeitschrift f. Anglistik u. Amerikanistik*, III, 277 ff., and *FBN*, 7 f. and *passim*.

The forms of this West Scandinavian name may be recalled: firstly ON *tjaldr* (in a *pula*), and secondly the modern Icel. *tjaldur* (-s, -ar) m., Norw. *tjeld* (often spelt *kjeld*) m., Far. *tjaldur* (-urs, *tjöldur*) n., further the Norn: Shetl. *shalder*, Orkn. *chalder*, also *chaldro*, (dimin.) *chaldrick*. With the above we have compared Icel. *tildra* f. 'turnstone', also *tildri* m. (Blöndal), cf. synonymous Far. *tjaldursgrælingur*, *fjörutjaldur*, Norw. *sandtjeld*, and reckoned with the possibility that *r* in ON *tjaldr* could have been part of the stem, as in Faroese, and not merely a case ending as one would assume from modern Icelandic.

From here we take up the matter again. The suggestion that *r* in ON *tjaldur* might be part of the stem admittedly leads to difficulties, for the implied change of declension in modern Icelandic would be irregular, and moreover the evidence of Norwegian strongly favours the natural view that ON *tjaldur* was a regular *a*-stem, gen. sg. *tjalds*, etc. It will become evident below that this was indeed the case; it is Faroese with *r* as part of the stem which has been the innovating language.

It is a striking fact that Far. *tjaldur* is neuter, though Svabo in the 1770's also knew it as masculine, see below. There is other evidence in the same direction. As is well known, many Faroese birds have recognised noa names in addition to their ordinary ones. Thus *kráka* f. 'crow' has gone under such names as *stálkoka*, *bláboka*, referred to above, or *fjatla*, *sigga*, *hin bláa undir homrunum* (see FBN, 61) and these appellations are all feminine after the primary *kráka*. Such agreement is regular. By the same token the oyster-catcher has the neuter noa name *hitt nevreýða* corresponding to *tjaldur* n. However, this bird has other names, as *gestur*, *rúðurbori*, which are masculine. Such terms are, we submit, evidence that Far. *tjaldur*, too, was once masculine. There will be no doubt that this gender must be original, as is corroborated by the Icelandic and Norwegian cognates. Finally, we may stress that the present neuter gender in Faroese is most exceptional, since Scandinavian birds names are normally masculine or feminine.

Turning now to morphology, it appears that *tjaldur* first joined those masc. *a*-stems where *-r* is part of the stem, words like *aldur* 'age', *Baldur* (*baldursbrá* 'Matricaria inodora'), *galdur* 'magic' presumably being the attracting forces, and this position still obtained towards the end of the 18th century. Most of Svabo's dictionary mss. mark the name masculine, and the compounds quoted there, *tjaldursgras*, *-grælingur*, show the change of declension; at the same time, other mss. give the word its present neuter gender.

It is noticeable that in Faroese the corresponding class of neuters, i. e. where *-r* is part of the stem, is a fairly substantial

one. It has been strong enough to attract loan words, e. g. *mynstur* 'pattern', *portur* 'gate', *sukur* 'sugar', and has otherwise been occasionally productive, cf. *blomstur* 'flower' (ON *blómstr* m., Norw. *blomster* n.), *foreldur* pl. 'parents' (ON *foreldri*), furthur *spjaldur* '(wooden) tag; small halibut' (ON *spjald*) and most interestingly, as Jóhan Hendrik W. Poulsen has kindly pointed out to us, *tjaldur* 'curtain; tent' in ballad style beside original *tjald*, see now *Føroysk-donsk orðabók*², *Eykabind*, 1974. One will see here the influence of analogy on the bird name, paving the way for the change of gender. Even so, considerable pressure must have been required to effect such a change, for the shift to the neuter gender is unprecedented in the sphere of bird names, where neuters are in any case very exceptional. From what is known of the widespread practice of name taboo one may perhaps ask if this is not an example of deliberate deformation as an evasive device, comparable in principle to, say, Eng. *mother Carey's chicken* for (unrecorded) *mother Mary's chicken*.

At this point we return to ON *tjaldur*, now confident that -r is indeed purely the nom. sg. ending, and from this form we may, of course, postulate ancestral Prim. Germ. **telða-*. This word we shall attempt to explain, first seeking guidance from comparative nomenclature. A survey of European oyster-catcher names indicates that these fall into three main categories, the bird being called after its

1) feeding habits, real or imaginary: Far. *rúðurbori*, Eng. *oyster-catcher*,

2) appearance: Far. *hitt nevreýða*, Irish *riabhán* or *roilleach* lit. 'striped', and often compared to the magpie, as Dan. *strand-skade*,

3) various calls — there is a fair repertoire: Far. *klipp*, Welsh *pib* also meaningful 'pipe', Dutch *liev*, Sc. Gael. *trille-achan* lit. 'triller'.

We would add that nowhere have we encountered an instance of the bird being named after its gait. The commonly supposed connection of ON *tjaldur* with such verbs as Norw.

(Telemark) *tildra seg fram* 'go on tiptoe', otherwise *tiltra*, *tilta*, etc., etc., thus receives no confirmation from comparative nomenclature and we, for our part, feel that such an interpretation is, in any case, philologically impermissible, and on the level of folk etymology.

The question now is: can Prim. Germ. **telða-* be accommodated in one of the above categories? The first is excluded, as Germanic designations here are always compounds. In the case of the second we have examined the evidence of the Germanic vocabulary known to us, but have failed to find any comparable root suggesting the required sense; nor does a step back to Indo-European **delto-* afford any help either, see Pokorny, *IEW*, 193—96. There remains the third, the onomatopoeic choice. It is permissible to analyse Prim. Germ. **telða-* as root **tel-* plus well-known suffix *-ða-* (F. Kluge, *Stammbildungslehre der altgerm. Dialekte*, 62) and here **tel-* is perfectly plausible as an echoic root and a suitable imitation of the high-pitched call of the oyster-catcher. Formations of this type ceased before the appearance of the earliest written records, so that the name *tjaldur* is clearly ancient. Properly denoting the call of the bird, it thus belongs to that old stratum of names well exemplified by Far., Icel. *lómur* 'red-throated diver', Icel. also 'moan', *Fróðskaparrit*, XIX, 129 f.

Next, Icel. *tildra* f., *tildri* m. 'turnstone'. The only reference in etymological dictionaries to this word occurs in Jóhannesson, *Isl. etym. Wb.*, where the name (in the form *tildra* only, 492) is placed with over a dozen other Icelandic words, among them *tjaldur*, and simply said to be derived from an IE root **del-* 'wackeln, schwanken'. The author does not seem to regard the two bird names as particularly closely linked: *tjaldur* is listed between *tøltur* pl. 'schlechte hufeisen mit stacheln' and the verbs *tolla* 'lose hangen' and *tylla* 'lose anheften', while *tildra* appears also without commentary between the verb *tildra* 'etwas lose aufhängen' and the adjective *tildrulegr* 'hin-fällig'.

It seems, however, that *tildra* is very closely affiliated to

tjaldur, and indeed such affiliation is virtually enjoined upon us by the ornithological facts. It requires no stretch of imagination to see in the turnstone a miniature oyster-catcher, especially in flight when the pied pattern of the former becomes very distinctive. Moreover, there is the impugnable testimony of its Faroese and Norwegian names: Far. *fjørutjaldur* lit. 'foreshore oyster-catcher', Norw. *sandtjeld* lit. 'sand oyster-catcher', further the admirably apt Far. *tjaldursgrælingur* lit. 'oyster-catcher's *grælingur*', on this last element see FBN, 30 f. We therefore propose to regard *tildra*, *tildri* as derivatives of *tjaldur* and standing in the same relation to it as, say, Norw. *spildra* 'piece, strip (of wood)' to *spjald*. In this context we recall the Orkney form *chaldro* (above) which can go back to ON **tjaldra* or **tjaldri*, postulates comparable to the modern Icelandic forms under discussion.

In conclusion, it will not be entirely irrelevant to mention Eng. *teal*, Middle Eng. *tēle*, and the synonymous derivatives in Low Ger. *teling*, Dutch *taling*, Frisian *tjilling*. The philology of the continental words has recently been clarified by W. J. Buma, *Ūs Wurk* (1974), 91—93, and his findings enable us to identify an onomatopoeic base of the same type as postulated above for ON *tjaldur*, cf. next *TPS*. This is not to imply that the assumed Scandinavian and West Germanic roots are related in the strictly genetic sense. They are doubtless independent, arising at different times, but owing their origin to the same basic principle.

ÚRTAK

Í greinini eru blandað uppískoyti til ymist, sum hævundurin hevur áður skrivað um føroysk fuglanøvn.

Sýnt verður, at *krypilsont* merkti upprunaliga 'krikont' (Anas crecca). Noa-navnið *stálkoka* 'kráka' verður greint sum merkingarlíga javnsett við hitt sammerkta *bláboka* og sýnt verður, at *súla* er serlig nýtsla av orðinum í upprunamerking síni 'eitthvørt klovið'. *Tjaldur* verður tulkað sum fornt ljóðherminavn, av einum stovni **tel-*, og ísl. *tildra* 'tjaldursgrælingur' sum avleiðsla. Skyldur stovnur er eisini funnin í enskum *teal* 'krikont'.