

EDITORIAL

Mainly for financial reasons, the use of laser-composition via a mainframe computer employed for Volume XI has had to yield place to a more modest method of production making use of a PC and a laser-printer. All concerned have been striving to maintain the highest standards of presentation attainable by these more limited machines; and we hope that our readers may not be too gravely disappointed by the results.

Finance has been a preoccupation in other ways too. Experience with XI, the first of our volumes to be produced on a wholly commercial basis, has made it clear that our existing rates of subscription are inadequate to sustain a publication of the size and quality to which our readers have become accustomed. Choice has lain between reducing our annual output to some 140 pages or raising the subscription by 50%. Reluctantly, we have chosen the latter course, and we hope that in so doing we have interpreted correctly our readers' wishes. As it is, due to financial pressures we have at the last moment had to hold over to the next issue some copy, including a number of reviews, already set for the present volume. Nevertheless, it is the largest one to date.

Readers will have noticed the change in cover-date of the present volume to '1988-89', rather than '1988'. Future issues will likewise have double year-dates; thus XIII will be dated '1989-90'. This we feel more accurately represents the contents; the CNS conference papers have normally appeared in print, after revisions, in the year following their delivery, while the contents of the bibliography have often included works published in more than the one year. Tying the cover-date to the year of the previous CNS conference has never been accurate bibliographically and has been the cause of much needless extra work for those responsible for answering queries about subscriptions and supply of volumes. It has always made each issue seem to be late, even when this has not been the case.

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C. C.
O. J. P.
A. R. R.
V. S.

QUESTIONING THE VALUE AND VALIDITY OF THE TERM 'HYBRID' IN HEBRIDEAN PLACE-NAME STUDY

Richard Cox

The term 'hybrid' is given the following definition in Chambers's *Dictionary*: 'an organism which is the offspring of a union between different races, species, genera or varieties: a mongrel: a word formed of elements from different languages'. This might be extended specifically to include place-names, as follows: 'a place-name formed of elements from different languages'. In the following it is argued that, while the term 'hybrid' remains valid from a purely lexical or etymological point of view, this is not the case with regard to an onomastic analysis of names. It is not asserted that this is necessarily applicable to areas other than the Hebrides, from which examples of names used here are drawn, but there are nevertheless suggestions that it frequently is.

To be able to describe a place-name as a hybrid of course involves scrutinizing its form, both phonetic and documentary, establishing what elements it may contain, and assessing from what lexical items and languages these may be. In this way we derive bits of names from one or more languages of origin. For example, the township and village name *Siabost a Deas*, on the west of the island of Lewis, is a hybrid name because its first part derives from Old Norse (ON) *Sá-bólstað* (accusative) 'sea-farm', while the remainder is a Gaelic (G.) adverb, here used adjectivally in the sense 'south, southern'. By the same token, the name *South Shawbost*, which is applied to the same village and township by people when they speak English, is also a hybrid name, since its first part is obviously the English adjective 'south' and its last can be shown to derive from ON *Sá-bólstað* 'sea-farm'. What we are doing here, in accordance with our definition of the term 'hybrid', is merely identifying those languages from which elements within these names derive. In referring to them as hybrids, we convey an idea of their complex origin without actually having to mention which languages are involved.

To treat the names *Siabost a Deas* and *South Shawbost* in the same way like this, however, is obviously not satisfactory. For the former, when we say that it is a hybrid name including elements of Norse and Gaelic origin, the description creates for us a feeling or an expectation with regard to Norse-Gaelic contact. This is justified because of phonological and historical evidence; or rather, because of phonological and historical evidence the definition of the term hybrid is expanded to imply some sort of linguistic, social and political contact. A sense of

union is promoted. Looking to the name *South Shawbost*, however, this is not a thing we should wish to do, since phonological and historical evidence asserts that the final part of the name, i.e. *-Shawbost*, was transmitted to English via Gaelic. Therefore, to say *South Shawbost* is a hybrid name including elements from English and Old Norse is of very limited value. In doing so, we identify early forms of the various elements of the name, but in such a way as to ignore its development.

This may be regarded as a moot point, in the sense that commentators would pay due heed to the dissimilar developments of the names *Siabost a Deas* and *South Shawbost*, and not treat them similarly by calling *South Shawbost* a Norse-English hybrid name. To accept this argument obliges us to view the term 'hybrid' in a more specialized sense than that with which we started, i.e. one which also implies linguistic, and, presumably, social and political, contact. The term, in this case, has a dual role: it not only identifies lexical items from different languages, it also indicates that there was contact between the linguistic groups involved. The evidence of place-names themselves, however, argues that the apparent benefits of this term are actually a hindrance to understanding the complex nature of contact, in this case between Norse and Gael – something which the term 'hybrid' purports to point out.

As has been suggested already, one of the more immediate disadvantages in using the term hybrid is that it ignores the onomastic structure of names, and so the development of names. By onomastic structure, I mean the structure of forms according to how they function as names, and the contribution to this of their various elements or groups of elements. If we take the name *Beinn Leathainn Mhòr Amar na h-Eit*, for example, we could say that a feminine substantive in initial position (*beinn*) is followed by two attributive adjectives (*leathainn mòr*) whose initial consonants are mutated because of the gender of the preceding noun, and that this noun-group is followed by a noun (*amar*) in genitival relation to it, and, finally, that this in turn is followed by a genitive noun preceded by the definite article in agreement with it. We could then translate the name as 'the large broad mountain of the crag of the cattle'. However, we would have only concerned ourselves with syntactical, morphological and lexical aspects of the name. From an onomastic point of view we should first wish to point out the generic status of the name-initial element, *beinn*. We should then wish to point out how the name contains three qualifiers with different functions. The primary qualifier is *leathainn*: it specifies the generic element involved. This generic group, *Beinn Leathainn*, is itself modified, however, by *Amar na h-Eit*, and we

should have to point out here that the form *Amar na h-Eit* derives from a place-name, and that its function here as a qualifying element is to show absolute location and, therefore, that its lexical meaning is of no significance whatsoever. The term I use for erstwhile names (whether they currently survive independently in the nomenclature or not) that have been used for qualifiers in the formation of other names is 'ex nomine onomastic unit', or 'ex nomine unit' for short: they have a function similar to that of a place-name proper, in that they indicate feature and location, but can no longer be regarded as names in their own right. Names that are dependent for their creation upon qualifying *ex nomine* units (regardless of their provenance) can be termed 'dependent' names: while 'independent' names are not so formed and may be qualified or unqualified. Finally, we should note that the modified group, *Beinn Leathainn Amar na h-Eit*, is itself qualified by the adjective *mòr* 'large'. This qualifier, however, has a contrastive function: compare our name with the neighbouring *Beinn Leathainn Bheag Amar na h-Eit* which contains the adjective *beag* 'small'. From this analysis we should translate these names as 'the greater, and the lesser broad mountain of *Amar na h-Eit*'.¹ The approaches and results of, on the one hand, a grammatical and, on the other, an onomastic analysis of names are, therefore, substantially different.

Now, names like *Loch Lacsabhat* have been considered hybrids because, in this example, the initial element is the indigenous Gaelic word for 'lake' and because the final element derives from ON *Laxavatn* 'the lake of the salmon'. In doing so, however, we ignore the fact that the specific element is derived from another name, namely *Lacsabhat*. This is apparent when we come to translate the name: i.e. 'the lake of *Lacsabhat*' pays due heed to its onomastic development, whereas 'the lake of the lake of the salmon' is purely metaphrastic. In acknowledging the onomastic development here, then, we are bound to accept that the name *Loch Lacsabhat* tells us nothing about Norse-Gaelic contact that the independent name *Lacsabhat* does not, and, further, that it is at one remove or so from that contact. This is more dramatically shown by names like *Tursachan Cnoc Bhileabhair Bheag* whose development can be shown as follows:

- (i) ON **Vin-vqrðu* or **Vil-vqrðu* acc. (see below)
- (ii) G. **Bhileabhair* (a loan-name from ON; the exact form of the ON reconstruction here is uncertain: the generic, in name-final position is no doubt *varða* f. with the sense 'cairn'; the specific may be *vin* f. (with *l/n* alternation) 'a meadow', or be connected with *vil* nt. or fem. 'will, desire; pleasure' used in a commendatory sense).

- (iii) **Cnoc Bhileabhair* 'the hill of **Bhileabhair*'.
- (iv) *Cnoc Bhileabhair Bheag* 'the lesser **Cnoc Bhileabhair*'.
- (v) *Tursachan Cnoc Bhileabhair Bheag* 'the standing-stones of *Cnoc Bhileabhair Bheag*'.

The name *Tursachan Cnoc Bhileabhair Bheag*, then, comes to us after the evolution of a number of stages of development starting with a name created by speakers of Old Norse. Once the ON name was borrowed by Gaels it may have remained applied to the hill in question for some time. At some point, however, the onomastic meaning of the loan-name changed (very likely to the general area) and it was then possible to rename the hill **Cnoc Bhileabhair*, i.e. 'the hill of **Bhileabhair*, where the specific's function was to show absolute location. But because there was another hill in this area which could also be designated 'the hill of the area of **Bhileabhair*', new name-forms arose in the nomenclature, each with a contrastive qualifier, namely *Cnoc Bhileabhair Bheag* and *Cnoc Bhileabhair Mhòr* 'the lesser, and the greater *Cnoc *Bhileabhair*'. In the name *Tursachan Cnoc Bhileabhair Bheag* then, *tursachan* is the generic element while the rest of the name as a single unit constitutes the specific.

The effect of describing names like *Loch Lacsabhat* and *Tursachan Cnoc Bhileabhair Bheag* as hybrids is obviously misleading when trying to get near to the matter of Norse-Gaelic contact. The fact is, of course, that onomastically, syntactically, and morphologically, these are Gaelic names. One result of labelling such names as hybrids has been that the number of Norse vestiges thought to have survived in the nomenclature of the Hebrides has been artificially high. For instance, besides *Lacsabhat*, and in the same locality, the following names are also found: *Aird Lacsabhat* 'the headland of *Lacsabhat*', *Allt Ceann Aird Lacsabhat* 'the stream of **Ceann Aird Lacsabhat* (the head of *Aird Lacsabhat*)', *Loch Lacsabhat Ard* and *Loch Lacsabhat Iosal* 'upper, and lower *Loch Lacsabhat*'. There is no doubt, however, that we are dealing with the same '*Lacsabhat*' in each case here.

Other aspects of name structure will arise later on, but for the moment we can turn to what is perhaps the biggest disadvantage inherent in the use of the term 'hybrid'. It not only fails to point out the distinction between loan-names (i.e. borrowed place-names) and loan-words (including borrowed personal-names), it does not even convey the broad concept of borrowed forms at all.

While applying the term 'hybrid' to a place-name establishes a lexical profile of the name, it supplies this outwith any context. There is a significant difference between a corpus of names that contains only loan-names and one which also contains loan-words. It is one thing for Gaels to have borrowed what was once a

Norse place-name, for example *Bergsgjó* 'ravine of the promontory' with gen.sg. of the nt. *berg*, and for the borrowed item to have survived into the present century, appearing as G. *Beirghsgéadh*. A Gaelic name like *Rubha na Beirghe* 'the point of the promontory', on the other hand, which contains a loan-word from ON *berg*, or rather the dative *bergi*, testifies to a much more familiar degree of contact between Norse and Gael. The elements *Siabost*, *Lacsabhat* and *Bhileabhair* in those names already discussed are, like *Beirghsgéadh*, ON loan-names. The name-element *Shawbost*, however, is an item within an English rather than a Gaelic nomenclature, and its primary onomastic description is a Gaelic loan-name.

Let us now turn to the question of loan-words. The common Gaelic appellative for a tidal rock or skerry in the Hebrides is *sgeir f.*, a loan-word from ON *sker* nt. We may assume that this item has been more or less continuously productive in the lexicon since it was borrowed from the Norse. As an appellative it was incorporated into the onomasticon where it is still productive today. There are probably tens of thousands of Gaelic names – i.e. names created by Gaels – containing the Gaelic, albeit ON loan-word, *sgeir*. Examples where the element has a generic function are *Sgeir Dhubh* 'the black skerry', *Sgeir nam Muc* 'the skerry of the whales', and *Sgeir nam Bàrnach* 'the skerry of the limpets'.

Oftedal's analysis of the frequency of ON loan-words uses MacBain's *Etymological Dictionary* for source-material, and *sgeir*, as an attested and current lexical item, is therefore included in his calculations.² However, if we aim to study Norse-Gaelic contact in the Hebrides, we cannot afford to ignore place-names which, by virtue of the dearth of documentation (records, literary sources, etc.), are our oldest source material. Thus analysis of the onomasticon of a particular area may provide a list of otherwise unattested loan-words. *Beirghe*, which has already been mentioned, is one such; others are *amar* 'a precipitous rock, or crag' from ON *hamar* acc.m., *allt* 'a craggy knoll, or hill' from ON *holt* nt., and *camp* 'an overhang' from ON *kamp* acc.m.; and these lists will grow the more names are collected in the field and analysed.

There is absolutely no reason, despite their comparative scarcity, why we should not view the borrowed elements in names like *Amar na h-Eit* 'the crag of the cattle', *Cnoc an Allt* 'the hill of the crag' and *Sgeir a' Champ* 'the skerry of the overhang' just as we view *sgeir*. They give us a fuller picture of the range and number of lexical items borrowed from Norse settlers (or their descendants) into the earlier Hebridean Gaelic language; and systematic research into this question may be able to suggest broader or narrower ranges and greater or lesser numbers of loan-words within different geographical areas. None of these

examples of names, if we pay any heed to their structure and to the significance of loan-words, can be thought of as hybrids. Although they include linguistic material derived from both Old Norse and Gaelic, they are Gaelic creations, compiled from a Gaelic onomasticon, part of a Gaelic lexicon which just happened to contain ON loan-words.

Sometimes we have to assume the erstwhile existence of loaned words since they survive only within Gaelic derivational forms. For example, consider the elements *bratag*, *ceòsan* and *fideach* which have Gaelic derivational suffixes (-*ag*, -*an* and -(*e*)*ach*) attached to otherwise unattested loan-words ultimately from ON *brattr* 'steep', *kjóss* m. 'a hollow', etc., and *fit* f. 'a river-lea', respectively. Again, these forms increase our knowledge of the character of medieval Hebridean Gaelic. Nevertheless, whether we are considering forms such as *bratag*, etc., whose Gaelic etymons are unattested, or forms like *sgeireach*, derived from *sgeir* and having the sense (as the lexicographer Dwelly might have put it) of 'water abounding in rocks', the term 'hybrid' inadequately conveys either the history or the chronology of their development. The danger of ignoring the phenomenon whereby appellatives, for example, are borrowed into another linguistic group's lexicon and are then utilized in creating names, is to take a name such as *Sgeir nan Sgarbh* 'the skerry of the cormorants', where both elements are derived from ON, and assume that the name derives from an ON *Skarfasker* 'the skerry of the cormorants'.³ However, Oftedal rightly points out that such names, although they do contain elements of Norse origin, are in reality Gaelic names.⁴

Within the place-nomenclature of the Hebrides, of course, we are also provided with material about the nature of the Norse language there – what we might call Hebridean Norse or Hebridean Norn: the form of language spoken during the medieval period by descendants of Norse settlers, and, we may assume, acquired by at least some, if not a good proportion of, Gaels. Certain generic elements in ON loan-names in the Gaelic nomenclature of the Hebrides have long been identified as having been borrowed from Gaelic. For example, early Gaelic *áirge* 'a milking-place', later 'a shieling or temporary summer residence' (cf. modern Gaelic *àirigh* f.), was borrowed by the Norse and occurs, for instance, in the name-form **Tiongalairidh* (to which we shall return shortly). Other examples which, to a greater or lesser degree of certainty, also contain Gaelic loan-words are (and modern Gaelic forms are used throughout): *Athabhat*, cf. *àth* m. 'a ford', *Buaileabhal*, cf. *buaile* f. 'an enclosure', *Druidigeadh*, cf. *druid* f. 'a thrush', and *Liosamar*, cf. *lios* or *leas* f. 'an enclosure'. (These loan-names have reconstructions containing the ON generics *vatr* nt. 'lake', *fjall* nt. 'mountain', *gjó* f. 'ravine' and

hamarr m. 'crag', respectively.) It is most likely that careful research will uncover many more Gaelic loan-words in the Norse contribution to the nomenclature of the Hebrides than have hitherto been thought to be present.

Loan-names by themselves, of course, can be fascinating subjects. The example **Tiongalairidh* is a case in point. The name-form does not in fact survive independently, but has a qualifying function as specific in the name *Cnoc an Tiongalairidh* 'the hillock of **Tiongalairidh*'. We can transcribe this name onomastically as *gs* (i.e. generic plus specific), or, better, *g(s)* where the brackets indicate that the qualifier is an *ex nomine* unit. The specific itself, from ON *þingvöll-ærgi* (metaphrastically translated as 'assembly-site milking place'), in all probability has an onomastic structure (*s*)*g*, where **þingvöllr* (nom.) is itself an *ex nomine* unit. Another name, *Clach Eilistean*, we can parse onomastically as *g(s)*, where (*s*) is potentially from an ON name-form **Æl-stein* acc., which in turn has a structure (*s*)*g*, where **æl* is very likely a Gaelic loan-name from **Ail* '(the) rock'. *Clach Eilistean*, then, could be rendered 'rock rock rock', with tautology rampant as in the Stirlingshire river-name *Allander Water* which, for our purpose, can be rendered 'water water water'. For these names, however, as with the charge of tautology, the application of the term 'hybrid' gives no recognition of their development.

Once we have identified loan-names and loan-words within the nomenclature – either Norse loans in Gaelic, or Gaelic in Norse – we are surely a step further towards describing the nature of Norse-Gaelic contact, and the extent of that contact within different geographical areas. We are also closer to being able to assess what degree of bilingualism was prevalent in the Hebrides. Such evidence, incidentally, will also have a bearing upon the centuries after the cession of political control to Scotland in 1266, as well as those before the advent of the first Norse settlers. Here I am referring to questions, for example, regarding the continuity of Gaelic settlement through the several hundred years of Norse political sovereignty in the Hebrides, and the diminution of the Norse element in the later Gaelic language.

Loan-word content in the nomenclature, therefore, has an undoubted value for us in attempting to assess the characters of the languages involved and this question of contact. So, also, do the non-borrowed items. In the case of Norse, the choice and omission of particular elements helps differentiate the Norse of the Hebrides from the language-forms of other Norse-speaking areas, if only from the restricted level of their onomasticons. But more than this, apparent anomalies

cropping up in the work of derivation may eventually establish a clearer picture for us of what Hebridean Norse, or Hebridean Norn, was like. However, an aspect of the term 'hybrid' is that, while it assumes a field of contact, it tends to keep us away from this by focusing upon the two or more language entities which it implies are involved. By anomalies I mean, for example, the use of otherwise unattested weak forms of nouns as opposed to attested strong forms, e.g. G. *palla* 'ledge', from an unattested ON **palla* acc.m., as opposed to ON *pall*, acc. of *pallr* m.; or the use of otherwise unattested side-forms. e.g. ON **kleif* nt. (cf. the attested fem. *kleif*) used of a steep hillside, usually with a track or path up it, and which is found in such ON loan-names as *Cliasgro*, *Cliasam Creag* and *Cliasproc*. It seems appropriate, then, to be wary of ignoring the potential for specifically Hebridean forms or characteristics surviving in the Norse element of the nomenclature.

In conclusion, then, if we refer to appropriate examples of the names we have been discussing as 'hybrids', what are we asserting other than a statement regarding the etymology of their various elements? It does not tell us, where one of the elements is a loan-name, as in the example *Loch Lacsabhat*, that the name that we are looking at could easily have been created within living memory. Where an element is a loan-word, as in the example *Amar na h-Eit*, it does not make it clear that the contact between Norse and Gael, necessary for the borrowing of *amar* from Norse, in fact took place before our name was created. While the term 'hybrid' remains valid from a purely lexical or etymological point of view, its value here, were the term really a valid one in onomastics, is doubtful. How, then, do we get nearer this question of contact? This is the core of the problem. I have leant towards the question of lexis here, and no doubt this is an essential area with which to begin. However, as we peel off chronological layers of name-forms by analysis of their onomastic structure – and continue, certainly, with the equally essential process of understanding phonological developments – we may also draw nearer to answering questions regarding morphology and syntax. Without the loose, catch-all term 'hybrid', we may find the evidence for and clarification of the contact which it nebulously implies staring us, to some extent at least, in the face.

UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW

NOTES

¹ R. A. V. Cox, *Place-Names of the Carloway Registry, Isle of Lewis*, unpublished doctoral thesis (University of Glasgow, 1987), I, § 4.

² M. Oftedal, 'On the frequency of Norse loan-words in Scottish Gaelic', *Scottish Gaelic Studies*, IX (1961-2), 116-27.

³ A. Sommerfelt, 'Norse-Gaelic Contacts', *Norsk Tidsskrift for Sprogvidenskap*, XVI (1952), 226-36, at p. 31.

⁴ M. Oftedal, 'Norse Place-names in Celtic Scotland', *Proceedings of the International Congress of Celtic Studies 1959* (Dublin 1962), pp. 43-50, at p. 44.