

On the Oldest Territorial Division of the Faeroe Islands

Um elsta fðroyska jarðarbytið

Rolf Guttesen

Associate Professor Rolf Guttesen, Institute of Geography, University of Copenhagen
Oester Voldgade 10, DK-1350 Copenhagen K
Tel: +45 3532 2500, Fax: +45 3532 2501, e-mail: rg@geogr.ku.dk

Úrtak

Kanningar av ávísum staðanøvnum miðskeiðis á Streymoynni, av tí gamla markatalinum, av gomlum søguligum keldum o.ð. vísa, at tað er gjørligt at endurskapa markið millum tvey høvdingadømi, sum einaferð hava verið, helst í tíðini áðrenn ár 1000. Staðanøvnini benda á, at okkurt hov ella annað heilagt stað hevur verið har. Og møguliga hevur ting verið hildið júst á markinum millum hesi upprunaligu høvdingadømi. Har er funnin ein stórur flatur steinur, tingborð kanska, har rist er við rómartølum IM.

Abstract

It is possible to reconstruct the border between the two original chiefdoms (*lens* or *høvdingadømi*) in the Faeroe Islands, based on place-names from central Streymoy, one of the major, central islands, as well as the Faeroese unit of land value measure (the *markatal*) and historical and other sources. Furthermore, the place-names indicate that there has been some kind of sacred place in the area as well, as this could be the locale where the oldest Thing or parliament was held. The discovery in this area of a flat stone, with a carving of the Roman numerals IM, is discussed.

Introduction and Methodological Considerations

Many years ago when I read *The Journals of the Stanley Expedition to the Faeroe Islands and Iceland in 1789* edited by J. West, I noticed that Baine, one of the expedition's members, reported their visit in Kollafjørður and the climbing of the mountain, Skælingsfjall. In this passage he spelled a certain place-name in a peculiar way. Hundsarabotnur, as it is written in Faeroese today, is a large, cirque valley (*botnur*) north of the mountains Stallur and Skælingur, debouching into Kollfaradalur that crosses the island of Streymoy. Baine spelled this place-name as *Handseleband*, *Handselebund* (twice) and *Hundselebund* (37, 39, 51). Hundsarabotnur is not a mountain, but, seemingly, Baine used this name incorrectly for the mountain, Stallur. From this location, he used a quadrant to measure the height of the surrounding mountains, which were Skillingsfieldt

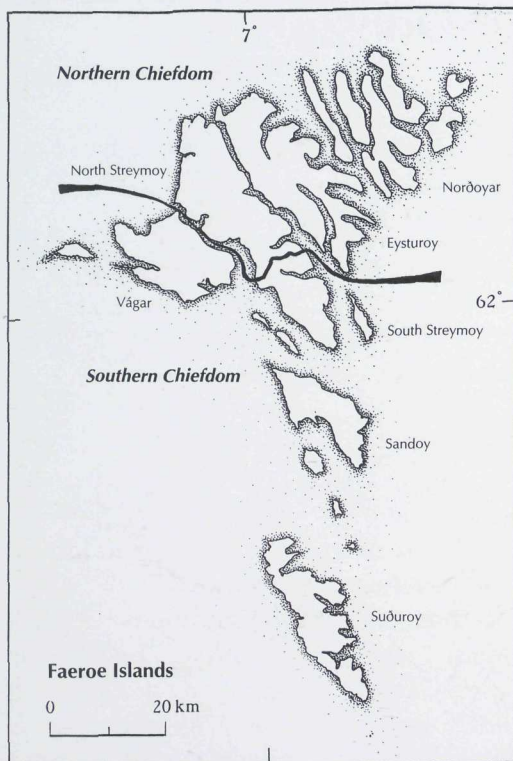


Fig. 1. Faeroe Islands with the proposed boundary between the northern and southern chiefdoms.

Mynd. 1. Føroyakort, har hypotetiska markið millum norðara og sunnara høvdingadømið er innteknað.

(Skælingsfjall), Snais (Sneis), Sunfelle (Sornfelli) and Nickwand (Núgván). Was this a misspelling of Hundsarabotnur, or was the place really pronounced as he wrote it? Let us analyse this question, presuming his spelling to be correct. First, however, some methodological considerations are needed.

When dealing with the old historical-ge-

ographical situation in the Faeroe Islands, the investigations always have a touch of uncertainty or hypothetical thinking. The *Saga of the Faeroese* has often been considered as a “true” document, but certainly it does not tell us the full and true history of the Faeroe Islands. Several other sciences have made new contributions, though they give us but fragmented and dispersed knowledge. Pollen analyses made by the late Jóhansen (1978) have moved the period of the first *landnám* from around 820 back to 600-650. Matras (1957) concludes from certain place-names that people from Rogaland, Hordaland and Sogn in western Norway settled in specific villages. Thorsteinsson (1997) proposes that people from the western regions of Britain settled in Vestmanna. Archaeological findings (Dahl, 1970; Mahler, 1996) indicate a land-use system different from what is known to have been in effect for the last 400 years. In short, the methodology used in this research can be presented as “observation-analysis-synthesis”, where the synthesis perhaps best can be explained as a kind of inference to best explanation. However, we cannot take this best explanation in the strict sense: as natural, scientific explanation. Because of the actual subject matter, we must add some of the basic principles of hermeneutic philosophy as discussed in Pahuus (1995), for instance, and replace interpretation with understanding.

After analysing the first surprising observations tied to the place-names, Hundsarabotnur, Stallur and Hórisgøta, we arrive at a hermeneutic understanding of the possibility of something special attached to

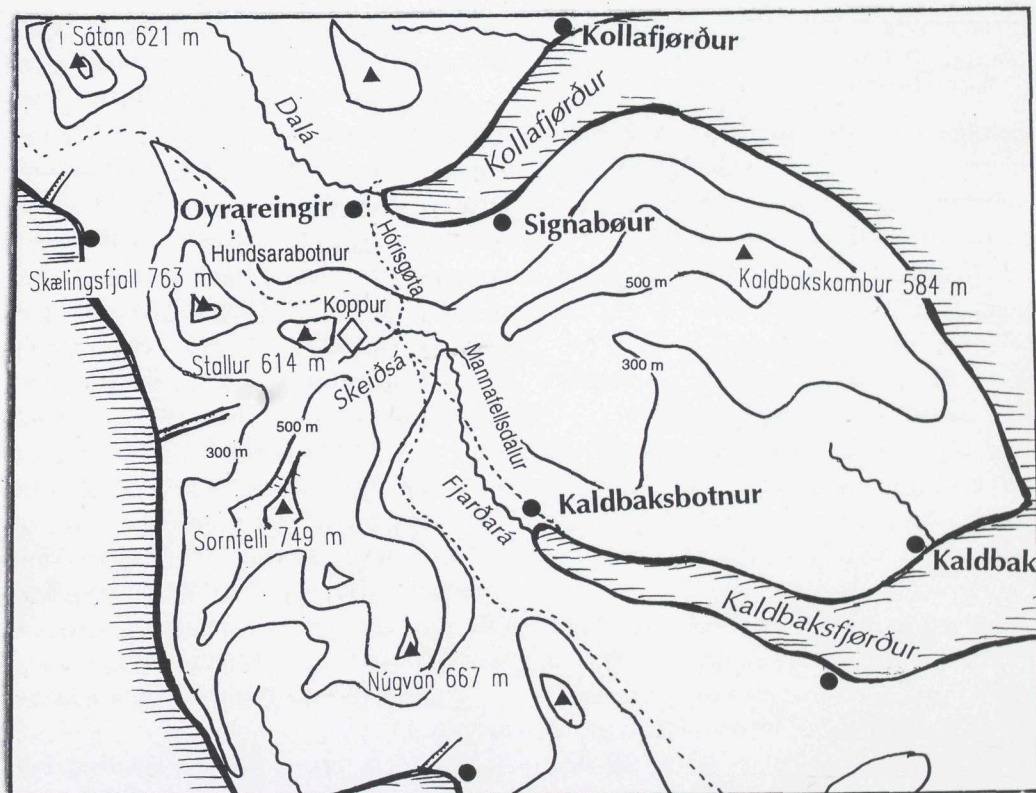


Fig. 2. Sketch of the study area with place-names and main landscape elements.

Mynd 2. Kortskitsa, sum vísir tað kannaða landskaðið á Streymoyinni við staðanøvnum, sum koma fyrri í greinini.

this area on Streymoy, that of an old, sacred place. Moreover, the analysis of the place-names in the same region: Skeiðsá, Ívarsteinar and Mannafeldalur enable us to advance the hypothesis that a boundary of some kind has divided the islands into two main areas. Using the hypothetic-deductive method proposed by, e.g. Popper (1976), we have to ask: What can be deduced from this hypothesis, and can these deductions be corroborated or should they be rejected? If the hypothesis is correct, it could have in-

fluenced such wide-ranging areas as: the clerical and administrative districts of the islands, the territorial perception of the individuals in the *Saga of the Faeroese*, the old land value unit called the *markatal*, the dialects and isoglosses in the islands, the place-names referring to the *landnám*, and perhaps more.

The Place-name, *Hundsarabotnur*

It is remarkable that Baine all three times wrote the place-name, Hundsarabotnur,

with an *l* in the middle, instead of an *r*, as it is written and pronounced in Faeroese today. The other place-names are rather well reproduced by Baine in a kind of phonetic transcription, so it must be assumed that the place-name at that time, some 200 years ago, was pronounced Hundsálabotnur, with an *l*. Later on, this has changed by a consonant shift or analogy to an *r* or *l* > *r*. The analogy influence could stem from the endings in words like *okkara* (ours), *hansara* (his), *ovara* (upper), *niðara* (lower). It could also derive from the compositional fuga used in place-names like Skinnarasker, Norðaraskarð, Slættaratindur, Heimaranes. Otherwise, the consonant shift *r* > *l* is common. Jakobsen (1907, xliii) mentions *Norsoy* > *Nólsoy*. In other cases, there is an ambivalence between *r* > < *l*. Weyhe (1996a) gave me some examples: *Herdals-tindur* > *Heldarstindur*, where both kinds of consonant shift have taken place: the first *r* > *l* and the second *l* > *r*.

Over the cirque, Hundsarabotnur, there is a rock protrusion or knoll called Hundsenni, and in the cirque you find the river Hundsá. The first part of Hundsarabotnur, Hundsenni and Hundsá is usually explained as the genitive *hunds-*, from *hundur* (dog, hound), so Hundsarabotnur can be explained as a distortion of the hypothetical *Hundsáarbotnur. The question is, however, which name is the original one and which are derivatives. If Hundsá is the original name and *Hundsáarbotnur a derivative, then it would be difficult to explain the other derivative: Hundsenni, then it ought to be Hundsáarenni or perhaps Hundsarenni.

If we take the older form *Hundsala-

botnur seriously, we can look for an explanation of this name. In Nielsen (1966), under the reference, *alter* (in English: altar): "In Gothic the designation *hunslastaps* was used for the word 'altar' actually a heathen term "offering place", where the first part is *hunsl* 'sacrifice' (in Danish: offer), that is also preserved in Old English *husl*, but it is of uncertain origin." Heggstad (1958) mentions the meaning in Old Norwegian of *húsl* or *hunsl*, a neutrum, as *Kristi likam* or Corpus Christi in the Eucharist (the Lord's Supper). In Old Icelandic, Zoëga (1910) mentions: *húsl* (n.) as "house" in English (in Danish: *Alterbrød*) and *húsla* (v.) "to house" or administer the Eucharist to someone: "Hann var húslaðr og dó síðan" (He was houseled and then died). The following development is then reasonable:

*Hunslabotnur > Hunsalabotnur > Hunsarabotnur.

The latest form is written Hundsarabotnur, but the *d* is never pronounced in any of the three place-names today. My hypothesis is now that somewhere in the vicinity of the mountain projection, Hundsenni, there was a sacred place or temple (Old Norse: *hov*), which must have been the **Hunsl* that gave name to Hundsenni, Hundsá and also Hundsarabotnur.

The Mountain, *Stallur*

Nielsen (1966) continues his explanation above in this remarkable way: "In Old Norse, yet another old word for 'altar' is handed down: *stallr*, meaning scaffolding, staging (in Danish: stillads) on which idols are placed." It is remarkable because the mountain that Baine called Hundselebund

is named Stallur. Matras (1933: 264) explains the place-name, Stallur, which is found in several other places, as “a projecting part of a mountain, ledge in a slope or mountain side.” This description fits well for many other Stallur place-names in the Faeroes, but not as well for the mountain Stallur, as this place-name refers to a whole, large mountain. Partridge (1983: 659) explains the Indo-European origin of the word, *stall*, as “a stand, a station, fixed position”. From this original meaning, many other words are derived: in German: *stelle*, *stellen* (position, to put upright); in Old Norse: *stallr* (a support, pedestal, i.e. the foot of a stall); in Danish: *stytte*, *stol* (stilt, chair or pew). Furthermore, it is related to Greek: *stele* (an upright gravestone). Kluge (1963) explains: “Grundbedeutung ‘Standort’ ... *stallr* ‘Sockel für Götterbilder, Altar; Krippe’”. Nordland (1982, vol 17: 38) explains that *stalli* (or *stallr*) is a structure (altar) used in worship in heathen times. He also refers to the Norse god, Óðin (Woden), who was called: *Vinr stalla* (friend of the stalls).

My hypothesis is that the place-name, *Stallur*, must be connected with some kind of a sacred place. Thus, on or nearby Stallur mountain, which is relatively high, but quite unproblematic to ascend from the eastern side, there has been a temple, a single-stone monument or an offering place.

The Old Path, *Hórisgøta*

From the old farm at Oyrareingir, the path that connects the northern and southern part of Streymoy ascends steeply up to the

plateau between Kollafjørður and Kaldbaksfjørður. This is one of the few paths in the Faeroes that has a special name. The paths are traditionally named after the village or place to which they lead. Slættanesgøta and Sundsgøta on Vágar, Leynavegur in south of Hvalvík towards Leynar, Havnargøta north of Kvívík towards Vestmanna (-havn). The path name, *Hórisgøta*, thus falls into a special group. It derives from *Pórisgøta*, as it is called in the *Hundabraevið* (the Dog Letter) from the middle of the 14th century (Helgason, 1951: 11), where the first element is the name *Pórir*, or perhaps the name of the god, *Pór*. Winther (1875), who did not know the text of *Hundabraevið*, commented on the path name, *Hórisgøta*. He spells it *Háryggsgøta* (87, note 1), or the High Ridge Path. However, he continues: “But possibly it is *Hofryggsgøta*, i.e. the path on the mountain ridge, where there has been a house of God (*hof*, *hov*)”. This is a remarkable passage, because it seems like Winther is seeking for an explanation of this place-name by connecting it to legends of a *hof* or a house of God, but without telling us about these legends.

The River, *Skeiðsá*

Between the mountains, Stallur and Sornfelli, is the pass Skeiðsskarð, and from this pass flows the river, Skeiðsá, towards the east. But on the plateau between Kollafjørður and Kaldbaksfjørður it turns south and runs into Kaldbaksfjørður as Fjarðará. Neither Jakobsen (1957) nor Matras (1959), both of whom discuss river names in the Faeroes, mentions this name. Both

Heggstad and Zoëga mention several meanings of the word, *skeið*: 1) race, run; 2) racecourse; 3) a piece of a way; 4) a space of time. The basic meaning seems to be something demarcated or measured. Kluge (1963: 640) mentions *Scheide* (f.) in the meaning of "boundary", or "to divide". The same meaning is found in the English word, "shed". Partridge (1983: 614) indicates "shed" means, "to separate", as in watershed, which derives from the Latin *scindere*, "to split". Greek has *skhindere*, "to split", and a derivation from this is "skizofren". In English, a related noun is "shist", in Danish *skifer*. In the meaning as a boundary, the place-name, *Skeiðsá*, can be seen not only as a boundary between the out-fields of neighbouring villages, but, moreover, as the boundary between northern and southern Streymoy. In Iceland, there is a *Skeiðará* on the southern coast, south of Vatnajökull. This river is the boundary between Austur and Vestur Skaftafellssýsla.

I assume, therefore, that *Skeiðsá* means the "boundary river". Otherwise, the names, Marknará (Boundary River), Marknagil (Boundary Creek), Marknagjógv (Boundary Gorge) and other variations are common in the Faeroes to demarcate a boundary of some kind.

Paths and Monumental Stones by *Skeiðsá*

On the plateau near *Skeiðsá*, four paths meet or cross. From Oyrareingir, the above referenced, *Hórisgøta* ascends to this area. From Kollfaradalur, another path ascends more slowly through Hundsarabotnur and

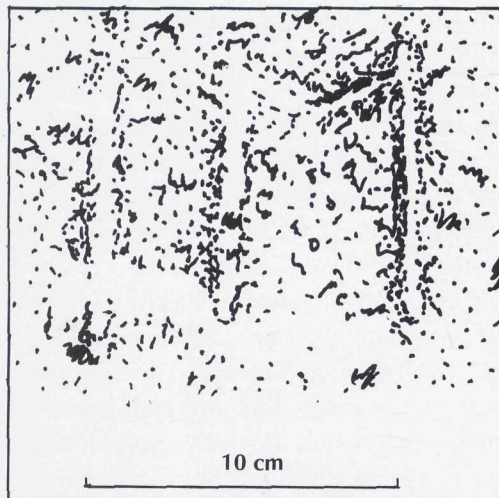


Fig 3. Sketch of the IM carving in the stone in the Valley of Koppurin

Mynd 3. Tekning, sum vísir IM merkið í steinum í Koppinum

along the famous stone, *Brynjumannaborð*, which Hammershaimb (1852: 171) mentions. The victorious warriors in the Battle of Mannafellsdalur celebrated their victory here. (More about this later when discussing the place-name, *Mannafellsdalur*.) From the south, the so-called *Oyggjagøtan* comes from the Tórshavn and Kirkjubø area. Furthermore, we find a *Mannaskarð* on the slope down towards Kaldbaksbotnur. In all other places where such a name appears it is in connection with paths that have been used by men. This path, however, is not found on the maps. We could assume that people landing by boat in Kaldbaksbotnur in forgotten days used this path on their way up to this plateau. Moreover, there are signs of yet another path, which, from the mountain protrusion near Hunds-



Fig 4. Close-up photo of the stone carving in the Valley of Koppurin

Mynd 4. Nærfotomynd av IM merkinum í flata steininum í Koppinum

enni, turns westward into the little valley or depression called Koppurin (the cup). It could either be a simple route created by the sheep, or it could originally have been a man-made path leading into this little valley. On the spot, it appears clearly in some places. The question then arises: Has this little valley, *Koppurin*, had any special significance?

Just where the modern road crosses Skeiðsá, there is a signature on the map depicting two stones with the name, Ívarssteinar, where *Ívar* is a personal name, thus, the *Ívar*-stones. In reality, there are three, one east of the road and two to the west. They are very impressive in size, about 3 x

3 x 4 m, thus perhaps weighing 80 tonnes. They are lying in a straight line; I think that this is an accidental occurrence, however. Nevertheless, they are very conspicuous, and could have acted as the passage from one chieftdom to the other. The path into which the four above-mentioned paths merge over a short stretch passes along within a few meters distance of the westernmost of the Ívarssteinar.

The Valley of Mannafelsdalur

At a height of some 200-250 m Skeiðsá/ Fjarðará streams down towards Kaldbakbotnur, through the valley Mannafelsdalur, sometimes also written Mannafallsdalur.

In both cases, tradition explains it as the "man-fall-valley". Legend relates that a pitched battle was fought in this valley between the forces from the northern region and the southern region of the Faeroes (Hammershaimb, 1852: 170). Tradition says that the grass in the valley grows red because of the bloodshed. Personally, I have often looked for this red grass, but have never seen anything unusual. In spots, species of *Juncus* and *Carex* take on a reddish colour when touched by frost in winter. If the legend is true, there was a violent confrontation just in the vicinity of the boundary river, Skeiðsá. Jakobsen (1901: 69) states, however, that »the ending of the legend about *The Battle in Mannafelsdali* is a foreign myth that arrived in the Faeroes later and merged into the legend of Bishop Erlend." Even if the legend is not true, it is suggestive that tradition located it in this special area. The origin of the place-name, Mannafelsdalur, therefore, must be sought elsewhere. A mountain or fell could be a solution, but there is no such fell in the area.

I suggest a daring hypothesis, open for discussion and refutation. This place-name could be of the type where Celtic and Norse elements are combined. Known examples from the Faeroes are, e.g. *Korkadalur*: *coirc-* meaning "oats"; *Papurshálsur*: *pap-* meaning "priest" or "Christian Irishman"; *Ærgisbrekka*: *airgh-* meaning a "mountain pasture". *Mannafal-* could be derived from *Magh-na-fal* (or *bhfal*) that Joyce (1913: 216) interprets as "the plain by the wall". Now, wall does not necessarily mean the Berlin Wall, as Joyce translates it as hedge, in other passages. In other words: the plain

by the fence, the dyke or perhaps just the boundary. There is, as already mentioned, an important boundary in the area. There is a boundary river, and, furthermore, there are the impressive Ívarssteinar that perhaps can be seen a portal on the boundary. The history about a battle with a large "man fall" does not seem to hold, so the Mannafelsdalur must be explained in some other way. Perhaps, the "plain by the boundary"?

Sýslur and the Clerical Divisions

The largest administrative units that are known from the earliest medieval documents and later are the districts called *sýslur*, sing. *sýsla*. The designation is also known from Denmark, Norway and Iceland. Each *sýsla* had its *sýslumaður* that was the King's representative in the district. His job was to collect taxes and tribute from the King's tenant farmers (*Kongsbóndi*). The *sýslumaður* further presided over the *Várting*, Spring Court, held yearly in each *sýsla*, where simple criminal cases were adjudged.

After the Reformation, but perhaps long before, the Faeroes were divided into six *sýslur*: Norðoyar, Eysturoy, Streymoy, Vággar, Sandoy and Suðuroy. Thus, there was no boundary between the northern and southern part of Streymoy. Winther (1875: 522) says that this happened in the days of the Norwegian King Olaf Kyrre (AD 1067 – 93). Bjørk (1957, vol 2: 302) states that the clerical division used this boundary, but this is assumed to be a post-Reformation boundary.

Hundabrævið, or the Dog Letter

An old ordinance called *Hundabrævið*, or the Dog Letter, about the keeping of dogs in the villages stems from the second half of the 14th century. Helgason (1951) has deciphered the text. Several villages are mentioned in every *sýsla*, except for the southern part of Streymoy. In this area, dogs were prohibited. The original formulation is: »en engi (hundr) suðr frá Þorísgotu« (111). In this passage, the place-name Hórisgøta is used as if it was a commonly known and recognised boundary or division line. It is still today common usage in the Faeroes to say "south of Hórisgøtu" when speaking of the southern part of Streymoy.

The Saga of the Faeroese about a Division of the Faeroes into Two Chiefdoms

The Saga of the Faeroese must be read with the utmost care and a critical eye when we try to extract historical facts from it. It was written by a Christian clergyman with the purpose of explaining and defending the seizure of power over the Faeroes by the Roman Catholic Church. It was an apologetia.

In the *Saga*, we read about *sýslumenn* and the different divisions of chiefdoms. (Chp. 4): "Havgrímur was chief over one half of the islands and had it in fief [*í len*] from King Harald Gráfeld". Further on (Chp. 4): "Brestir and Beinir were renowned men and were chiefs over half-part of the islands and had it in fief from Earl Hákon Sigurdsson". Brestir and Beinir, as well as Havgrímur, are referred to as *sýslumenn*, though it is unlikely that there

was a consolidated administrative division of the land into *sýslur* at that time. The designation must refer to their function as the King's officials or tax collectors. Later, when all these individuals were killed in different conflicts, the famous Prand from Gøta alone takes power over the islands and frees them from Norwegian supremacy. He divides the power with his foster son, Ossur Havgrimsson, and the islands are again divided into two chiefdoms.

When Sigmundur Brestisson, who is the hero of the *Saga*, returns to the Faeroe Islands with the support of the Norwegian King after a long and involuntary journey in Norway, he has converted to a new religion. He gets the islands in fief, however, from Hákon Sigurdsson and later from Olaf Tryggvason (Chp. 25 & 30). Nowadays, such an act would be regarded as high treason, but the *Saga* presents him as a hero. He introduced Roman Catholicism. According to the chronology in different editions of the *Saga*, it happened in the year 999 or 1000. Mortensen (1998) has recently argued for the interpretation that the correct year was 998. For a time, Sigmundur is chief over one-half of the islands, but at the same time he has the whole archipelago in fief (*í len*). After further conflicts, Sigmundur Brestisson is killed and Prand once more organises a division, this time into thirds (Chp. 48). He takes one part for himself, Leif Ossurson gets one and the sons of Sigmundur get another. Perhaps the division could be interpreted to mean: one-half to Prand, one-quarter to Leif and the other quarter to Sigmundur's sons. Regardless, this arrangement lasted just about 5 years.



Fig 5. Looking eastwards over the Valley of Koppurin. In the foreground a remarkable boulder with two large top-stones weighing several hundred kilos. It could not be decided if the phenomenon is natural or man-made.

Mynd 5. Yvirlitsmynd tikin í ein eystan. Í forgründini ein stórir klettur við tveimum stórum steinum liggjandi omaná. Koppurin vinstrumegin. Skeiðsá rennur tvørurum í bakgründini, har Sornfellisvegurin eisini hómast.

After a series of violent episodes, and after Brand is dead, Leif Ossurson takes control over the islands (Chp. 58). He sails to Norway and gets the islands in fief from Magnus I, the Good. The dramatic saga ends about 1030-40. Brøgger (1937) suggests that originally, shortly after the *land-nám*, three chiefdoms: Suðuroy and Norðoyar, as well as the central islands, were separate chiefdoms. This would give a very unequal division, and the arguments for this proposal are not strong.

In a passage in the Saga of the Faeroese (Chp. 45) about tax-collection, Norðoyar is mentioned as a separate area equal to

Streymoy and Eysturoy, where the taxes were collected by different men. This shows that the six small northern islands are already perceived as a unit. Thus, Brøgger's proposal, mentioned above, is unlikely to hold for the central area.

In conclusion, it can be stated that the Faeroe Islands in this period, and perhaps also before, were divided into two chiefdoms, and only for a short interval into three.

The Markatal as an Indication of an Old Territorial Division

The Faeroese measure of land value, the

markatal, is a problematic unit. It is not known for sure when it was introduced or emerged, but perhaps in the period 1000-1200. The question has been dealt with by several authors, among whom are Degn (1930), Bjørk (1957), Zachariassen (1959), Brandt (1973) and Thorsteinsson (1991). Danielsen (1993) has an alternative view, as he proposes that the markatal was part of a strictly organised *landnám*, but his thesis as an historical document is in many ways untrustworthy.

The registered markatal of the villages has to some degree changed by mistakes in the registers, by re-evaluation, as a result of divisions, and for other reasons. In spite of these changes, the markatal should be evaluated as an indication of the main divisions. The total markatal at the comprehensive "taxation" in 1873 was 2374, not including the decimals. The islands or *sýslur* had the following markatal:

Suðuroy	367 M
Sandoy	277 M
Vágar	220 M
Streymoy	584 M
Eysturoy	501 M
Norðoyar	425 M

It is not possible to divide the islands into two sections with an equal number of markatal on this basis. If we try to divide along the boundary river, Skeiðsá, however, so that the area "south of Hórisgøtu" becomes part of a southern chiefdom, then the calculation looks like this:

Southern part	(367+277+220+282) =	1146 Mark
Northern part	(425+501+302) =	1228 Mark

This calculation comes rather near to an

equal division. One must remember, however, that the first taxation (the original markatal evaluation) was possibly done in middle of the 11th century by Leif Ossurson, as proposed by Winther (1875: 522).

Other Sources on Two Chiefdoms

Winther (1875: 86) refers to old legends, stating that the division line was in Kollafjarðadalur along the rivers and lakes there. This viewpoint raises a problem, as the old parishes, as well as the markatal villages of both Kollafjørður and Kvívík then will be divided. Normally, Kollafjørður is perceived as one village, including the areas on the southern side: Oyrareingir and Signabøur. If we follow Winther's proposal, and revise the calculation above and add these two farms as well as the farm, Heygur, that has its outfield on the southern side, then:

Southern section	(1228+41)=	1187 Mark
Northern section	(1146-41)=	1187 Mark

This amazing result is almost too good to be true. Perhaps it indicates, however, that in the chiefdom period there was a forerunner for the markatal: a standard farm and simple divisions of this area as a sort of taxation unit.

The Isoglosses and Linguistic Boundary

Weyhe (1996b) has written a very interesting essay on isoglosses or linguistic boundaries in the Faeroe Islands. In an interview, he told me that some of the most important isoglosses crossed Streymoy just in the study-area, so that southern and northern Streymoy is still today divided according to

dialects. Furthermore, he views these differences as being "very old". Perhaps they go back to the period of the *landnám* where the immigrants came from different areas within Norway, or possibly one of the groups came as "West Men" from the Norse lands in the British Isles.

Rischel (1964) discusses expressions in the Faeroese language that relate to geographical location or arrangement, e.g. *Uppi á Brekkum* (up on the cliffs), *Úti í Líð* (out on the slope). The general form is adverb + preposition + substantive. He states (39): "those adverbs that indicate the directions between different villages or the position of the villages in relation to each other are, however, strongly conventionalized." In many places, it is standard usage to say, e.g. go east to a village or go west, north or south. Of special significance, Rischel states, are the cases in which certain distinguishable areas on an island are referred to in different ways, e.g. in one area it is common usage to say north to area "A", and people in another area on the island say to go south to area "B". Rischel: "On Streymoy a southern area is found, comprising Tórshavn, Syðradalur and Norðradalur, and a northern area comprises Kvívík, Skælingur and Kollafjørður. The direction from the southern area to the northern is consequently indicated as *norður*, and the direction in the opposite way as *suður*."

In some areas, it is usage to say *heim* (home) to one village, and the other way, from this village to say out, north, east, west, in or over to the others. The simplest example is Sandoy. It is usage there to say *heim til Sands* from all the other villages on

this island. The two above-mentioned areas on Streymoy are, moreover, two separate "home-areas". In the southern area, they say *heim til Kirkjubøar* and *Velbastaðar*, while people from these villages say *yvir* (over) to Tórshavn. In the northern area, usage is to say *heim til Kvívíkar*, but in Kvívík they say *oman til* (down to) *Kollafjarðar*. Rischel's conclusion is that the functional division between the two areas is clear, but it can not be explained by the geographical conditions. We have to explore explanations from the settlement history.

Different Origins of the *Landnám* Men

Matras (1957) points out a few Faeroese place-names that relate to different regions in Norway. Thus, the first element in Ørðavík on Suðuroy contains a reference to *Hørðar* or people from *Hordaland*. The runic stone from Sandavágur on Vágar tells us about "*porkæl onundarsun austmaður af ruhalande*" (a man that came from Rogaland and settled in Sandavágur). Signabøur, situated just north of the Skeiðsá boundary, Matras (1957) explains, refers to people from the Sogn region. Thorsteinsson (1997) proposes that the village name, Vestmanna, situated in the northern part of Streymoy, originally Vestmannahavn, derives from *vestmen*, Norse people who came from the western regions of the British Isles.

The Stone Carving in the Valley of Koppurin

Then the question arose. Wasn't it possible to find something there of interest? Visiting the valley of Koppurin, I discovered a large,

flat stone with some kind of petroglyph inscribed into it. There was something that I saw as an "M". In front of it, but not so clear, a line or an "I". The carving was overgrown with old lichen. How should this "IM" mark be explained? It could be the initials of some unknown person, but I am more inclined to the possibility that it indicates a year in Latin numbers, if so, the year 999. But it would be a pure speculation to relate it to some historical event. The latest investigations into the chronology of the *Saga of the Faeroese* by Mortensen (1997) conclude that Sigmundur Brestisson introduced Christianity in 998.

The petroglyph could be related to the locale of a main or local Thing, placed just on the boundary between the two chiefdoms. This contradicts the general interpretation of the *Saga* that places the main Thing i Tórshavn. Certain formulations in the *Saga*, however, are open for other interpretations. The first time the Thing is mentioned the sentence has a peculiar structure: "The Thing of the Faeroese was then in Streymoy, and there is a harbour that is called Tórshavn". Other times, it is just called *Streymoyarting*, other times it clearly states that the Thing "was in Streymoy in Tórshavn".

The reference could be related also to a pre-Roman Catholic, or heathen, place of God, a *hof* or altar, that is indicated by the place-names containing the elements *Hunsl-* and *Stallr*. This is also supported by Winters' efforts to explain the meaning of Hórisgøta as Hof-ryggs-gøta.

Conclusion

From these investigations into the historic literature, from map-sheets with place-names, as well as on the spot observations, many indications and arguments have been found from which it can be assumed, but not definitely proven, that:

- * The oldest territorial division of the Faeroe Islands into two chiefdoms cut Streymoy into two parts, the boundary of which followed Skeiðsá on the ridge between Kollafjørður and Kaldbaksfjørður.
- * There has been a sacred place or *hof* in the vicinity of Hundseni, Stallur and the valley, Koppurin.

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