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Notes on the Question of the Development of Old Norse bólstæðr in Hebridean Nomenclature

Richard A. V. Cox
Brig o’ Turk

Professor W. F. H. Nicolaïsen’s pioneering research on the distribution of a range of generic elements of Old Norse origin across Scotland concentrates in the north and west of the country in particular on the settlement generics staðr, bólstæðr and sætr and/or sett. 1

Work has been carried out more recently on bólstæðr and on the question of sætr and/or sett in Gaelic Scotland—i.e. the Hebrides, the West Highlands and the North of Scotland down to the Moray Firth and the Inverness area but excluding Shetland, Orkney and the northern tip of Caithness. 2 The first of two articles examines the distribution and historical phonology of Old Norse sætr in its development to modern Scottish Gaelic in both simple and compound names. 3 The second examines the range of reflexes found in anglicised name forms in Gaelic Scotland which were ascribed in Nicolaïsen’s work to Old Norse bólstæðr. 4 Orthographic -ble, 5 -bo, -bol, -boll, -bost, Bosta, Boust, Boust, -busta, -bull, -pol, -poll, Polla, -pool and -puill are shown to derive not from the one element bólstæðr, but from a range of elements, namely Old Norse (ON) -byll ‘domicile, residence’, (-)bólstæðr,

1 W. F. H. Nicolaïsen, Scottish Place-Names. Their Study and Significance (London, 1976), pp. 84–94. I am grateful to Professor Colm Ó Baoill and Roy Wentworth for reading an earlier draft of this paper and for their helpful suggestions.


5 Map or other documentary forms are given in bold type; for the most part they are not intentional Gaelic forms of names but represent anglicised forms.
-bústaðr, -ból ‘farm, farmstead, residence’ and -po³l ‘head of a sea-loch, bay, pool’. In addition, it is argued that the south-westerly forms -bolls, Bolsay and -bus (chiefly confined to Islay but with some representation in Mull) are, on phonological grounds, likely to have derived from a further, as yet unidentified, element; and, given the phonetic shape of their modern Gaelic pronunciations (see below), an unattested compound *bólshagi is suggested as a possible candidate for the etymology of these reflexes.6

In the northern Hebrides,7 ON Bólstað acc. (a compound of ból nt. and stað acc. m.) yields Gaelic (G.) Bòsta [bò:sta] or, with closure of the open final syllable in Gaelic, Bòsthad [bò:sta].8 Initial ON b-, d-, g- regularly yield voiceless G. b-, d-, g- [b d g], e.g. G. birg

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6 For discussion of possible alternative derivations and of the possible sense of a compound *bólshagi, see Cox, ‘Descendants of bólstadr?’, p. 60.
7 For present purposes, including Lewis, Harris, Scalpay, North Uist, South Uist, Skye and Coll.
8 Cox, ‘Descendants of bólstadr?’, pp. 46–50. On the question of the closure of an otherwise open final syllable, see ibid., p. 46. In discussing the development of final ON -bólstadr, P. Gammeltoft, ‘Why the difference? An attempt to account for the variations in the phonetic development of place-names in Old Norse bólstadr in the Hebrides’, Nomina, 23 (2000), 107–19 (p. 110), states that ‘The final element [ð]-] was lost early because of its final, unstressed position.’ It was certainly present at the time of borrowing into Gaelic, as it is accounted for by the quality of the vowel in the final syllable in Gaelic. The development is an Old Norse short vowel + consonant > G. *[a]: > G. [a].
9 P. Gammeltoft, The Place-Name Element bóstaðr in the North Atlantic Area (Copenhagen 2001), p. 104, derives G. Próbost from ON Breid(ax)bóstaðr ‘[the] broad farm’, reasoning (upon a misconstruction of C. Hj. Borgstrøm, ‘The dialects of Skye and Ross-shire’, in A Linguistic Survey of the Gaelic Dialects of Scotland II, Norsk tidsskrift for sprovgidskap Supplement Vol. II (Oslo, 1941), p. 33, §45) that ‘initial [p]: for original [b] is a result of unvoicing of initial [b] in the local Skye Gaelic dialect.’ Here, the initial is in fact post-aspirated [pʰ]- which would be expected to derive in loans from Old Norse not from initial b-, but rather from initial p-, e.g. G. palla ‘ledge’ [pʰala] < ON *palla acc. m. (note 38). Further, the non-palatal quality of G. [pʰa]-: in a development from ON Breid- is not explained; cf. G. Breídhaig [bʰe:iɡ; tyrk] < ON Breid(ay)vik ‘[the] broad bay’ (cf. M. Oftedal, ‘The

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[Ø]nberg dat. nt.,10 G. bot [bɔ:t] m. ‘(lake or valley) basin’ < ON botten m.; G. doka [dɔ:kə] m. ‘pit or quarry’ < ON dýkk f.; or palatalised forms: G. Diobadal [dʒi:ba:dəl] < ON Djúpadal acc. ‘[the] deep valley’;11 G. gil [gil] f. ‘ravine’ and by extension ‘stream’ < ON gíl nt. The long Old Norse stressed vowel ó yields G. [ɔ:] for example in G. Ceös [kʰɔ:s] < ON Æs [æs] ‘[the] hollow’,12 and G. (gen.) Bhata Leòis [væːtːa ˈlœːs] < ON Vatnís Ljósú ‘the bright or clear loch’.13 ON í is no longer discernible in G. [bɔː:sta] (because of the original long vowel), although the lateral in the Old Norse verb halsa can still be traced in the quantity of the stressed vowel in G. ahbísadhr [aːusay] m. ‘decreasing or slackening sail’.14 Weakly-stressed initial ON st- yields G. [st]-, e.g. G. Tolstadh

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14 Regarding the development of ON bóstaðr, Gammeltoft (The Place-Name Element bóstaðr in the North Atlantic Area, 93) states that ‘The stem vowel... has developed in various ways. In the West and South-west, the original vowel has retained its quantity, [-ɔː-], [ɔː] has been diphthongised to [-au-], according to Cox ([‘Descendants of bólstadr?’], pp. 46–50 and 59). He is of the opinion that this is owing to a secondary lengthening as the result of the loss of the following consonant ([ ])’. However, this is not the case with the Islay example, which has retained the following consonant, so it is probably safest to assume that the stem vowels of the modern reflexes descend directly from original [-ɔː-]. There are two points here which, however, are out of context. Firstly, the secondary lengthening referred to may have occurred in names
structured specific + generic, i.e. final ON -bólstað acc. initially yields G. *-[hɒlststæ] compensating for the loss of ð (see notes 8 and 26); this gives way to *-[hɒlststæ] with shortening of the final syllable; and this becomes *-[hɒlststæ] after shortening of the weakly-stressed vowel, which in turn yields *-[hɒlststæ] with temporary lengthening of the weakly-stressed vowel due to the loss of l. Once the final syllable was dropped, *-[hɒlststæ] remains, and this, with eventual reduction of the vowel length, gives modern *[hɒlst] (Cox, ‘Descendants of bólstað’?, p. 50). This could not have arisen in simple names where the generic remains in fully-stressed position. The second point is that a stressed breath vowel in Gaelic before post-vocalic -s (a rare consonant cluster in Gaelic) is likely to be diphthongised, with or without loss of the syllable, in spite of the historical differentiation between a non-germanic lateral + consonant, e.g. alt [ælt] ‘joint’, and a geminate lateral + consonant, e.g. alt [ælt] ‘stream’ (T. F. O’Rahilly, Irish Dialects Past and Present, (Dublin, 1976, first published 1932), pp. 49–52; C. Ó Baoil, ‘Rhyning vowels before long liquids in Scottish Gaelic’, Éigse, 24 (1990), 131–46 (p. 131); R. A. V. Cox, ‘The phonological development of Scottish Gaelic uimhag “window” and related questions’, Scottish Gaelic Studies, 20 (2000), 212–21 (pp. 214–15)). For example, G. allsporog > abhsporog I. ‘cow’s windpipe’ (G. Calder, A Gaelic Grammar (Glasgow, 1972, first published 1923), p. 68; M. MacLennan, A Pronouncing and Etymological Dictionary of the Gaelic Language (Edinburgh, 1925), p. 2: abhsporog äüsporac; Rev. Fr A. McDonald, Gaelic Words and Expressions from South Uist and Eriskay, edited by J. L. Campbell (Oxford, 1972), p. 27: amispìör aguspóra < ON hals m. ‘neck’ + ëbarka acc. m. ‘windpipe’ (G. Henderson, The Norse Influence on Celtic Scotland (Glasgow, 1910), p. 113, recognises a compound in ON hals-; G. ãlsadh ãbhsadh m. ‘decreasing or slackening sail’ < ON halsa (Calder, ibid.; ON halsr with a short, not long, stressed vowel as in Henderson, ibid., pp. 138 and 255: halsa); cf. also G. bailegair > bahsgear m. ‘bladdersite [booster]’ (MacLennan, A Pronouncing and Etymological Dictionary of the Gaelic Language, p. 25: bailegair bausgair) ‘a light, restless man’ (McDonald, Gaelic Words and Expressions from South Uist and Eriskay, p. 34: bailegair) < Early Gaelic bailecnaire bailecnaire (Dictionary of the Irish Language and Contributions to a Dictionary of the Irish Language, Royal Irish Academy, Dublin, 1913–1976: bolstaire), Irish bolcnaire bolcnaire bolcnaire (P. S. Dinneen, Foclóir Gaedhilge agus Béarla (Dublin, 1947, first published 1927): bolcnaire); also the development of English bolster in Islay and Kintyre Gaelic (see below). Assuming that the etymology of the Islay form Bolosay [hɒlɔsə] includes initial ON bölsta-gen, diphthongisation has also occurred in the case of

\[\text{[hɒlɔsə stay]} < \text{ON bolstaðir ‘Polf's farmstead',}^{15} \text{ (palatalised)} \text{G. Uamaísteach [uarni jf'an] < ON Hvannmásstейn acc. ‘the rock of the valley’.}^{16} \text{ Short weakly-stressed ON} \ a \text{ has been lengthened initially to compensate for the loss of ON} \ ð \text{ in Gaelic (notes 8 and 26), and the resulting Gaelic} *-[a:] \text{ has since been reduced to short} \ [a] \text{ in weakly-stressed position in the modern form, cf. G. Tolsatadhi above; also G. Carlabagh [hɒka:va:vay] < ON Karlaβåg acc. ‘Karl’s bay’.}^{17} \text{ G. Beirgshgeadh [hɪeβe:j f'ke:ay] < ON Bergsgrý ‘the ravine of the promontory’.}^{18} \text{ In weakly-stressed position, final ON -bólstað acc. has gone through similar changes in Gaelic, except that the final of G. *-[hɒlststæ] has weakened to the extent that it has normally been lost,}^{19} \text{ while long [ɔː] is an original long vowel. However, while the lateral remains in Bolosay [hɒlɔsə], it is lost in the case of Bousd [hɒorstə] in Skye, also derived from ON bolstað acc. (Cox, ‘Descendants of bolstað’?, p. 46), although the presence of longer there than in the north: contrast Bóstadhi [hɒorstə(γ)] in Lewis (ibid., p. 47).}^{15}

\[\text{Oftedal, ‘The village names of Lewis’, 378–79. For the question of loss of case and/or plural endings in the process of borrowing from Old Norse to Gaelic, see R. A. V Cox, ‘Maintenance of the Norse legacy in Scottish Hebridean nomenclature’, Namn i en föränderlig värld, edited by G. Harling-Kranck, Studier i nordisk filologi 78, Svenska litteraturhistoriskt skapet i Finland nr 631 (Helsinki, 2001), pp. 45–52 (pp. 46–47).}^{16}


\[\text{Oftedal, ‘The village names of Lewis’, 378.}^{18}

\[\text{R. A. V. Cox, ‘Old Norse berg in Hebridean place-nomenclature’, 61.}^{19}

\[\text{Heribusta [həɾə hɔstə] in Skye (probably from ON -bóststad acc. rather than -bólstað acc.) retains final -[a] as the reflex of the original final syllable (Cox, ‘Descendants of bolstað’?, p. 50). Gammeltoft in ‘Why the difference?’ does not refer to this name; instead, he points out that the loss of the final syllable ‘may date to the fifteenth century, as a possible vestige of this vowel, -r, is present in the early source form Husaboste from 1389...}^{20}

\[\text{But in the form Froybost from 1498 (ibid., 111), it would be difficult to pronounce on the contemporary Gaelic pronunciations of these names from their orthographic...}^{21}
has been reduced to short [ɔ], e.g. G. Siabost ['ʃia hɔst] < ON Sæðólstaðr acc. ['the] sea-farmstead, G. Torgabost ['tɔrɔga hɔst] doubtfully from ON Hǫrð-bólstaðr acc. ['the] cairn-farmstead.

forms in Scots. With regard to the correct identity of the Old Norse generic in Heribust, Gammeltoft elsewhere cites, in favour of ON börstaðr, the 1630 documentary form Tarrabost, which is in contrast to the 1832 form Heribust and the modern Gaelic pronunciation [hera hɔsta] (Gammeltoft, The Place-Name Element bólstair in the North Atlantic Area, pp. 94, note 69, and 122). It seems more likely that Tarrabost is an analogical form based on other Skye names in -bost than that it has given rise to the later forms; at any rate, G. [hera hɔsta] from a supposed earlier *['fara hɔst] is fraught with phonological impossibilities.

Oftedal, ‘The village names of Lewis’, 377. Capt. F. W. L. Thomas, ‘Did the Northmen extirpate the Celtic inhabitants of the Hebrides in the ninth century?’, Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, 11 (1876), 472–507 (p. 480), gives the variant form Sjá-bóstair (sic), although Gammeltoft (The Place-Name Element bólstair in the North Atlantic Area, p. 146) implies that he gives Sæ-bólstaðr. Gammeltoft continues by suggesting that ‘judging from the source evidence as well as the phonetic transcription, the variant form, sjáir, m., appears to be more likely.’ The documentary forms given include Schabost 1662, Shabost 1776, North Shawbost and South Shawbost 1821; contrast, however, the first Board of Ordnance 6 inch-to-the-mile map Sheabost a Tuath and Sheabost a Deas 1854. Only the 1854 forms can be said to represent Gaelic names (albeit with a partially anglicised orthography), i.e. [ʃia hɔst a ʃuːa] [ʃuːə]. On sjá- would be expected to yield G. ['ʃia]-, cf. ON Kjáss m. ['the] hollow > G. Cèis [kʰəsi] above, ON Ljótt acc. m. > G. Líód [lʰəd], ON Vestfjard ‘the bright or clear loch’ > G. (gen.) Blata Leith [voʰa lʰəri] (note 13). In this regard, ON kjarr m. ‘brushwood, fane or marsh’ would not be expected to yield an initial non-palatal consonant nor long stressed vowel as suggested for Carboßt ([kʰərɔra hɔsto]) in Skye (Gammeltoft, ibid., p. 107). Initial palatal [ʃ]- is determined by the following front vowels in Gaelic and is not a question of dialectal idiosyncrasy (Gammeltoft, ibid., p. 146: ‘The sources for Seilebost seem to reflect the palatal [ʃ], which is used in Harris instead of [s]’—which misconstrues C. Hj. Borgstrøm, The Dialects of the Outer Hebrides. A Linguistic Survey of the Gaelic Dialects of Scotland I, Norsk tidsskrift for sprovgidskap Supplement Vol. 1 (Oslo, 1940), p. 159, §217). Stressed G. [ʃia]-, via earlier *['ʃa]-, from ON sær, is found for example in G. Sladar ['ʃiaər] < ON Sætr nt., G. Loch Tréalabhal [lɔk ʃrələt ʃaː] < ON Praelafall [ˈprelaflaː] ‘the mountain of the thurls’ (cf. Oftedal, ‘Names of lakes’, p. 185, who gives phonemic /lɔl triaːuːr/); see Cox, ‘The origin and relative chronology of Shadder-names’, 96–97. (For this reason alone, Heribusta [ˈherə ʃaːsta] (note 19) is unlikely to contain ON hærri ‘higher’ as suggested by Gammeltoft (ibid., p. 122).) Indeed, Gammeltoft’s phonetic transcription, [ʃiaˈbst] (sic), is drawn from Oftedal (‘The village names of Lewis’, 377: [ʃiaˈbst]) who, comparing the examples of Sladar and Tréalabhal above, states that ‘The phonetic development is regular.’ For the shift from /ʃa/ to /ʃ/, see K. H. Jackson, ‘The breaking of original long ū in Scottish Gaelic’, in Celtic Studies. Essays in memory of Angus Matheson 1912–62, edited by J. Carney and D. Greene (London, 1968), pp. 65–71. For a question relating to the pronunciation of the English forms, see R. A. V. Cox, ‘Place-nomenclature in the context of the bilingual community of Lewis: status, origin and interaction’, in Gaelic and Scots in Harmony, edited by D. S. Thomson (Glasgow, 1990), pp. 43–52 (p. 50).

Gammeltoft rightly rejects MacIver’s derivation (D. MacIver, Place-Names of Lewis and Harris, (Stornoway, 1934), p. 50) from a form in initial ON horg m. ‘square, market place’ on the grounds that initial G. t- is a back-formation (on the evidence of documentary forms and pronunciations in Gaelic and English) from original ON [h], and goes on to reject Thomas’ ON høyng m. ‘mound, hill’ (‘Did the Northmen extirpate the Celtic inhabitants of the Hebrides’), 480: ‘Thomas is probably right that the specific refers to this mound [i.e. a chambered cairn] on the farm, only høyr, m., is not the correct etymology. […]The specific should rather be seen as originating from ON høgr, m., “a stone-heap, a heap of gathered stones”’ (Gammeltoft, The Place-Name Element bólstair in the North Atlantic Area, p. 124). Thomas’ suggestion is wrong on the grounds that ON au would be expected to yield a long vowel in Gaelic, e.g. G. sgásd ‘sail, or part of a sail’ from ON skaut nt. (Cox, ‘The phonological development of Scottish Gaelic vinneag “window”,’ 213), rather than on a question of semantics. In addition, both ON høyr and høgr contain velar fricative [ɣ] which would normally be expected to yield G. [ɣ], e.g. G. dorg [ˈdɔrɣ] ‘hand-line’ < ON dorg f., G. Borgh [ˈbɔɾɣ] < ON Borg f. ‘fortification’, G. Borghaston [ˈbɔɾhɔstɔn] < ON Borg-stafn ‘fort-spit, or fort-promontory’ (Cox, ’The Norse element in Scottish Gaelic’, 141), G. stiotha [ʃtʰya] ‘cliff path’ < ON stiga acc. m., G. bàgh [ˈbaː] ‘bay’ < ON vág acc. m. ON harg acc. m. is the basis for G. Na Horg [nohɔr] (cf. Borgstrøm, The Dialects of the Outer Hebrides, p. 166; for the question of the use of the article, see, for example, Cox, ’Maintenance of the Norse legacy in Scottish Hebridean nomenclature’, pp. 47–48) as noted by Henderson: ‘but it may be questioned if'}
In Islay, ON bölstad acc. would also be expected to yield medial -str- as suggested by the parallel development of Islay Gaelic [poustr] and Kintyre Gaelic [bo'sDor], both from Eng. bolster.

The Gaelic pronunciations of the Islay reflexes in question, however, are [boustr]-, [böstey] and [-böst]. It is assumed that the first of these reflexes yields the second, with some loss of the stressed vowel in weakly-stressed position, and weakening of the final vowel in turn (with incidental closing of the open final syllable in Gaelic), and that the third is a reduction of the second, with loss of the

we have it also in the place-name Torgabost’ (Henderson, *The Norse Influence on Celtic Scotland*, pp. 78–79), i.e. because of the presence of a velar stop [g] rather than fricative [ɣ]. If this name is from ON Høg-bólstað acc., the development has yet to be explained.


23 N. M. Holmer, *The Gaelic of Kintyre* (Dublin, 1962), p. 46. On the question of the etymology of the Gaelic word, Holmer invokes a development from a form *[bo'sDor]* via *[bo'vesDor]*, perhaps based on the variant spelling form *bögðstair*, also written, for example, *bogðstair*, *bögðsdaor*, *bolstar* (E. Dwelly, *The Illustrated Gaelic-English Dictionary*, 9th edn (Glasgow, 1977, first published 1901–11), pp. 103, 106 and 109, respectively). I am grateful to Professor Colm Ó Óssuill for pointing out to me that D. MacAulay, in his review of *The Gaelic of Kintyre* (Scottish Gaelic Studies, 10, Part I (1963), 115–23 (p. 119), comments that ‘One may quarrel with... the antecedents given... for bo'sDor which is surely a borrowing from late west Midlands Middle English’.

24 Cox, ‘Descendants of bölstad?’, p. 59. With regard to his hypothesis that the Islay reflexes -bolis, Bolsay and -bus derive from ON -(i)bólstaðr, Gammeltoft ignores this evidence, stating that the ‘core of the problem is that it is not known whether the development from ON [-lst-] to Gael. [-lst-] is possible or not, as there are no parallels in Scandinavian loans into Gaelic against which to check the Islay development’ (‘Why the difference?’, 113). See also note 14.


26 On this point, Gammeltoft (‘Why the difference?’, 114) considers that the 1588 Islay form, *Nerrabollasadh*, ‘may probably not be seen as evidence of the retention of the final element [ð(-)]’, the reason being that contemporary source forms show no such remnant.’ The spelling in *dhh* may represent final G. -[ɣ], final syllable; while the distribution of the last two reflexes is dependent on the number of preceding syllables in those names in which they occur, e.g. (one syllable) *[gr: høsas]*, *[r: høsav]*, (two syllables) *[k:a: ˈ høs]*, *[n: e: ˈ høs]*. This assumption is phonolo-
gically plausible and is supported by the documentary evidence. 36
Formally, these reflexes would not be expected to derive from ON
(-)ðölstadr acc.

More recently still, Dr Peter Gammeltoft has preferred, after
Nicolaïsen,33 to derive the Islay reflexes from Old Norse bólstaðr,32
rejecting the suggested bólshagi derivation31 mostly on the grounds
that it is otherwise unattested, but also because it ‘would represent
an instance of innovation in naming which is completely unknown
in Scottish place-names of Scandinavian origin’.34

[door] ‘worshipping’ < EG adrad; G. búsdr [ðo:dr̥a], comparative
of bodhar ‘deaf’ < EG bodar ([B̥̄]) is the phonetic realisation of the palatalised r
phoneme in, for example, Lewis, and not a reflex of the Early Gaelic dental
fricative); G. saibhreas /sáirreas/ besides /sáirreas/ ‘wealth’, cf. EG saibhir
saidhre (ibid.), ON Neðra- [the] lower...’ might well yield G. [Nacr̥a].
30 E.g. Eurobolsay 1562 Ewrabolse 1584 Orepols 1614 Oriepols 1665
Yorabus 1751, modern Earrabus (Gammeltoft, The Place-Name Element
bólstaðr in the North Atlantic Area, p. 114); Nerrabollisdhith 1588 Nerobollis
Nerrabollisdhith 1588 Nerobollis 1627 ?Morabullsadhe 1630
Nerrabolstavil 1662 Nerobols 1665 Newbolside 1674 ?Morabultadie 1687
Nerabull 1751, modern Nerabus (ibid., p. 138).
31 And other scholars before him, e.g. Gillies, The Place-Names of Argyll, p.
33 I.e. by Cox, ‘Descendants of bólstaðr?’, p. 60.
34 Gammeltoft, ‘Why the difference?’, 112–13. Gammeltoft (The Place-Name
Element bólstaðr in the North Atlantic Area, pp. 299–315) remarks a number of
other derivations given by Cox (who is said to derive the reflexes -bol, -boll,
-bol, -poll and -pool mostly from ON pollr but to be ‘cautious enough to say that
some may derive from ON ból’ (p. 88); however, the derivation is made more
strongly than is implied and is based upon phonological grounds (‘Descendants
of bólstaðr?’, pp. 50–57)). Two names whose pronunciations (-þar) suggest
final ON -bol are ascribed by Gammeltoft to ON -ból or -poll acc.:
Bircepall, The Place-Name Element bólstaðr in the North Atlantic Area, pp. 299–315) remarks a number of
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strongly than is implied and is based upon phonological grounds (‘Descendants
of bólstaðr?’, pp. 50–57)). Two names whose pronunciations (-þar) suggest
final ON -bol are ascribed by Gammeltoft to ON -ból: Herrapoll, Assapol, Corsapoll,
Cullipoll, Unapoll, Meoble, Eribil, Kirkiboll; or to either -bol or -poll acc.:
Arnaboll, Arnipoll. In addition, Scoboll (-þar) is ascribed by Gammeltoft to
either -ból or -boll, and Ullapoll (-þar) to -boll.

There is, on the contrary, a good deal of evidence to suggest that the
Norse nomenclature of the Hebrides developed along independent
though frequently similar lines to that of Norway. A number of Gaelic
loan-words have been identified in the Norse nomenclature, e.g. Old
Norse kró f. in the sense ‘fold’, pen < Early Gaelic (EG) cró m. of
similar sense,35 and ON argsi nt. < EG árgie ‘milking-place’ and by
extension ‘shieling’, modern G. áirigh f.36 Some Old Norse-elements
appear to have a more specialised or extended sense than otherwise
generally found, e.g. in Lewis ON gróf f. is the element commonly
used of streams in names of Old Norse derivation,37 while ON giγr f. occurs
strictly in the sense ‘coastal ravine’ and is not found inland.
Occasionally, modern Gaelic reflexes suggest otherwise unattested, or
at least less common, forms, e.g. an Old Norse weak declension *palla
acc. m., rather than strong declension pall acc. m., yielding G. palla
[pɒ'la] m. ‘ledge’,38 an Old Norse genitive neuter rather than feminine
specific in *Klefsgróf ‘[the] stream of the hill path’, yielding G.
Claigsro [klı:isgr̥o] (note 37). In addition, there are a number of
names in Lewis and St Kilda, e.g. G. Beirgh Lógha [bʊð̥’lu:a] < ON
Bergit Lága ‘the low promontory’, which represent the relatively
late development of generic-initial name structures which took place
furth of Norway, in particular in the Faroes and to a lesser degree in

36 As in the place-name Asgrimsærgin, in Orkneyinga saga, edited by Finnbi
guðmundsson, Íslenk fornrit 34 (Reykjavik, 1965), Chapter 113, §10.1. See
also Cox, ‘Old Norse berg in Hebridean place-nomenclature’, 61, and Cox, ‘The
Norse element in Scottish Gaelic’, 139. For a discussion of the development
of ON argsi in Faroese and its survival in Faroese place-names, see Chr.
Matras, ‘Gammelfærøsk argsi, n., og dermed beslægtede ord’, Nann og Bygd, 44
(1956), 51–67—the article is briefly summarised in W. B. Lockwood, ‘Chr.
Matras’ studies in the Gaelic element in Faroese: conclusions and results’,
Scottish Gaelic Studies, 13 (1978), 112–26 (pp. 125–26).
37 E.g. G. Claigsro [klı:isgr̥o] < ON Klefsgróf ‘[the] stream of the hill path’.
38 An ON poll acc. would be expected to yield G. *þar, cf. G. call ‘loss’,
EG, call call (O’Rahilly, Irish Dialects Past and Present, pp. 49–52; Ó Baillil,
‘Rhyding vowels before long liquids in Scottish Gaelic’, 131; Cox, ‘The
phonological development of Scottish Gaelic umnæg “window”’, 214); see also
note 9.
Shetland, Orkney and Caithness. Such evidence suggests that we should not rule out the possibility, in the context of the Islay reflexes, of lexical innovation during the 450 years (at the most conservative estimate) of Norse presence in the West of Scotland.

Gammeltoft makes a number of additional points in support of a derivation of the Islay reflexes from ON bánstadar:

A link is made between the more northerly -bost name forms and the Islay reflexes through the documentary forms of the name Abos, on Ulva, an island off Mull (Abos 1630 Abose 1683 Abost 1751 Abost 1771 Abos 1832), noting that a ‘late development to [-s] is marginally evidenced in the southern extremity of the area of distribution [of the development of ON -lст > G. [-st]].’ Yet among the ‘twenty-four’ Islay examples of names in -bus there is no documentary evidence of a connection between them and ON bánstadar. It seems more probable that this supposed link is the result of analogous formation, or misunderstanding or typographical error, than that it sheds light upon the etymology of the Islay reflexes.

It is stated that ON -lст- develops on two different lines: firstly, ‘ON -lст- > G. [-st]’ as in G. Slabost < ON Sæbólsťadar acc., above; secondly, ‘ON -lст- > G. [-lst-]’ > [-st]’; ‘There is nothing problematic as such about this reduction itself. In fact, it is quite normal for clusters of three consonants to be reduced to two consonants or even a single one,’ and G. srbh < Eng. straw, and G. srát < ultimately from Latin stratae are later cited in this regard. Initial [sr]- is original in the Gaelic languages, however, and the loan-words cited have simply fallen together with indigenous words in initial sr-. The innovation in Gaelic of initial sr- > str- ‘is shared by Manx with the northern dialect of Scottish [Gaelic],’ although this group reverts to historical type under mutation: G. srón [strón] ‘nose’, mo shrón [mô rón] ‘my nose’.

39 Only -[ls]- occurs today, i.e. in Balsay [bólsai].
40 Gammeltoft, ‘Why the difference?’, 108–09. In addition, it is argued in the case of triconsonantal clusters that ‘one would expect the medial consonant to be dropped, apart from cases such as the present where the phonetically most “powerful” consonant [s] occupies the medial position’ (ibid., 108), but no examples are given to explain and/or corroborate this.
41 Gammeltoft, ‘Why the difference?’, 108–09. In addition, it is argued in the case of triconsonantal clusters that ‘one would expect the medial consonant to be dropped, apart from cases such as the present where the phonetically most “powerful” consonant [s] occupies the medial position’ (ibid., 108), but no examples are given to explain and/or corroborate this.
43 The documentary forms Bolstig and Port Boldstig (Blæu, Theatrwm Orbis Terrarum 1654, 1662) are cited under Bòlsá on Islay in Gammeltoft, The Place-Name Element bánstadar in the North Atlantic Area, p. 96, rather than under Bòsd on Coll where they appear to belong.
44 Only -[ls]- occurs today, i.e. in Balsay [bólsai].
45 Gammeltoft, ‘Why the difference?’, 108–09. In addition, it is argued in the case of triconsonantal clusters that ‘one would expect the medial consonant to be dropped, apart from cases such as the present where the phonetically most “powerful” consonant [s] occupies the medial position’ (ibid., 108), but no examples are given to explain and/or corroborate this.
46 Gammeltoft, ‘Why the difference?’, 108–09. In addition, it is argued in the case of triconsonantal clusters that ‘one would expect the medial consonant to be dropped, apart from cases such as the present where the phonetically most “powerful” consonant [s] occupies the medial position’ (ibid., 108), but no examples are given to explain and/or corroborate this.
In Islay and Mull, it is stated, ‘there is some marginal and late evidence for a resistance to the combination [st(-)] in place-names of Scandinavian origin.\(^{51}\) This is supported by Captain Thomas’ statement that ‘[there] is usually much abbreviation of the generic terms in the last two centuries, particularly such as have ceased to have meaning in common speech, and in a few cases they are altogether suppressed. Thus stādr [sic], in the sixteenth century becomes “sta” and “say”, but it is now vaguely represented by “s”...\(^{52}\) The instances cited by Thomas are Steinsa, Cultorsay, Keppolis earlier Keapolsay, and Skerolssay which are all derived from forms in final ON -seir, and Eresaid (also written Earasaid) earlier Herrestuid which is said to contain ON -stādr.\(^{53}\) If Herrestuid does indeed represent modern Earasaid, there are spelling errors in other names in the sixteenth-century charter in which it appears which cast doubt upon the form Herrestuid;\(^{54}\) at any rate, were the development -st- > -s- an authentic one in this case, such a remodelling would be expected to be analogical, not phonological—in effect a one-off event. As for the other names, the supposition that they derive from forms in ON -seir is not based on any phonological or documentary evidence, but presumably on the fact that ON (-)bólstað acc. has already been deemed, without explaining the development, to yield Islay -bolls, Bolsay and -bus.\(^{55}\)

In accepting a common origin for both the northern and southern reflexes, Gameltoft also discusses the potential significance of there being two distinct sets of reflexes from the one element, on the one hand in terms of a chronology of gaelicisation of the Norse-ruled Hebrides, and on the other in terms of a chronology for the changes from -ir- to -ir- and -irs- > -is- and whether or not these changes originate in a Gaelic or Norse linguistic context. A contrast is made between the development, according to documentary forms, of Myklebost in West Norway and Husabost and Frobst in Skye and South Uist, respectively.\(^{56}\) The difficulty here is that virtually all Hebridean documentary forms are English/Scots forms and are at a further remove from their Norse etyons, and so a comparison between like and like is not being made. In addition, it is suggested that Norse naming patterns using bólstaðr may have taken a different direction in Islay, firstly because the only example of suspected Gaelic influence in the bólstaðr onomasticon occurs in Islay, namely Persabas, with a suggested specific from ‘Gaelic pearisa, n.f., “person, parson(?)”, \(^{57}\) and secondly because the Islay material ‘completely lacks the stereotypical place-names in Kirkjubólstaðr and Breiðabólstaðr, so commonly found in the Northern Isles and in the rest of the Hebrides.\(^{58}\) However, Gaelic loan-words in place-names of Old Norse origin are also found in the northern Hebrides,\(^{59}\) and the so-called stereotypical names are also absent from Harris, Scalpay, South Uist, Tiree, Coll, Mull, Luing, Moidart, Sutherland and Ross-shire. The case of the Islay name Lyrabus is also raised, citing Magne Ofsdal’s article on the development of ON steinn in Gaelic,\(^{60}\) as a potential example of an early

\(^{51}\) Gameltoft, ‘Why the difference?’, 113.

\(^{52}\) Thomas, ‘On Islay place-names’, 242.

\(^{53}\) Of ON staðr and seir in Islay place-names, Thomas states that ‘it is not easy to distinguish between them when the form of the name is corrupt’ (ibid., 244–45).

\(^{54}\) E.g. Aelisty, cf. modern Ellister; Octoforda, cf. modern Octofad; Garthcarr, cf. modern Gartcarra (from a charter dated 1562; Originés Parochiales Scotiae, 3 vols (Edinburgh, 1855), II, i, 272–75.

\(^{55}\) Thomas, ‘On Islay place-names’, 243–44 and 255–57; although, the development is reversed in the case of the derivation of Toradale from ON Þórisdalr (ibid., 259; leg. ON Þórisðalr).


\(^{57}\) Gameltoft, ‘Why the difference?’, 116. It is not clear why it should be considered ‘remarkable how absent Gaelic influence seems to be from the specific inventory of this place-name element [bólstaðr]’ (ibid.).

\(^{58}\) Ibid. Kirkibost in Lewis, North Uist and Skye; possibly Breiðabost in Skye. For the question over the inclusion of G. Prábas in Skye here, see note 9. (Kirkapol, -[pa] from ON -ból, and Kirkiboll, -[pa] from ON -poll acc., occur in Tiree and North Sutherland, respectively (Cox, ‘Descendants of bólstādr?’, pp. 50–57.).

\(^{59}\) See, for example, R. A. V. Cox, ‘Norse-Gaelic contact in the West of Lewis: the place-name evidence’, in Language Contact in the British Isles, edited by P. Sture Ureland, Linguistische Arbeiten, 238 (1991), 479–94 (p. 486), and Ofstedal, ‘Scandinavian place-names in Celtic territory’, p. 188.

\(^{60}\) Ofstedal, ‘Norse steinn in Hebridean place-names’. 
Norse loan-name in Gaelic. Oftedal’s study shows how ON steinn and its earlier form *stainn, before raising of the diphthong, have produced different reflexes in Gaelic: a long unrounded close-mid front vowel [øː] preceded by a palatalised cluster, and a long unrounded close back vowel [ɐː], i.e. IPA [uː]61 preceded by a non-palatalised cluster, respectively. Initial palatal [t’] in Lyrabus, therefore, rules out any connection with the archaic Old Norse diphthong *au.

Regardless of the merits or demerits of alternative proposals for the derivation of the Islay reflexes, there is no evidence to support their derivation from ON bólstadr.

Phonetic Note
A grave accent, as in G. beirgh [ˈbeɹə̞ɣ], indicates a svarabhakti vowel, with level or rising tone and with stress equal to that of the preceding vowel. [d] + [t’ + t’ + t’] are dentals. [l + n + r] are velarised. [r] is trilled. [l’ + n’] are palatals. [d’ + t’] etc. are palatalised.

Anna, Dot, Thorir …
Counting Domesday Personal Names

David N. Parsons
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Introduction

In dealing with DB material statistical methods are as a rule quite worthless and often definitely misleading

Olof von Feilitzen1

Despite von Feilitzen’s warning, I aim to show in this paper that his own Pre-Conquest Personal Names of Domesday Book (PNDB) can be profitably subjected to ‘statistical methods’. It is surprising that the great philological achievement of his 1937 work seems nowhere to have been followed up by the sort of ‘Applied Anthroponymics’ described to this Society by Cecily Clark, some twenty years ago.2 One might surely expect that the huge corpus of names of those who held land in the days of King Edward the Confessor (died January 1066) would offer some cultural-historical information about late Anglo-Saxon England. For the pre-Conquest period, Veronica Smart has, for instance, several times demonstrated the value of an ‘applied’ approach to Anglo-Saxon moneyers’ names,3 while Gillian Fellows-Jensen and John Insley have

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61 Ibid., p. 228, note 1.