

Faroese Bird-Name Origins

VI

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Faroese Names for the Little Auk

We refer first to the convincing treatment of *fulkobbi*, *-kubbi* 'little auk' by H. Hamre, *Fróðskaparrit*, xix, 117 ff., where it is demonstrated that the original form will be *fulkubbi* for **fúlkubbi* lit. 'stinking lump'. In this connection we may be forgiven a reference back to our own contribution (*Fróð.*, xvi, 104 ff.) and observe that the lines of development in the case of *imbrimil* 'great northern diver' from original **hímbrimi* (*Fróð.*, xx, 43) and of *fulkobbi* via *fulkubbi* from original **fúlkubbi* are now seen to be exactly parallel. In both cases, by a secondary shift, a bird name has been brought into association with a seal name. It goes without saying that the reduction of the originally long vowel in the first element shows that both words go back into the Middle Ages.

The second welcome step forward is Hamre's demonstration that the second element in Far. (Suðuroy) *báraffjertur* 'little auk', (Fugloy) *báruffjertur*, *-fjarti*, *-fjarta* (*Faroese Bird Names*, 66) actually means 'fart', cf. Norw. *baarafjært*, synonymous *-fis* 'little auk' (*l. c.*). We study matters further in connection with our previous contribution (*Fróð.*, xviii, 187—7). The Norwegian provenance of these names may now be taken for granted with the implication that the Norwegian sense 'little auk' will also have been the primary meaning in Faroese — indeed this is the meaning in the earliest attestation 'Barufiard'

(Clusius, 1605). The obloquious nature of the name cannot fail to recall synonymous Icel. *haftyrðill* lit. 'ocean turd', also known from a *pula* in the old language. And, to make a three-some, we can quote Far. *fulkobbi*, *-kubbi*, now recognised as meaning 'stinking lump'. Thus, throughout our area, the names of the little auk are uniformly defamatory, a remarkable fact which must have its justification in some ancient aspect of seaman's lore. We know that *haftyrðill* goes back to the Middle Ages, and we have deduced as much for *fulkobbi*. The same must apply to *baarafjært*, *-fis*, for the second element lit. 'fart', not 'farther' as in more modern terminology, is a sure sign of an ancient formation (*Fróð.*, xvi, 102 f., xix, 129 ff.).

Icel. *haftyrðill* 'little auk' has a formal correspondence in Far. *havtyrðil* 'stormy petrel'. We have shown in our previous contribution that the Faroese sense is secondary, at the same time noting that no (original) petrel name in our area is known to bear a pejorative connotation. Now that the etymology of Norw. *baarafjært* is satisfactorily explained, there can be no doubt that the Faroese meaning 'stormy petrel' is secondary. Recognition of this fact also helps us to understand better the Suðuroy term *bárufjatlá*. It will not be an entirely independent creation, but rather a further development of a form as, e. g. *bárufjarta* above. That is to say, the original meaning of the word 'little auk' changed to 'stormy petrel' and then the obscure *-fjarta* was altered to *-fjatlá* lit. 'hopper' in order to give the name a tangible meaning, i. e. 'wave hopper'. In the contribution referred to, we explained that the reported meaning of *bárufjatlá*, namely 'Sclavonian grebe', could not be original, but must have previously been 'stormy petrel'. The new facts now available naturally confirm this identification.

The background to the semantic shift from 'little auk' to 'stormy petrel' will have been the same in the case of Far. *havtyrðil*, the name of the lesser known arctic bird being transferred to the more familiar petrel in the service of name taboo. Indeed, the Fugloy names are expressly stated to have been usual in *sjómál*. The same doubtless once applied to Suðuroy

bárufjatla, and we remember that *fjatla* is also known as an independent noa name for 'crow' (*FBN*, 61, 69). Though we are not aware of any Faroese evidence, it is probable that the name of the little auk, too, was involved in the taboos to which the names of so many seabirds have been subjected. This would be grounds enough for the borrowing of Norw. *baarafjært* in the first place.

Gorfuglur

As is well known, *gorfuglur* 'great auk' goes back to synonymous ON *geirfugl* (*FBN*, 52), but etymologists are not agreed as to how the name is to be explained. In the *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik*, xvii, 258—62, we recall that *geirfugl* also has the meaning 'gerfalcon' and argue that the sense 'great auk' arose in the colonies in the west as a humorous noa name. The name was in use in Shetland and Orkney, and although not actually recorded in Norn, is seen as a loan in Sc. Eng. *gair-*, *garefowl* (forthcoming *Neuphil. Mitteilungen*).

The term also passed into Scottish Gaelic, St Kilda being the last refuge of the bird in the British Isles. Here the Norse name appears as *gearrbhall* (A. Carmichael, *Carmina Gadelica*, iv, 110) showing assimilation to *gearr* after the harsh cry, and *ball* 'spot', an allusion to the white spot in front of the eye; the onomatopoeic element *gearr* appears as an independent bird name in both Irish and Scottish Gaelic, denoting a variety of species, see Dinneen, Dwelly (*Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie*, xxxiv, 158).

Hyplingur

In *Fróð.*, xiii, 47—50, we showed that *hyplingur* rather than *hiplingur* is the etymologically correct spelling of the cormorant's Faroese name; it goes back to ON **hypplingr*, certainly of Viking age, witness Manx *huplin*, and is a derivative of

huppr 'hip' in reference to the distinctive white spot (*hyplings-blettur*) which often figures in cormorant names, cf. *FBN*, 26. We subsequently (*Fróð.*, xvi, 106 f.) had reason to suppose that the name must have arisen as a noa word. There seems to be more evidence in the same direction.

As the analysis shows, *hyplingur* means literally something like 'fellow with the hip', but the tell-tale spot which provided the motivation is surprisingly not mentioned. We may now compare the name with a Norwegian synonym *kvitlåring* lit. 'fellow with the white thigh', the same word as Shetland Norn *hwītlorin*, which however also appears simply as *lorin*, i. e. the stage exemplified by *hyplingur*. We conclude, therefore, that ON **hypplingr* will have been an abbreviated form of an original **hvithypplingr*, interpreting the short form as a step in the direction of anonymity in the interest of word taboo, essentially as in the case of *bakur* 'greater black-backed gull' from *svartbakur* (*Fróð.*, xxiii, 22).

Mortítlingur

The wren name *mortítlingur* poses no formal problems, cf. *FBN*, 28, and one sees that it arose after the analogy of the common name *grátítlingur* lit. 'grey tit'. But what actually led to the coining and widespread acceptance of this new name in the face of the old-established *músabróðir*?

It seems that the point of departure is to be sought in the now little used synonym *hin morreyði* lit. 'the dark brown one', in reference to the colour of the bird's back. We have here yet another of those somewhat imprecise circumlocutions based on adjectives and commonly found in evasive names, as *hin halli* 'shearwater' lit. 'the sloping one' or *hin bláa á køstinum* 'crow' lit. 'the black one on the midden' (*FBN*, passim). At all events, the wren has obviously been considered important enough to be referred to with some deference, otherwise the use of such a term would be inexplicable. The Faroese wren is a noted vocalist; listen to M. á Ryggi, *Fuglabókin*, 11: *Altíð er hann*

fróur og kátur, syngur bæði árla og síðla, og syngur fagraast av øllum Føroya fuglum — og so harðmælt hatta lítla er! But alas! this sweet song is poor comfort, for it portends more rain. That is why the wren has the nicknames *váti skalli* and *vatn-skøltur*.

We have evidently identified the milieu in which the epithet *morreyði* became closely attached to the wren (following the masculine gender of already existing *músabróðir*). With the subsequent creation of the semantically more transparent *mor-títlingur*, there appeared a prosaic competitor with clear advantages over *músabróðir* which, though traditional and apposite, is nevertheless an unusual sort of bird name.

Stórfuglur

This collective term for guillemots and razorbills is discussed in *FBN*, 70, and characterised as a term likely to have arisen in fowler's parlance. This aspect we now endeavour to bring into sharper focus.

First, the motivation. We note that the two species are commonly named as one and this appears to be traditional, cf. synonymous *svartføtti*, further the parallel use of Icel. *svart-fugl* (*Fróð.*, xxii, 110), and of course the two species regularly consort and may, in popular use, go under a single name, as e. g. Eng. *murre*. But neither is by any stretch of the imagination the largest bird known in the Faroes. On the other hand, if we are dealing with a fowling term, then other considerations can apply, and here a remark from the oldest source for the name seems to confirm this. The source in question is R. H. Resen, *Færøerne*, ms. from c. 1673, as follows (*Færoensia* ix, 48 f.): *Lomviven* er ret en stor Fugl, saaat den og derfor af Færøerne kaldes Stor Fugl, but in the parallel Latin text we find *Lomviven*, avis satis magna: ut ideo Færoensibus vocetur *storfugel* sive avis magna per excellentiam. The addition 'per excellentiam' suggests that economic interests are involved. This being so, *stórfuglur* 'big bird' may be understood as a

large species particularly sought after by fowlers, i. e. the guillemot. And since this species and the razorbill were traditionally associated, *stórfuglur* automatically covered both species. Such a name would perhaps contrast, at least by implication, with *smáfuglur* 'little bird', presumably the puffin, that other common object of the fowler's efforts.

A term like the present reminds one cogently of similar rather imprecise-sounding names known to have evasive connotations. We imagine that *stórfuglur*, too, will ultimately belong to this category.

Storkur 'stork' — a notable sequel

In *Fróð.*, xxii, 111 f., we showed that this Common Germanic name literally means 'stick' or the like, a nickname motivated by the bird's habit of resting on one leg. It was observed that German dialect preserves meanings close to the basic sense, namely Tirolese 'stem; tree-stump', Bavarian 'fishing rod', further medieval Ger. *Storch* 'penis'.

It may interest readers to learn that this etymology has, in turn, lead to the solution of an outstanding problem of European folklore. We refer to the popular tradition that the stork brings the babies. The reason for this and associated notions has hitherto remained a total mystery, see *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens*, viii, 501.

My colleague, Dr S. Lucas, however, now draws attention to the medieval sense of *Storch* (above) and notes that in former times the word thus signified both 'stork' and 'penis'. Here is an obvious link between the bird name and a sexual organ, and evidently the beginning of the involvement of the stork in the baby business. The sense 'penis' occurs in the phrase *des Mannes Storch* (M. Lexer, *Mittelhochdeutsches Handwörterbuch*), the source being *Codex germanicus monacensis* 317, 71, an Austrian medical miscellany from the first half of the 15th century. It is reasonable to assume that the tradition in question is at least as old as this. Furthermore, in the present

connection, we should mention another German stork name, *Adebar* or *Odebar*, going back to late Old High German times and conjectured to mean 'fortune-bearer', cf. F. Kluge, *Etym. Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache* (any edition) 'Adebar'. If this conjecture is correct, the tradition in question could be of early medieval age. We ourselves, however, following H. Suolahti, *Die deutschen Vogelnamen*, 370, regard this interpretation (which goes back to Grimm) as untenable. One could perhaps argue that such notions could not arise until the stork, which by nature nests in trees, came into intimate contact with man by taking possession of his roof-tops. This seems to imply fairly substantial buildings and these could hardly have existed in Germany until the beginning of medieval times. At any rate, a medieval (as opposed to a very ancient) date is in line with the fact that similar beliefs were, according to the *Hwb. d. dent. Aberglaubens*, *loc. cit.*, unknown to the Romans.

New names

The publication of J. H. W. Poulsen, *Føroysk-donsk orðabók. Eykabind* (1974), has made accessible a number of new names of interest here.

We begin with two new root words, apparently isolated in Faroese. First: *frebbi* 'old puffin (with very broad beak)', also in a figurative sense 'boaster'. On this evidence the word has a basic meaning 'big beak' and appears to be an expressive formation, but we have not identified a possible cognate. Second: *válkur* quoted as a local term for an unspecified species of 'small gull'. The name will not be ancient, and the word itself has already been recorded, albeit in a very different sense, by Svabo, *Indberetninger*, 894 f.: Paa Hovedet, naar en Pige staaer Brud, legges en Krands, bestaaende af glimrende Blomster og Baand, og kaldes *V a a l k u r*. This word can hardly be anything else than Low Ger. *walk* 'tuft of hair, etc.', a term borrowed as *valk* into Danish (also Swedish) and Norwegian, and developing a wide semantic range, cf. Torp, *Nynorsk etym.*

ordbok, etc. With such limited information about the present name, one can only guess at the motivation, but if the primary sense is 'chick', then the appearance will most likely have been responsible. For the Faroese form (with *á*), cf. *válka* 'rummage in filth' (ON *valka*).

Next, variants of two etymologically obscure items already known. First: *skurur*, a local variant of *skuri* 'immature gull'. The new form confirms the impression that *skuri* is ultimately the same word as Norw. *skur* 'Spurv, eller Fugl som ligner Spurv' (Aasen) and distinct from *skári* (preserved in Svabo's *svarþaksskári*) which it eventually replaced. We imagine developments to have been as follows. The Faroese cognate of Norw. *skur*, whether **skur* or *skurur*, at one time denoted the gull chick, but subsequent confusion with the traditional name *skári* led to the present compromise form *skuri* 'immature gull'. A postulated earlier sense 'chick' also removes any appreciable problem in connecting the Norwegian and Faroese names semantically, and agrees reasonably with the first Faroese attestation in Resen's 'Skuren, en lille graae Fugl'. See *FBN*, 48. Possibly, too, a reminiscence of the meaning 'chick' survives in the newly reported *skurapisa* 'gull chick', which has every appearance of being tautological. Second: *-steppa*, *-stiffa*, variants of *-stebba*, *-steffa* in *álku*-, *lomvigastebba*, *-steffa* 'razorbill, guillemot' in its first year (*FBN*, 24). Though the etymology continues to elude us, the forms appear to belong to the category of expressive words.

Names posing no etymological problems are *alífuglur* 'tame bird' (as hen, duck), cf. *alípisa* 'chick of seabird raised by hand' (*FBN*, 86). Next, *bakfuglur* lit. 'back bird', a collective term for brooding guillemots. Mr Poulsen kindly informs us that this name has been reported from places so far apart as Gjógv and Hvalba, and from the latter comes the explanation that *bak*- alludes to the fact that the brooding birds sit on the ledges with their dark-coloured backs away from the rock face, in contrast to the non-breeders, which sit the other way round and show their white breasts. Further, *flekkusúla* lit. 'spotted

gannet' (*flekkur* 'spot'), synonymous with *oyðisúla* and *grinduboka* 'gannet in its second and third year' where *flekku-* is perhaps after the analogy of *grindu-* (*FBN*, 20), for the species as such an obsolete *súlugás* lit. 'gannet goose', a not unexpected tautology having an (independent) parallel in Eng. *solan* goose (*ZAA*, xxi, 418 ff.). Then a collective *seiðafuglur* 'birds, esp. large gulls, feeding on *seiður* (small coalfish)'. Next, *sildahøna* lit. 'herring hen', a name for the red-necked phalarope, main name *hálsareyði* (*FBN*, 50), and *velhvíti* 'stormy petrel' lit. 'tail white', parallel to standard *drunnhvíti* (*FBN*, 66 f.). The name *villgás* [vil-] 'wild goose' may be compared to already recorded *villdunna* 'wild duck' (*FBN*, 12). Two nicknames may now be mentioned: for the wren, *vatnskalli* substantially the same as *vatnskøltur* lit. 'water skull', also *váti skalli* (under 'Mortítlingur' above), and similarly for that other weather prophet the snipe, *vætuskøltur* (*væta* 'rain'), with which compare — in spirit — *døggreyv* lit. 'dew backside' (*FBN*, 16). The name *uglubóndi*, defined as 'hanugle', seems a special case. The term is only known from the traditional *Fuglakvæði* (*CCF*, vi, 279), where it will be a nonce word, reflecting the use of *bóndi* lit. 'husbandman' in the specialised sense 'husband', still locally in *dótturbóndi* 'son-in-law', as the context confirms: *tá kom ugla og uglubóndi* 'then came the owl and the owl's husband'. Lastly, more evidence for the practice of name taboo among fishermen in the shape of two sea terms for the crow, bringing the total for this inauspicious bird up to eleven or twelve, cf. *FBN*, 61. The names are *várklukka* and *vattarbak*. The former was only applicable in springtime; it is lit. 'spring clucker', cf. *klukka* 'to cluck', morphologically comparable to another noa name for this bird *fjatla* lit. 'hop', i. e. 'hopper', beside *do.* 'to hop', cf. 'Faroesse names for the Little Auk' above. The latter, lit. 'back of (woollen) mitten, esp. when resewn to make a shoe for use on a slippery beach', is pretty obviously a noa name of the humorous type (*FBN*, 64): reused as a shoe, the back of the mitten would soon get as black as the back of a crow.

A Note on Names in *-us*

In *FBN*, 46, we characterised *gneggjus* and *pippus* as agent nouns from *gneggja* 'neigh' and *pippa* 'chirp' — and later (*Fróð.*, xix, 125 f.) explained *meyrus* as lit. 'prodder' from a lost **meyra* — referring these and comparable formations (*hvinus*, *gánus* or *kánus*) to the influence of Latinate proper names in *-us*, as Dan. *Rasmus*, also Far. *Hanus*, *Janus*.

One will not doubt that the common nouns are morphologically akin to the proper names. Nevertheless, it is still not entirely clear how the ending, distinctive though it is, actually came to function as an agent suffix. One can deduce, however, that there was probably, at some stage, a special point of contact between the foreign names in *-us* and indigenous Norse.

One of the most popular names of this type, and by far the oldest, is *Magnus* which according to *Heimskringla* came to Norway as a royal name in 1204 (*Fróð.*, xxi, 113, 148). It is apparent that this foreign name could be brought into close association with native Scandinavian *magn* 'strength', *magna* 'strengthen', so that *Magnus* could then, by folk etymology, be interpreted as 'Strengtheners', a very appropriate explanation of a name borne by so many of the high and mighty, and of course not so far removed from the literal meaning of the Latin, i. e. 'great', an item of knowledge which would not be lost on some. This we therefore indentify as the crucial point of contact from which *-us* emerged as an agent suffix and became moderately productive.

Turning now to the proper names in *-us*, one notices that these are prominent in Faroese, the number of those taken over directly, as *Rasmus*, being augmented by others created by sound substitution; thus *Klaus* and *Landres* were naturalised as *Kláus*, *Landrus*. Similarly the very common *Hanus* for *Hanes*, whence analogically the also ubiquitous *Janus*. Indeed, *-us* has on occasion helped to assimilate quite exotic forms, as *Mórus* for *Mourits*, thus perhaps setting a precedent for such a word as *klappus* 'hooded seal', Dan. *klapmyds*. The presence

of *-us* in so many familiar names gave this ending a tangible status, which may well be regarded as a predisposing factor in the evolution of the agent suffix. Apart from *Magnus*, proper names of this sort did not become common until after the Reformation. It therefore seems likely that the formations in question are not older than the 16th century.

ÚRTAK

Í greinini verður fyrst tikið til umrøðu navnið *fulkubbi* og sýnt, at eins og í íslenskum og norskum, er upprunamerkingin niðrandi; fuglurin man hava verið illa umtóktur av sjómonnum. Navnið *gorfuglur* verður skýrt sum skemtandi eyknevni, tí at fn. *geirfugl* hevur upprunaliga merkingina 'geirfalkur' (t. e. fn. *geirfalki*, helst 'veiðifalkur' (*Falco gyrfalco* L.)). Navnið *hyplingur* verður skilt sum stuttformur av fn. **hvíthypplingr* 'fuglur við hvítum huppi'. Undir navninum *mortítlingur* verður hildið at búgva *hin morreyði* í líking við navnið *grátítlingur*. Stórfuglur er lýst sum fuglamannaorð. *Storkur* er í royndum eyknevni við bókstavligu merkingini 'stavur, steyrur' — fuglurin stendur ofta á einum beini. Tað er sama orðið sum tý. *Storch*, sum eisini kundi merkja 'penis'. Tað at fuglurin og kynslimurin av málsligum hendingi eru vorðnir navnar hevur kanska av fyrstu tíð givið tilstuding til hugmyndina um, at storkurin kemur við børnunum. Nøkur fuglanøvn, sum higartil hava ikki verið á prenti, eru at finna í eykabindinum (1974) til føroysku-donsku orðabókina. Summi av hesum nøvnum eru tikin til umrøðu, lutvíst í samanburði við nøvn, ið áður vóru kend. At enda er sýnt, at upprunin at fuglanøvnum, sum enda við *-us*, sum eitt nú *gneggjus* av *gneggja*, fylgir mynstrinum *Magnus*, sum eftir almenningsskýring kundi verið runnið av sagnorðinum *magna*.