

Faroese Bird-Name Origins

(VIII)

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Lerkur 'lark'

Far. *lerkur* is, to all appearances, a borrowing from Danish, see *Faroese Bird Names*, 74. The name is indubitably part of the Common Germanic heritage, and it is this aspect we discuss below.

The relevant forms will be (North Germanic) OWN *lævirki* m., OSwed. *lerikia* f. whence Swed. *lärka*, Dan. *lærke*, (West Germanic) OEng. *lāwrice*, MLGer. *lēwerike*, OHGer. *lērihha*, older **lēurihha* (cf. *sēla*, older *sēula* beside OEng. *sāwol*, Goth. *saiwala* 'soul'), then N. Fris. *lāsk*. Falk-Torp, *Norw.-dän. etym. Wörterbuch*, thought it probable that all these forms ultimately went back to Pr.Gmc. **laiwazakōn*, consisting of **laiwaz-* with the suffix *-ak-*, as in Goth. *ahaks* 'dove'.

It will be convenient to start our commentary from these conclusions. In the first place, one recognises the presence of a *k*-suffix, not infrequent with bird names, but the form *-ak-* can hardly be in order; it must be *-ik-*, as the examples themselves testify, and cf. Kluge, *Stammbildungslehre*³, 24, 33. Falk-Torp do not explain the postulate **laiwaz-* further, but this element has always been considered to be onomatopoeic, a view going back at least as far as Jakob Grimm, *Kleine Schriften*, ii, 124. One has little doubt that this is substantially correct, seeing that the lark's song is a most striking feature and as such likely to lead to the creation of a name. An echoic base **laiw-*

is entirely plausible; one may compare *inter alia* Greek *laíein* 'to sound'. Nevertheless, the formal details remain obscure, and we accordingly turn our attention to these.

We deal first with the West Germanic words. They are feminine and evidently stem from a single ancestor. It could be Falk-Torp's postulate suitably amended to **laiwazikōn*, where *-ikōn* is identifiable as an archaic diminutive, cf. Kluge, 35. However, this is not the only permissible reconstruction; **laiwizikōn* is equally possible, and superior, for it yields a more tangible morphology, as can next be shown.

It is to be expected that a termination so ancient as *-ikōn* will have been attached to the stem of the basic word. We therefore posit a neuter *s*-stem, nom.acc. **laiwaz* (for the termination cf. Lat. *genus*, both Lat. *-us* and Gmc. **az* going back to IE **-os*), inflecting stem **laiwez-* (cf. Lat. *gener-*, originally **genes-*), a noun of imitative origin with the meaning 'song' and used to name the lark, thus another example of the employment of an abstract noun in this function, cf. *Svanur* 'swan' below. To this stem, the suffix *-ikōn* was subsequently added after the analogy of other bird names, cf. Kluge, 24, 32f., giving **laiwezikōn* whence by normal evolution **laiwizikōn* (*e* becoming *i* due to following *i*) literally 'songster'.

We now notice the surprising N. Fris. *lāsk* for expected **lārke*, cf. W. Fris. *ljurk*. The North Frisian name, here normalised following *lāask* of the archaic language of Föhr and Amrum, occurs with appropriate variation in all the dialects except that of Sylt, where *lörki* is found, but pretty obviously a Danicism. As there seems no possibility of explaining *s* for *r* in terms of internal North Frisian change, we conclude that N. Fris. *lāsk* must represent an independent development of the Common Germanic form postulated above. It has then evidently descended via a contracted **laiwizkōn*, realised as **laiwiskōn*, thus preserving as a sibilant a consonant otherwise regularly rhotacised.

The North Germanic forms may now be considered. OSwed. *lærikiā* f. will continue an earlier **laiwrikia*; it requires no ima-

gination to presume a more original **laiwrika* to bring it into line with the West Germanic form. OWN *lævirki* m. can derive by metathesis from **lævriki*, presupposing **laiwriki*, i.e. with substitution of the masculine termination but otherwise agreeing with East Norse. Needless to say, such differentiations are commonplace in the sphere of bird names. The Scandinavian forms may thus be fitted without further ado into a Common Germanic background. There is no reason to contemplate borrowing from West Germanic, as has been suggested, e.g. by De Vries, *Anord. etym. Wörterbuch*. Such a suggestion is, moreover, a priori unlikely on ornithological grounds — the lark is an abundant species everywhere in the traditional Germanic areas; there would be no call for such borrowing.

Svala 'swallow'

The immediate source of the Faroese is, of course, ON *svala*, a Common Germanic term, cf. OEng. *swealwe*, OHGer. *swalwa*, presupposing Pr. Gmc. **swalwōn* f. The ultimate origin of this name, however, has been an etymological riddle. To be sure, etymologists have tried to find cognate material in other Indo-European languages, but a glance through the dictionaries shows that there is no consensus, only a handful of isolated conjectures, all admittedly tentative, see e.g. De Vries, *Anord. etym. Wb*. In view of these difficulties, we would see in *svala* a purely Germanic name, i.e. one arising in Germanic, and therefore most likely explicable in terms of the Germanic known to us.

Passing in review etymologisable swallow names in various languages, we observe that the bird may be called after its distinctive forked tail. An example of such a name is widespread in Gaelic: Irish *gabhlán*, cf. *gabhal* 'fork', further Scots Gael. *gòbhlan*, Manx *gollan*. The Germanic name was evidently similarly motivated, since *svala* is recognisable in ON *súla*, as follows. The meanings of this word are 1) post, prop, support, pillar, column, 2) two crossed pieces of wood tied round a pig's neck to prevent it breaking through fences, 3) gannet (cf.

Fritzner, *Ordbog*, iii, 597). We may add that a basic meaning 'fork' for 2) is confirmed by the sense in Faroese, namely 'kløftet, gaffelformet træredskab, ramme, hvorpå fiskeesnøren ophæspes' (Jacobsen-Matras, *Føroysk-Donsk Orðabók*), this special sense again, and related meanings, in Norwegian (Torp, *Nynorsk etym. Ordbok*).

We next consider the different meanings of the Old Norse, but noticing first that in meaning 1) the form may be *súl*, this latter corresponding exactly to synonymous OHGer., OLGer. *sūl*, and with ablaut to Goth. *sauls*. Looking now at the other meanings, it can be stated that 3) is definitely derived from 2), reference being to the crossed wing tips, black in contrast to the otherwise white plumage (*Fróðskaparrit*, xxiii, 26f.). But how are the disparate meanings of 1) and 2) to be reconciled? We recall that *súl* is attested only in meaning 1). It is therefore arguable that *súl* can have influenced *súla* in point of this meaning, with the rider that the original sense of the latter is seen in meaning 2). This being so, the apparently unbridgeable semantic discrepancy between *súl* 'post, etc.' and *súla* 'fork' implies etymologically distinct words. If *súl* affected *súla* semantically, it is not hard to believe that it did so morphologically as well. We therefore propose to regard *súla* as a corruption of *svala* 'fork', lost in this original sense, but preserved in the bird name.

Svanur 'swan'

Far. *svanur* descends directly from ON *svanr*, a Common Germanic word, cf. OEng., OHGer. *swan*; one postulates Pr. Gmc. **swanaz*. In *Fróðskaparrit* xix, 129f., it was noted that this term is comparable to Lat. *sōnus*, Skt. *svanás* 'sound, noise, cry, call', whence it follows that some such meaning lies behind the Germanic name, 'swan' being then literally '(swan-) song'. In this, of course, we were following a well known etymology, so that the general validity of the above statements will scarcely be challenged. On the other hand, we now notice an ornithological problem, hitherto overlooked, which has an important bearing on the *Realien*.

There are three European species of swan: 1) the mute swan, 2) the whooper swan, 3) Bewick's swan. On the evidence of their present geographic range, all three may be taken as having been known in the traditional areas of Germanic speech, i.e. South Scandinavia and North Germany, where Pr.Gmc. **swanaz* is presumed to have acquired its recorded meaning. However, only the mute swan is actually resident in these areas, the other two being simply winter visitors. Bewick's swan is a somewhat silent bird, but the whooper is noisier and it has been assumed that this species motivated the name, cf. e.g. Kluge, *Etym. Wb. d. deut. Sprache*¹³ 'Schwan'. It seems, however, surprising that a visiting species rather than a resident should have been responsible for the name. Indeed, in the present case it is hardly credible, for how could a word clearly meaning sound, noise or the like be applied to name birds, the most familiar species of which was mute? We note, too, that Pr.Gmc. **swanaz* reflects a Proto-Indo-European word with the sense of sound in general; it is clearly not associated with any particular sound, such as the nasal trumpeting of the whooper. These circumstances persuade us that the name was not motivated by any call, but by a unique peculiarity of the mute swan. Its flight is characterised by a metallic throb of the wings, and this 'music' is, in favourable conditions, audible over a mile away, cf. H. F. Witherby *et al.*, *Handbook of British Birds*, iii, 168. And naturally we wonder if it was not this same peculiarity which was ultimately responsible for the concept 'swan song', handed down from Classical Antiquity.

We next consider Pr.Gmc. **swanaz* in relation to the other traditional Germanic swan name seen in ON *álpt* etc. f., comparable to OEng. *iel fetu* f., and further to OHGer. *elbiz*, older *albiz* m. These words are, in their turn, to be compared with Slavonic forms, as Russ. *lébed'* m.f. or, in an older variety, Slov. *labód* f. (Vasmer, *Russ. etym. Wb.*). The foregoing names are plausibly referred to a root seen in Lat. *albus* 'white', also in Greek *alphós* 'dull-white leprosy' (Liddell & Scott), the bird being thus called after its resplendent white plumage. It can

hardly be doubted that this is the older term and therefore, not surprisingly for a bird name, considerably differentiated in form both as between Germanic and Slavonic as well as within the two linguistic groups themselves. Without a doubt this word goes back to the Old European period. Pr.Gmc. **swanaz*, on the other hand, is seen to be a later, purely Germanic development; it shows only minimal variations in form in the various descendent languages. We suppose that a name of this nature most likely arose as a fowler's term.

Okn 'swan' and related matters

We recall that Far. *okn* is a corrupt form which has been associated with ON *álpt*, hence the presumed sense 'swan'. In this connection, we further refer to the toponym *Oknadalur*. As explained in *FBN*, 57f., this name cannot be taken as evidence for *okn* 'swan'. We now think that, after all, *Okna-* must stand for original **Opna-*, i.e. with characteristic composition vowel from ON *opinn* 'open', the name 'Open Dale' being explained as a dale open at one end, a name applicable to the three dales in question. We now view the sporadic West Norse change of *p* to *k* in the combinations *pn*, *ps*, *pt*, in a somewhat different light. The change, evidenced e.g. in Far. *vákn* beside original *vápn* 'weapon', is certainly ancient having been present in Viking times, as proved by the earliest datable occurrence (1086 A.D., five times in Domesday Book) *Loctus* for literary *lopthús* 'upper room, etc.' and also by Sc.Gael. *ucas*, *ucsa* 'mature coalfish', a loanword from Norse, presupposing OWN **uksi* beside recorded *upsi* (W.B.L., *Namn och Bygd*, lxvi, 54f., *Scottish Gaelic Studies*, ix, 128—31). We may therefore argue that the change was widespread in the earliest Faroese; as well known, dale names in the Faroes can be assumed to go back to the Settlement in the 9th century. In the event, **Opna-* was changed to *Okna-* in spite of its original transparency etymologically, just as in *Loctus* above.

It will now be appropriate to consider Far. *opna* (ON ~) both as a verb '(to) open' and as a noun lit. 'opening', but in

Faroese specialised to denote the two pages visible in an opened book, a sense also known in Icelandic. In the case of the verb, it is arguable that the change of *p* to *k* did not establish itself owing to the ever-present connection with the adjective *opin* 'open'. In the case of the noun, one could hardly more obviously be dealing with a book word, hence the strong suspicion that here the literary tradition militated against the change. There remains *opna* 'cow seal', a term which (to the best of our knowledge) has not yet been etymologised. It is possible to analyse *opna* as a substantivisation of *opin* 'open' in the specialised sense of 'giving milk' (Pouslen, *Føroysk-Donsk Orðabók. Eykabind*). That being so, *opna* is idiomatically 'milker', doubtless a term proper to seal hunter's parlance. It will be a relatively recent creation, at all events arising after the change of *p* to *k* had ceased to operate.

ÚRTAK

Lerkur er komið um danskt úr fornum eystur-norðurlenskum **laiwrikia*, sum er at rekja aftur til samgermanskt **laiwezikōn*, ið man hava merkt 'sangari'. *Svala* merkir upprunaliga 'kvísl', ið sipar til kloyvda ella sýlda velið. *Svanur* merkir bókstavliga 'ljóð'; navnið er ikki elvt av málinum, men av veingjasuðinum hjá fuglinum, *Cygnus musicus*. Víst verður eisini á, at *svanur* er yngri navn enn isl. *álpt*. *Okn* er bronglað navn og hevur einki samband við staðarnavnið *Oknadalur*, sum eftir øllum líkindum er upprunaliga **Opnadalur*, sbr. *vákn* < *vápn*.